Chapter 6

Adolescence

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should:

- *understand the main developmental tasks of adolescence;*
- *be able to evaluate the development of sense of self;*
- *be able critically to discuss storm and stress theory;*
- *critically understand the increasing importance of peer relationships;*
- *have developed your critical and creative thinking skills;*
- *have developed your ability to understand and use qualitative data.*

Introduction

Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Important physical and hormonal developments take place during adolescence, leading to increasing **sexual dimorphism**. It is the entry into this period of intense physical change (*puberty*) that is usually recognised as the start of adolescence. However, adolescence is about more than physical maturation. It is also a period of significant social and emotional development, characterised by increasing independence from family, a clearer sense of self and greater emphasis on peer group relationships. In the light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that, traditionally, adolescence has been seen as a tumultuous period of development characterised by three key features: conflict with parents, mood disruptions and risky behaviour. However, as this chapter shows, current evidence suggests that 'storm and stress' does not describe the typical experience of an adolescent.

Biological and physical changes in adolescence

Puberty is a period of rapid physical change, involving hormonal and bodily changes. However, it is not a single sudden event, but rather an extended set of changes that take place over time (Dorn et al., 2006). These changes include increases in height and weight, and reaching sexual maturity. The specific changes are different for boys and girls, as are the timings at which such changes occur. In general, girls enter puberty approximately two years before boys. Initial changes are associated with increased height and weight. On average, for girls this growth spurt begins at the age of nine years, while for boys this is closer to 11 years of age. The peak of this growth spurt happens approximately three years later, so girls are growing fastest between 12 and 13 years of age, while boys are growing fastest between the ages of 14 and 15 years. During the growth peak, girls grow by around 9cm a year and boys by 10cm, which is why, by about 14 years of age, boys have overtaken girls in terms of height. Girls also end their growth spurt earlier when they are around 18 years of age, while boys need another two years before they finish growing at the age of 20 years.

The adolescent growth spurt starts on the outside of the body and works inwards, so the hands and feet are the first to expand, followed by arms and legs, which then grow longer. Following this the spine elongates. The last expansion is a broadening of the chest and shoulders in boys, and a widening of the hips and pelvis in girls.

This growth spurt is triggered by a flood of hormonal changes, which is set off by the **hypothalamus** and **pituitary gland**. The main hormones associated with pubertal changes are **testosterone** and **oestrodiol**. Both of these chemicals are present in the hormonal make-up of both boys and girls, but testosterone dominates in male pubertal changes and oestrodiol in female pubertal changes. In boys, increases in testosterone are associated with an increase in height, a deepening of the voice and genital development. For girls, increasing levels of oestrodiol are linked to breast, uterine and skeletal development (e.g. widening of the hips).

It has been suggested that these same hormones may contribute to psychological development in adolescence (Rapkin et al., 2006). For example, studies have shown links between testosterone levels and perceived social competence in boys (Nottelmann et al., 1987), and between oestrodiol levels and the emotional responses of girls (Inoff-Germain et al., 1988). However, the relationship between hormones and behaviour is a complex one; there is evidence that the link between behaviour and hormones may work in the opposite direction as well, since behaviour and mood have been found to influence hormone levels (Susman, 2006). Indeed, it seems unlikely that hormones alone can account for the psychological changes that occur in adolescence (Rowe et al., 2004).

Physical changes and psychological well-being

One of the first major tasks of adolescence is to adjust to the huge physical changes that are taking place. How easily adolescents deal with this will depend partly on how closely their bodies match the well-defined stereotypes of the 'perfect' body for young women and young men that are promoted by the society in which they live. In general, however, it seems that all adolescents show some body dissatisfaction during puberty (Graber and Brooks-Gunn, 2001). The evidence suggests that girls tend to become increasingly dissatisfied as they move through puberty, while boys

become increasingly satisfied. It is likely that this is linked to the natural increases that occur in body fat in girls and in muscle mass in boys; indeed, when adolescents try to change their physique, girls are more likely to try to lose weight, while boys will try to increase muscle tone (McCabe et al., 2002). Adolescents who do not match the stereotype may well need more social support from adults and peers to improve their feelings of self-worth regarding their body type.

For girls, this issue is further confounded by the timing of entry into puberty, the effects of which appear to be different for males and females. At 11 to 12 years of age, early-maturing girls tend to have greater satisfaction with their body shape than late-maturing girls. However, this changes as girls reach 15 to 16 years of age, when late-maturing girls start to report greater satisfaction with their body shape (Simmons and Blyth, 1987). Interestingly, this change in body satisfaction may reflect differing body shapes at the end of puberty – early-maturing girls stop growing earlier and so tend to be shorter and stockier in comparison to their taller, thinner, late-maturing peers (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1985).

Early-maturing girls have also been found to be more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural problems, including depression, eating disorders and engaging in risky health behaviours such as smoking, drinking and drug taking, and early sexual behaviours (Wiesner and Ittel, 2002). These girls are also more likely to have lower educational and occupational attainments (Stattin and Magnusson, 1990). It seems that girls who physically mature at a younger age spend more time with their older peers and are easily drawn into problem behaviours, because they do not have the emotional maturity to recognise the long-term effects of such behaviours on their development (Sarigiani and Petersen, 2000). However, there is evidence to suggest that the negative psychosocial consequences of early puberty may not last into later adolescence or adulthood (Blumstein Posner, 2006).

Thus, it seems that, for girls, the advantages lie in later maturity. In contrast, the evidence suggests that, for boys, the advantage lies in early maturity. There is evidence, for example, that early-maturing boys have more successful peer relationships than their late-maturing counterparts (Simmons and Blyth, 1987). There is, however, some disagreement about whether or not this remains an advantage across the lifespan (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1985). Nonetheless, what is becoming more evident is that the link between an adolescent's beliefs about their appearance and their sense of self-worth – which is an important aspect of an individual's identity – should not be underestimated (Frisen and Holmqvist, 2010).

Developing a sense of self

One of the developmental tasks that has been seen to dominate in adolescence is developing a sense of who we are, what we believe and what our values are: in other words, establishing our sense of self. It has been suggested that sense of self follows a set developmental sequence in which younger children define themselves in terms of concrete characteristics, while adolescents increasingly come to define themselves in terms of more abstract inner or psychological characteristics. This idea is based primarily on research that has shown that children's self-descriptions change with age from observable and physical descriptions such as 'I am tall' to more psychological traits such as 'I am friendly' as, for example, in the classic study carried out by Rosenberg (1979). It has been suggested that this developmental trend reflects children's growing ability to distinguish themselves psychologically from others as they get older (Bannister and Agnew, 1977; Leavitt and Hall, 2004).

Focus on: Rosenberg's study of self-descriptions

Arguably one of the most important studies of the development of sense of self was carried out by Rosenberg (1979). He conducted open-ended interviews with individual children to find out about their self-perceptions. He interviewed a sample of 8–18 year olds about various aspects of their sense of self. The children were selected at random from 25 schools in Baltimore, USA. Many of his questions explored aspects of the children's categorical selves that went beyond the simple self-description ('Who am I?') to include feelings of pride and shame in aspects of their selves ('What are my best things/weak points?'); their sense of distinctiveness as separate individuals ('In what ways am I the same as/different from other children?'); and feelings about an ideal self ('What kind of person would I like to become?').

Rosenberg's first aim was to find a way of sorting the children's replies into meaningful categories. His second aim was to search for any patterns in the kinds of replies that were given by particular age groups. He was interested in looking for anything that might suggest a developmental progression in children's sense of self. He was able to categorise the children's replies into a series of broad groups of self-descriptions as follows.

Physical: descriptions of self that could be observed or identified or potentially be described by others; they are mainly about physical features or physical activities such as:

- objective facts – e.g. 'I am eight years old'; overt achievements – e.g. 'I can swim 25 metres';

- manifested preferences – e.g. 'I like milk';

- possessions – e.g. 'I've got a blue bike';

- physical attributes – e.g. 'I've got brown hair and blue eyes';

- membership categories – e.g. 'I am a girl'.

Character: descriptions of self that refer to personal characteristics or traits: personality, emotional characteristics and emotional control. These qualities could still be inferred by others from the behaviour of an individual but only the individual can have direct access to them, for example:

- qualities of character – e.g. 'I am a brave person and I think that I am honest;

- emotional characteristics – e.g. 'I am generally happy and cheerful';

- emotional control – e.g. 'I don't get into fights', 'I lose my temper easily'.

Relationships: descriptions of self that refer to interpersonal traits or to relationships with others, such as:

- interpersonal traits – e.g. 'I am friendly and sociable', 'I am shy and retiring';

- relationship to others – e.g. 'I am well liked by other children', 'Other people find me difficult to get on with'.

Inner: descriptions of self that refer to an individual's more private inner world of emotions, attitudes, wishes, beliefs and secrets, such as self-knowledge – for example, rather than simply describing a personal trait such as shyness, they would tend to qualify this with explanations of the circumstances in which they felt shy, why they thought that they were shy, how it affected them and how they coped with being shy.

Rosenberg (1979) found that the majority of the descriptions given by younger children were about physical activity and physical characteristics. The older children were more likely to use character traits to define the self. Rosenberg also found increasing reference to relationships. For example, when questioned about points of pride and shame, only 9 per cent of the eight year olds' responses consisted of interpersonal traits (e.g. 'friendly', 'shy'), as opposed to 17 per cent of the 14 year olds' and 28 per cent of the 16 year olds' responses. Likewise, when asked about what kind of person they would like to become, 36 per cent of the eight year olds' responses were to do with interpersonal traits, as opposed to 69 per cent of the 14 to 16 year olds' answers.

The oldest children (those aged around 18 years of age) made far more use of inner qualities, knowledge of which was only available to the individual. These descriptions were concerned with their emotions, attitudes, motivations, wishes and secrets. Rosenberg also found that older children are much more likely to refer to self-control when describing themselves, for example 'I don't show my feelings'. When questioned about points of shame, only 14 per cent of the eight year olds' responses related to self-control, while 32 per cent of 14 year olds' responses referred to the ability to hide self and feelings from others.

Task — Answer the following review questions.

- How robust is the evidence presented here by Rosenberg? How reliable and valid do you think these findings are?

- What developmental changes other than sense of self might Rosenberg's findings reflect?

Comment

Rosenberg's study seems to give a definitive picture of changing sense of self from childhood to adolescence. The sample size was robust and representative of the children in Baltimore. In many ways, the idea of a shift from the concrete to the abstract makes sense and mirrors other theorists' ideas in developmental psychology, including Piaget's theory of cognitive development. However, there are a number of things to consider in terms of the validity of this study. First, this was a cross-sectional study, so while differences may well have been observed in terms of the self-descriptions given by children at different ages, it is difficult to be absolutely certain that these differences reflect developmental change – only a longitudinal study could really confirm this interpretation. Second, even if these changing descriptions do reflect a developmental change, how can we be sure that the developmental change is actually about understanding of self? Self-descriptions necessarily rely on linguistic ability – perhaps the developmental change that is reflected is in terms of increasing sophistication in language ability. It is quite possible that verbal language skills limited the younger children's ability to communicate their knowledge of self.

Identity development

An important aspect of our sense of self is our personal identity. Identity has a number of different aspects, some of which are shown in Table 6.1. The importance of these different aspects of our personal identity may change across time and place. Intellectual identity may, for example, be felt more strongly during the school years; religion may be an important part of an individual's identity at home, but not at work.

The notion that identity is the key to adolescent development comes from Erikson's theory, which you learned about in Chapter 1. According to Erikson (1950), during adolescence, young people are faced with an overwhelming number of choices about who they are and where they are going in life. For Erikson, this is the crisis that has to be resolved at this developmental stage; if adolescents are not able to answer this question adequately they will suffer from identity confusion, which will delay their development in the later stages of life. The search for identity is supported by what Erikson calls a psychosocial moratorium. What he means is that adolescents are relatively free of responsibility, which enables them to have the space to try out (and discard) different identities. They are able to experiment with different roles and personalities until they find the ones that best suit them. Marcia (1987) suggested that this development is a staged process and he identified four different identity statuses.

- *Identity diffusion* refers to the individual who has not yet experienced a crisis or made any commitments. They are undecided about future roles and have not shown any interest in such matters.

Table 6.1: *Aspects of identity*

Aspect of identity	Components
Vocational identity	Career choice and aspirations; current or intended occupation
Intellectual identity	Academic aspirations and achievements
Political ideology	Political beliefs, values and ideals; may include membership of political groups
Spiritual/religious identity	Religious beliefs, attitudes to religion and spirituality; religious practices and behaviours; may relate to a specific moral and ethical code
Relationship identity	This may refer to intimate relationships and be defined by whether you are single, married, divorced etc; or to social relationships such as friend, colleague etc; or to family relationships – mother, daughter etc.
Sexual identity	Sexual orientation – heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual
Cultural identity	Where you were born and/or raised and how intensely you identify with the cultural heritage/practices linked to this part of the world; may also include language preference
Ethnic identity	The extent to which you feel a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group; the ethnic group tends to be one to which you can claim heritage and the beliefs of the group may influence your thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour
Physical identity	Body image and beliefs about your appearance
Personality	Characteristics that define patterns of behaviour, such as being shy, friendly, gregarious, anxious etc.

- *Identity foreclosure* describes individuals who have made a commitment to an identity without experiencing a crisis. They may, for example, have simply followed the ideologies and aspirations of their parents.

- *Identity moratorium* is the term used to describe individuals experiencing an identity crisis and whose commitments have not yet been strongly defined.

- *Identity achievement* is reached once individuals have undergone a crisis and made a commitment to their identity.

According to Marcia (1993), young adolescents are usually described by one of the first three statuses. However, there is increasing evidence that identity development is not solely a task of adolescence. Indeed, some aspects of identity are already well on the way to being established before adolescence. Gender, for example, is one aspect of identity that is a key aspect of development at an early age, but continues to be built on as more complex understandings of what it means to be male or female are negotiated. Likewise, some of the most important changes in identity occur after adolescence, taking place during early adulthood (Waterman, 1992). It has

even been argued that identity is not stable and the identity we achieve in adolescence is not necessarily the one we will keep for life (Marcia, 2002). Personal experiences and changes in society are likely to lead us to question our beliefs and who we are throughout the life span. Perhaps the healthiest identity is one that is flexible, adaptive and open to change.

Focus on: identity development

There is continuing debate about the value of the identity status approach. How well do you think this theory explains identity development?

Task
- In order to explore the question above, think about your own exploration and commitment to different aspects of identity by answering the following questions.
- Would you describe yourself as diffused, foreclosed, in moratorium or as having achieved identity following a crisis?
- Is this approach more useful for some aspects of identity than others?
- Do you agree that foreclosure is a limitation to identity development?
- Completing the following chart will help you focus on some of the relevant issues.

Identity component	Identity status			
	Diffused	Foreclosed	Moratorium	Achieved
Vocational				
Political				
Religious				
Relationships				
Achievement				
Sexual				
Gender				
Ethnic/cultural				
Physical				
Personality				

Self-esteem

Linked into all these different identities is another aspect of our overall sense of self – our **self-esteem**. Self-esteem refers to a general feeling of self-worth and, as such, encompasses all the evaluations we make of our skills and abilities in different domains of life, such as our physical appearance, athletic ability and intellectual skills. In a sense, it is a value judgement we make about how 'good' we are and, as such, is influenced by the domain-specific or *self-concept* evaluations we make. It is important to recognise that self-esteem reflects perceptions that do not always match reality (Baumiester et al., 2003). We tend to make judgements about our abilities in different aspects of our lives based on our successes or failures. However, failure does not automatically lead to low self-esteem. The impact of any failures – or successes – on our global self-esteem depends to a great extent on the importance we place on that aspect of our lives. Thus, for the adolescent who places little value on their athletic identity, but a great deal on their intellectual identity, coming last in the 200m hurdles is unlikely to have much impact on self-esteem. By the same token, coming bottom of the class in a test may well have an important negative impact on their feelings of self-worth.

As with other aspects of sense of self such as identity, it seems likely that self-esteem develops and changes as the child moves into adolescence. Given what we know about gender differences in adolescent perceptions of pubertal body changes and the importance of appearance to adolescent identity, it is perhaps not surprising that there is some evidence that self-esteem declines in adolescence – considerably more for girls than for boys (Robins et al., 2002).

Individuality and connectedness

In many ways this developing sense of self can be seen as an important step on the road to adult independence since, in Western society, the goal of self-development is to establish our individuality or a sense of our own uniqueness and separateness from others. Indeed, in Western society the word 'identity' is often taken to be the same thing as uniqueness and individuality; you might test this out by looking in a thesaurus for synonyms of the word 'identity'. The extent to which this search for individuality is a universal goal of development has, however, been questioned (Guisinger and Blatt, 1994). Studies from **anthropology** have suggested that this Western view, with its emphasis on the distinctiveness of the individual from others, differs from that of other cultures. There is evidence that non-Western cultures have a more socially centred ideal of the person that plays down, rather than draws attention to, the distinction between the self and others (Kim and Berry, 1993). This has led some psychologists to challenge the tradition of emphasising the importance of the development of the self, and of identity over the development of social relations (Guisinger and Blatt, 1994). Indeed, there is evidence that connectedness in the form of family relationships and friendships can enhance the search for identity in adolescence (Kamptner, 1988).

Developing peer relationships

During adolescence the development of peer relationships continues the trends started in childhood. In particular, the trend towards spending increasing amounts of time with peers persists in adolescence. It has been estimated that, in late adolescence, excluding time spent in the classroom, teens spend almost a third (29 per cent) of their waking hours with peers, more than double the amount spent with parents and other adults (13 per cent) (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). Adolescent peer interaction also takes place with less adult supervision than in childhood.

Friendships are also gradually becoming more stable during this period (Epstein, 1986), although they may be disrupted by transitions such as changing class or school (Wargo Aikins et al., 2005). However, high-quality friendships, which are marked by intimacy, openness and warmth, are more likely to be maintained despite such transitions (Wargo Aikins et al., 2005). Indeed, there is an increased emphasis on intimacy and self-disclosure throughout adolescence (Zarbatany et al., 2000), although there is some evidence to suggest that greater levels of intimacy are reported by girls than by boys (Buhrmester, 1996). This increasing intimacy and self-disclosure has been suggested to be fundamentally important for the adolescent's developing sense of self, as well as for the understanding of relationships (Parker and Gottman, 1989).

Sense of self is also thought to be influenced by adolescent involvement in **cliques and crowds**. According to Erikson (1950), community membership is central to the achievement of identity as it requires solidarity with a group's ideals. Identification with cliques and crowds is argued to help adolescents defend themselves against the loss of identity that may be provoked by the identity crisis. Thus, adolescents deal with the difficulties they experience in committing to adult identities (the identity crisis) by making exaggerated commitments to certain style groups and by separating themselves from other style groups. They may use particular kinds of clothes and music to indicate their unique style and how it differentiates them from other groups. These cliques and crowds, clearly identified by their own set of style, values and norms, are what we often now refer to as 'youth culture'. According to Miles et al. (1998), identifying with youth culture gives adolescents some power over their identity in a rapidly changing world. Paradoxically, by playing the conformity game, adolescents become more able to feel unique and different.

Youth culture is a relatively modern phenomenon thought to be brought about by a specific historical and economic context. As the school-leaving age (for compulsory education) increased during the second half of the twentieth century, so the transition period between childhood and adulthood lengthened. At the same time, young people had increasingly larger financial resources available to them, which gave them consumer power. Recently, studies of youth culture have suggested that such consumption is central to the construction of adolescent identities (Phoenix, 2005). Many such studies have focused on the links between consumption, style and identity, and have concluded that style provides an essential way of defining and sustaining group boundaries

(Croghan et al., 2006). Milner (2004) proposes that adolescents use their consumer power to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging with their peer group. However, the flip side of this is that failing to maintain such an identity can lead to problems such teasing, social exclusion and loss of status (Blatchford, 1998; Croghan et al., 2006). Given that such consumption is often linked to particular brands, an important issue to consider here is how economic disadvantage might make a difference to adolescent popularity. Some evidence suggests that not having enough money to afford the 'right' brands can lead to social exclusion, as brand items serve as markers of group inclusion that have to be genuine and could not be faked (Croghan et al. 2006). Adolescents in this study saw cheap versions of designer goods as a sign of style error, making group membership expensive. Other studies (e.g. Milner, 2004) suggest that, rather than engaging in conflicts around style, young people may express solidarity with these cliques by modelling themselves on the popular groups, but resisting the consumption of brand-name goods, thereby establishing a new, less high-status group.

There is some evidence that this conformity and conflict over style groups become less marked after the age of about 16 years, with older adolescents claiming they no longer felt pressured into buying and wearing particular kinds of things (Miles, 2000). Miles suggests that this is part of maturing as a teenager, which may imply a developmental progression in thinking and identity formation. An alternative explanation is that, at this age, young people in the UK are leaving compulsory education, which brings with it a change in social status and context. This is as true for the young person who goes on to further education as it is for the one who takes the step into the workplace. The organisation of the sixth form, whether at school or at college, is very different from the education system experienced by 11–16 year olds: both the workplace and the sixth form college give more responsibility and independence to the young person themselves. Milner (2004) suggests that young people's relative powerlessness at school makes them particularly prone to focus on status hierarchies that are highly dependent on consumption. It may be that the age-related change in focus on consumption happens at the same time as a change in how young people are organised in the education system, as well as being a developmental shift.

Cognitive skills in adolescence

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that thinking changes during adolescence. The main shift seems to be in the ability to engage in more abstract thought and logical thinking. According to Piaget (1923), this reflects a qualitative change in thinking as the adolescent moves from the concrete to the formal operational stage. There is also evidence that changing cognitive skills reflect ongoing structural and functional brain development. Structural MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) studies, for example, have demonstrated that the brain undergoes considerable development during adolescence, particularly in the prefrontal cortex (e.g. Huttenlocher et al., 1983). It is thought that the production of synapses in the prefrontal cortex continues up until puberty, followed by synaptic pruning during adolescence. This is accompanied by an increase in myelination in this area of the cortex. These structural changes are believed to represent the fine-tuning of this brain circuitry, so increasing the efficiency of the cognitive systems it serves (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006). There is also some suggestion that functioning in the frontal cortex increases with age (e.g. Rubia et al., 2000), although this has been challenged by some researchers (e.g. Durston et al., 2006). What seems most likely is that whether or not frontal activity increases depends on the function being investigated. The frontal lobes are involved in a range of tasks, including motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgement, impulse control, and social and sexual behaviour. They are also sometimes considered to be our emotional control centre. Changes in frontal lobe functioning might therefore help explain many of the cognitive, social and emotional developments seen in adolescence.

Formal operational thinking and adolescent egocentrism

Cognitive skills become more logical in adolescents. While children tend to solve problems in a trial and error fashion, adolescents are more likely to develop plans to solve problems, testing possible solutions in a systematic and organised way. In addition, the ability to engage in abstract reasoning also increases; adolescent thinking is no longer tied to specific concrete examples as it was during late childhood, meaning that they can engage in **hypothetical-deductive reasoning**. This change in cognitive skills is reflected in the growing ability of adolescents to handle increasingly complex scientific and mathematical concepts.

This new way of thinking also underlies the ability of the adolescent to engage in introspection and self-reflection, which, according to some theorists, results in heightened self-consciousness (Elkind, 1978). Elkind called this phenomenon *adolescent egocentrism*, suggesting that this governs the way in which adolescents think about social matters. According to this theory, adolescents believe that others are as interested in them as they are in themselves and in their sense of personal uniqueness. Two aspects of **adolescent egocentrism** have been described.

- *The imaginary audience*: this is where adolescents believe themselves to be 'at centre stage'. Everyone else's attention is riveted on them.

- *The personal fable*: this underpins the adolescent sense of personal uniqueness and invincibility. No one else can possibly understand how they really feel; furthermore, although others may be vulnerable to misfortune, they are not.

An important aspect of the personal fable – a sense of invulnerability – is suggested to be the cause of adolescent risk taking: drug use, smoking, unprotected sex, drinking and so on (Alberts et al., 2007). According to Arnett (1992), risky behaviour in adolescence may well result from a combination of cognitive factors: a feeling of invincibility combined with flawed probability reasoning – the idea that 'It will never happen to me.'

Moral development

Another important aspect of cognitive development that is thought to reach maturity in adolescence is our understanding of morality or what is right or wrong. According to Piaget (1923), understanding of right and wrong reflects increasing sophistication in a child's thinking processes: children under four years of age have no understanding of morality; between the ages of four and seven years, children believe that rules and justice are unchangeable and beyond the control of the individual, and they also judge whether an action is right or wrong by its consequences (**heteronomous morality**); from seven to ten years of age, children are in transition, showing some features of heteronomous morality and **autonomous morality**; finally, at around the ages of ten to 12 years, children's understanding shifts to autonomous morality, recognising that rules are created by people and that intentions are as important as consequences. Piaget believed that, in addition to increasing cognitive abilities, moral development relies on peer relationships. Through the give and take of social interactions and playing games, children experience disagreements that have to be solved, and learn to negotiate the rules of a game, which teaches them to recognise that rules are man-made rather than handed down from a greater authority.

Piaget's theory of moral development was developed further by Lawrence Kohlberg during the 1950s (Kohlberg, 1958). According to Kohlberg, there are three universal levels of moral development, each divided into two stages (see Table 6.2). Initially, children make judgements about right or wrong based solely on how actions will affect them. However, over time they recognise that they may need to take others' needs into account when determining what is right or wrong. Finally, it is recognised that morality concerns a set of standards and principles that account for human rights, not individual needs. Kohlberg suggested that most adolescents reach level II and most of us stay at this level of reasoning during adulthood. Only a few individuals reach the post-conventional level of reasoning; indeed, Kohlberg found stage 6 to be so rare that it has since been removed from the theory.

Evidence supports the view that children and adolescents progress through the stages Kohlberg suggested, even if they may not reach the level of post-conventional reasoning (Flavell et al., 1993; Walker, 1989). Cross-cultural studies also provide some evidence for the universality of Kohlberg's first four stages (Snarey et al., 1985). However, this theory is not without its critics and Kohlberg's model has been accused of both cultural and gender biases.

It has been suggested that Kohlberg's theory is culturally biased because it emphasises ideals such as individual rights and social justice, which are found mainly in Western cultures (Shweder, 1994). Miller and Bersoff (1992) showed that Americans placed greater value on a justice orientation (stage 4) than Indians. In contrast, Indians placed a greater weight on interpersonal responsibilities, such as upholding one's obligations to others and being responsive to other people's needs (stage 3). In the same way, it has been noted that women are more likely to use stage 3 than stage 4 reasoning. According to Gilligan (1982, 1996), the ordering of the stages therefore reflects

Table 6.2: *Kohlberg's stages of moral development*

Level and stage		Description
Level I: preconventional reasoning	Stage 1: heteronomous morality	Moral behaviour is tied to punishment. Whatever is rewarded is good; whatever is punished is bad. Children obey because they fear punishment.
	Stage 2: individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange	Pursuit of individual interests is seen as the right thing to do. Behaviour is therefore judged good when it serves personal needs or interests. Reciprocity is viewed as a necessity: I'll do something good for you if you do something good for me. Fairness means treating everyone the same.
Level II: conventional reasoning	Stage 3: mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and interpersonal conformity	Trust, caring and loyalty are valued and seen as the basis for moral judgements. Children and adolescents may adopt the moral standards of their parents in order to be seen as 'good' boys or girls.
	Stage 4: social systems morality	Good is defined by the laws of society, by doing one's duty. A law should be obeyed even if it's not fair. Rules and laws are obeyed because they are needed to maintain social order. Justice must be seen to be done.
Level III: post-conventional reasoning	Stage 5: social contract and individual rights	Values, rights and principles transcend the law. Good is understood in terms of the values and principles that the society has agreed upon. The validity of laws is evaluated and it is believed that these should be changed if they do not preserve and protect fundamental human rights and values.
	Stage 6: universal ethical principles	At this stage the individual has developed an internal moral code based on universal values and human rights that takes precedence over social rules and laws. When faced with a conflict between law and conscience, conscience will be followed even though this may involve personal risk.

a gender bias. Placing abstract principles of justice (stage 4) above relationships and concern for others (stage 3) is based on a male **norm** and reflects the fact that most of Kohlberg's research used male participants. Gilligan therefore argues that these orientations are indeed different, but that one is not necessarily better than the other. However, there is some debate about the extent of the evidence to support Gilligan's claims of gender differences in moral reasoning; a **meta-analysis** of the evidence by Jaffee and Hyde (2000) found that gender differences in reasoning were small and usually better explained by the nature of the dilemma than by gender. The

evidence now seems to suggest that care-based reasoning is used by both males and females to evaluate interpersonal dilemmas, while justice reasoning is applied to societal dilemmas.

Kohlberg has also been criticised for not differentiating reasoning about morality from reasoning about social conventions. In his **domain theory**, Turiel (1983) argues that the child's concepts of morality and social convention develop from the recognition that certain actions or behaviours are intrinsically harmful and that these are therefore different from other actions that have social consequences only. For example, hitting another person has intrinsic effects (the harm that is caused) on the well-being of the other person. Such intrinsic effects occur regardless of any social rules that may or may not be in place concerning hitting. The core features of moral cognition are therefore centred around thinking about the impact of actions on well-being, and morality is structured by concepts of harm, welfare and fairness. In contrast, actions that are matters of social convention have no intrinsic interpersonal consequences. For example, in school, children usually address their teacher using their title and surname (e.g. 'Mr Smith'). However, there is no intrinsic reason that this is any better than addressing the teacher by their first name (e.g. 'Joe'). Only social convention – a rule agreed by society – makes 'Mr Smith' more appropriate than 'Joe'. These conventions are arbitrary in the sense that they have no intrinsic status, but are important to the smooth functioning of the social group as they provide a way for members of society to coordinate their social exchanges. Understanding of convention is therefore linked to the child's understanding of social organisation. Recent research into children's beliefs about social exclusion suggests that children are able to separate these two aspects of moral reasoning, but that their ability to tell the difference between morality and social convention increases during adolescence (Killen and Stangor, 2001; Killen, 2007).

Storm and stress

Traditionally, adolescence has been depicted as a tumultuous period, full of chaos and confusion caused by the 'raging hormones' brought about by puberty (Hall, 1904). Indeed, as you learned earlier in this chapter, adolescence involves major physical transitions that include growth spurts, sexual maturation, hormonal changes and neurological development, in particular in the frontal lobes, an area of the brain linked to impulse control. It has also been argued that, for adolescents in Western cultures, there is a disjunction between biology and society that has the potential to create a difficult transitional period: even when adolescents are physically mature enough to perform adult functions such as work and childbearing, they lack not only the psychological maturity, but also the social status and financial resources to perform those functions responsibly. This is because of the extended dependency brought about by social conventions such as the school-leaving age. Indeed, Anna Freud regarded any adolescent who did not experience emotional upheaval as 'abnormal' (Freud, 1958).

However, this image of the troubled or delinquent teenager was challenged as early as 1928 by Margaret Mead, who presented an account of the coming of age for Samoan adolescents that showed a very gradual and smooth transition from childhood to adulthood. The debate about storm and stress in adolescents is frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g., Arnett, 1999); however, it seems that very few developmental psychologists still support this view. The consensus is that most of us negotiate adolescence with few serious personal or social problems. Coleman (1978) proposed a focal theory of adolescence, which suggests that each of the many personal and social issues that have to be dealt with in adolescence come to the teenager's attention at different times. In this way, adolescents do not have to cope with many issues at once. They are able to deal with issues of identity individually and the task is therefore a manageable one. It is only where issues come to a head all at one time that there will be a crisis in adolescence. There is evidence that, for a minority of adolescents, this developmental period can indeed be very troubling. However, it is important to recognise that those children who do have an emotional time in adolescence usually have some pre-existing emotional problem (Graham and Rutter, 1985; White et al., 1990). Likewise, delinquent teenagers are likely to have had behavioural problems as children (Bates, 2003). All of which perhaps points to adolescence intensifying existing predispositions, not creating new ones.

Critical thinking activity

Developing scientific thinking

Critical thinking focus: critical and creative thinking

Key question: *What are the main developmental tasks of adolescence?*

As you learned in this chapter, the changes that confront individuals beginning their second decade of life are complex. Adolescence is marked by a number of changes – biological, physical, intellectual and emotional. These tasks are challenging, but not impossible, even though to the adolescent they may at times feel overwhelming. What do you think are the main developmental tasks of adolescence? Using both the information, in this chapter and any of the reading you have done around this topic, produce a detailed list of the problems teenagers might face. Using this information create a brief guide for parents on 'How to support your teenager'. This can be in any format, from a leaflet to a website, but must be written with the audience in mind.

Critical thinking review

This activity helps you understand the main developments that take place in adolescence and the importance of social context – including family relationships – for that development. Reflecting on the role that parents can play in ameliorating the impact of adolescent changes requires you to think critically about the evidence that we have to support different theoretical views of development. This task demands that you then put this knowledge into a format that enables other people who have no psychology training to access that information. Doing this successfully requires a creative approach – you need to inform without either patronising or going over the heads of your audience. Communicating what you know to others also helps consolidate your understanding of key periods of development such as adolescence.

Other skills you may have used in this activity include recall of key principles and ideas, applying theory to real-life contexts, communication and (depending on the format chosen) presentation skills.

Skill builder activity

The development of self-concept

Transferable skill focus: understanding and using (qualitative) data

Key question: *Read the following written descriptions of self from individuals of different ages. Once you have read these extracts, try to decide from the information given what age group the writer is in – are they an adult, adolescent or child? Now try applying Rosenberg's identity categories (see pages 115–16, including Table 6.2) to this data. Does this alter your perception of the writer at all? Can you see a developmental progression in the understanding of self mirrored by the self-descriptions provided here? Which writer gave the most physical description and which gave the most character-based description?*

Extract A

I am a sister and I am big. I am Indian and English. I like playing football with Johan. I like doing work stuff because learn things are good. I'm really good at maths but get stuck on telling the time. I like reading and doing jigsaws. My hobby is making models. I get most everything that I need. I've lots of friends, because at my school we are all friendly. I love playing schools; it is my favourite game because I can teach children how to do things. I've got pets and I have to look after them. I love animals. I love rabbits and guinea pigs and dogs most of all.

Extract B

I am generally a happy go lucky person. I try and always look on the positives of life – my glass is always half full. In that way I am very different to other members of my family. My sister for example is very pessimistic, always anticipating the worst. She says she just a realist, but sometimes I think you can make your own luck up to a point. I don't really have many hobbies – I'm not very sporty but I do like swimming. I suppose I'm just not a very competitive person. What I real like to do is settle down with a good book and I can spend hour reading if it's a good story line that really gets me hooked. Like with Harry Potter – I just didn't want to put it down. Just wanted to finish it all in one go. Not that I am anti-social. I do like to go out with friends as well – we might go to the cinema or shopping, or sometimes we just hang out at someone's house – that's my favourite pastime, spending an afternoon catching up with friends. Gossiping my boyfriend calls it. I guess it's just a girl thing!

Extract C

I enjoy playing sport, in particular cricket, tennis and hockey. I also quite like to walk and cycle and I like to relax with a good fantasy or sci-fi book or listen to some music. I occasionally listen to something quiet and classical, but I prefer rock. I follow a football team heavily and I listen to any match or buy any books on the subject. I tend to take life as it comes rather than plan ahead which makes me a bit disorganised – as other people keep telling me! I am quite committed at things when I want to be. Overall I tend to be happy, but at times I can get frustrated with my other people and get depressed. I have one very close best friend and a few other good friends. Over the last few years my personality has changed drastically and although I am happier with my new 'image' than I was before I still feel the need to find my true personality, if this is possible, and to define myself. It is difficult not to do this by fitting into a stereotype, as I see many people doing, where the way they dress, their way of talking and even their values are defined by something as immaterial as their taste in music. I think quite deeply about my personality. From talking to my friends I think I am fairly unusual in this. Most people seem to take the way they are for granted whereas I see myself as having to work at myself to find a state in which I am happy.

Skill builder review

The focus of this task is the way in which self-descriptions might reflect inner beliefs about self. There are, however, a number of things to consider when evaluating the data provided above. First, what impact might the media (written self-report) have

had on the descriptions that are given by these individuals? What advantages and disadvantages are there in using written self-report? What other mode of data collection (e.g. verbal report or interview) might have been used and would this have overcome any of the problems you thought were associated with written reports? Second, the use of a predefined scheme can feel very artificial when coding qualitative data. Another approach might have been to have looked to see what themes came out of each report. You might want to try reanalysing the data at some point using this method. It is possible that some of the themes that emerge from the data are similar to those identified by Rosenberg; however, it is also likely that you will be able to think of new ways of representing this data as well.

Assignments

1. Critically evaluate the theory that adolescence is a time of storm and stress.

2. Critically discuss the Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

3. To what extent does the evidence support the idea that identity development must take place in adolescence?

Summary: what you have learned

Now you have finished studying this chapter you should:

- demonstrate understanding of the main developmental tasks of adolescence;

- be able to evaluate critically theories concerning the development of sense of self, and understand the relationship between self-esteem, identity and relationships with others;

- be able to use your knowledge of adolescent development to discuss critically storm and stress theory;

- have developed your critical and creative thinking skills by applying your knowledge of adolescent development to an applied task;

- have developed your ability to understand and use qualitative data by applying a simple coding scheme to a set of written self-reports and reflecting on other approaches to such data collection and analysis.

Further reading

Arnett, J (1999) Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *American Psychologist*, 54: 317–26. Available online at http://uncenglishmat.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/3/4/1434319/arnett.pdf.

Discusses traditional views of adolescence.

Casey,BJ, Giedd, JN and Thomas, KM (2000) Structural and functional brain development and its relation to cognitive development. *Biological Psychology*, 54, 241–57. Available online at www.med info.hacettepe.edu.tr/tebad/umut_docs/interests/fmr/aging/MAIN_structural_fonctional.pdf.

Considers links between neurological structures, brain function and cognitive skills.

Miles, S, Cliff, D and Burr, V (1998) 'Fitting in and sticking out': consumption, consumer meanings and the construction of young people's identities, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1: 81–91.

Good discussion of the relationship between consumerism and identity development in adolescence.

Phoenix, A (2005) Young people and consumption: commonalities and differences in the construction of identities, in Tufte, B, Rasmussen, J and Christensen LB (eds) *Frontrunners or Copycats?* Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, pp79–95.

This also looks at consumption identity, but from a very British perspective.

Turiel, E (2008) The development of children's orientations toward moral, social, and personal orders: more than a sequence in development. *Human Development*, 51: 21–39. Available online at http://jpkc.ecnu.edu.cn/fzxlx/jiaoxue/The%20Development%20of%20Children%E2%80%99s% 20Orientations.pdf.

Describes Turiel's theory of moral development.