

From <http://www.psyking.net/id183.htm>

### **Kurt Lewin's Theory of Adolescence – TRANSITION THEORY**

Fundamental to Lewin's theory of development is the view that adolescence is a period of transition in which the adolescent must change his group membership. While both the child and the adult have a fairly clear concept of how they fit into the group, the adolescent belongs partly to the child group, partly to the adult group, without belonging completely to either group. Parents, teachers, and society reflect this lack of clearly defined group status; and their ambiguous feelings toward the adolescent become obvious when they treat him at one time like a child and at another time like an adult. Difficulties arise because certain childish forms of behavior are no longer acceptable. At the same time some of the adult forms of behavior are not yet permitted either, or if they are permitted, they are new and strange to the adolescent (Muuss, 1975, p. 125).

The adolescent is in a state of "social locomotion," since he is moving into an unstructured social and psychological field. Goals are no longer clear, and the paths to them are ambiguous and full of uncertainties--the adolescent may no longer be certain that they even lead to his goals. Such ambiguities and uncertainties are illustrated well by the boy asking or hesitating to ask for his first date. Since the adolescent does not yet have a clear understanding of his social status, expectations, and obligations, his behavior reflects this uncertainty (Muuss, 1975, p. 125).

For example, the adolescent is confronted with several attractive choices that at the same time have relatively impervious boundaries. Driving a car, smoking pot, dropping acid, having sexual relations are all possible goals with positive valence, and thus they become a part of the adolescent's life space. However, they are also inaccessible because of parental restrictions, legal limitations, or the individual's own internalized moral code. Since the adolescent is moving through a rapidly changing field, he does not know the directions to specific goals and is open to constructive guidance, but he is also vulnerable to persuasion and pressure (Muuss, 1975, p. 125).

The self-image of an individual depends upon his body. During the normal developmental process, body changes are so slow that the self-image remains relatively stable. The body image has time to adjust to these developmental changes so that the individual knows his own body. During adolescence changes in body structure, body experience, and new body sensations and urges are more drastic so that even the well-known life space of the body image becomes less familiar, unreliable, and unpredictable. The adolescent is preoccupied with the normality of his body and how his body is perceived by others; he is concerned about and may actually be disturbed by his body image. He spends considerable time studying his own image in the mirror and is concerned about the development of primary and secondary sex characteristics in relationship to age-mates. This is understandable; obviously, the body is especially close to and vital to one's feelings of attractiveness, stability, security, and one's sex role. Negative feelings about one's own body are related to a negative self-concept (Rosen and Ross, 1968) and may lead to emotional instability that can change one's orientation toward life. Because of these various uncertainties adolescent behavior is characterized

by an increased plasticity of personality that can lead to personality changes and even religious conversions (Muuss, 1975, p. 125).

### **THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN - From PBS Frontline:**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/work/onereason.html>

**Interview with Jay Giedd** - Giedd is a neuroscientist at the National Institute of Mental Health. Recently, he spearheaded research showing for the first time that there is a wave of growth and change in the adolescent brain. He believes that what teens do during their adolescent years -- whether it's playing sports or playing video games -- can affect how their brains develop.

### **What has surprised you about looking at the adolescent brain?**

The most surprising thing has been how much the teen brain is changing. By age six, the brain is already 95 percent of its adult size. But the gray matter, or thinking part of the brain, continues to thicken throughout childhood as the brain cells get extra connections, much like a tree growing extra branches, twigs and roots. In the frontal part of the brain, the part of the brain involved in judgment, organization, planning, strategizing -- those very skills that teens get better and better at -- this process of thickening of the gray matter peaks at about age 11 in girls and age 12 in boys, roughly about the same time as puberty.

After that peak, the gray matter thins as the excess connections are eliminated or pruned. So much of our research is focusing on trying to understand what influences or guides the building-up stage when the gray matter is growing extra branches and connections and what guides the thinning or pruning phase when the excess connections are eliminated.

### **And what do you think this might mean, this exuberant growth of those early adolescent years?**

I think the exuberant growth during the pre-puberty years gives the brain enormous potential. The capacity to be skilled in many different areas is building up during those times. What the influences are of parenting or teachers, society, nutrition, bacterial and viral infections -- all these factors -- on this building-up phase, we're just beginning to try to understand. But the pruning-down phase is perhaps even more interesting, because our leading hypothesis for that is the "Use it or lose it" principle. Those cells and connections that are used will survive and flourish. Those cells and connections that are not used will wither and die.

So if a teen is doing music or sports or academics, those are the cells and connections that will be hard-wired. If they're lying on the couch or playing video games or MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going [to] survive.

Right around the time of puberty and on into the adult years is a particularly critical time for the brain sculpting to take place. Much like Michelangelo's David, you start out with a huge block of granite at the peak at the puberty years. Then the art is created by removing pieces of the granite, and that is the way the brain also sculpts itself. Bigger isn't necessarily better, or else the peak in brain function would occur at age 11 or 12. ... The advances come from actually taking away and pruning down of certain connections themselves.

The frontal lobe is often called the CEO, or the executive of the brain. It's involved in things like planning and strategizing and organizing, initiating attention and stopping and starting and shifting attention. It's a part of the brain that most separates man from beast, if you will. That is the part of the brain that has changed most in our human evolution, and a part of the brain that allows us to conduct philosophy and to think about thinking and to think about our place in the universe. ...

I think that [in the teen years, this] part of the brain that is helping organization, planning and strategizing is not done being built yet ... [It's] not that the teens are stupid or incapable of [things]. It's sort of unfair to expect them to have adult levels of organizational skills or decision-making before their brain is finished being built. ...

It's also a particularly cruel irony of nature, I think, that right at this time when the brain is most vulnerable is also the time when teens are most likely to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Sometimes when I'm working with teens, I actually show them these brain development curves, how they peak at puberty and then prune down and try to reason with them that if they're doing drugs or alcohol that evening, it may not just be affecting their brains for that night or even for that weekend, but for the next 80 years of their life. ...

### **One Reason Teens Respond Differently to the World: Immature Brain Circuitry – Sarah Spinks**

We used to think that teens respond differently to the world because of hormones, or attitude, or because they simply need independence. But when adolescents' brains are studied through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), we see that they actually work differently than adult brains.



Many teen subjects failed to interpret the emotion in faces like this one as fear.

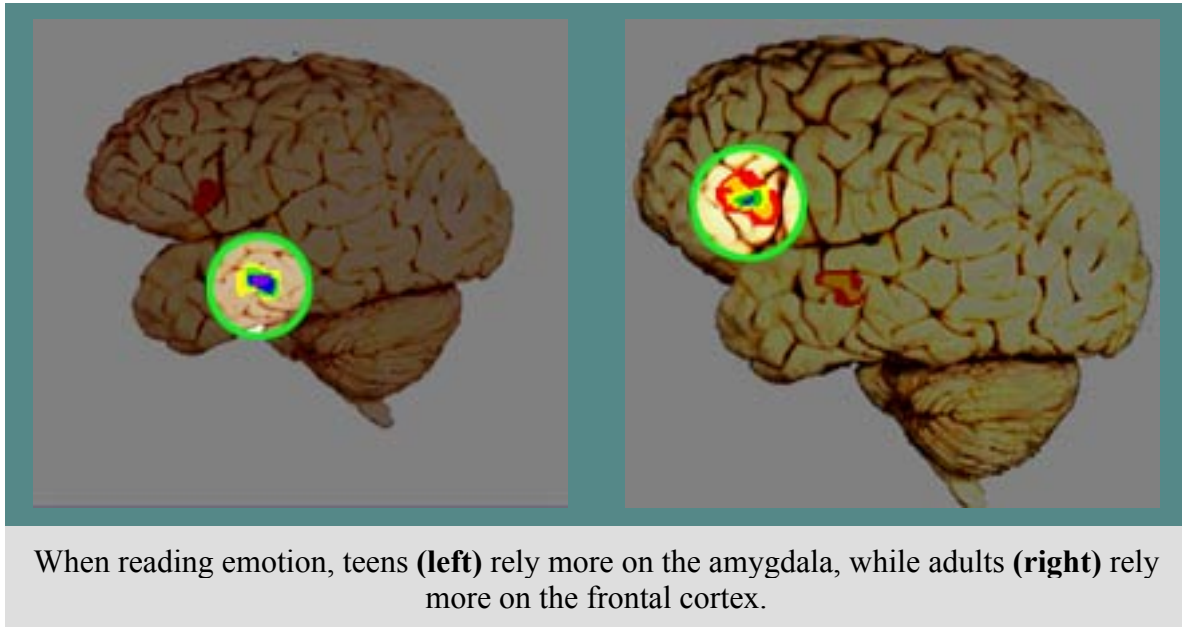
At the McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., [Deborah Yurgelun-Todd](#) and a group of researchers have studied how adolescents perceive emotion as compared to adults. The scientists looked at the brains of 18 children between the ages of 10 and 18 and compared them to 16 adults using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Both groups were shown pictures of adult faces and asked to identify the emotion on the faces. Using fMRI, the researchers could trace what part of the brain responded as

subjects were asked to identify the expression depicted in the picture.

The results surprised the researchers. The adults correctly identified the expression as fear. Yet the teens answered "shocked, surprised, angry." And the teens and adults used different parts of their brains to process what they were feeling. The teens mostly used the amygdala, a small almond shaped region that guides instinctual or "gut" reactions, while the adults relied on the frontal cortex, which governs reason and planning.

As the teens got older, the center of activity shifted more toward the frontal cortex and away from the cruder response of the amygdala.

Yurgelun-Todd, director of neuropsychology and cognitive neuroimaging at McLean Hospital believes the study goes partway to understanding why the teenage years seem so emotionally turbulent. The teens seemed not only to be misreading the feelings on the adult's face, but they reacted strongly from an area deep inside the brain. The frontal cortex helped the adults distinguish fear from shock or surprise. Often called the executive or CEO of the brain, the frontal cortex gives adults the ability to distinguish a subtlety of expression: "Was this really fear or was it surprise or shock?" For the teens, this area wasn't fully operating.



Reactions, rather than rational thought, come more from the amygdala, deep in the brain, than the frontal cortex, which led Yurgelun-Todd and other neuroscientists to suggest that an immature brain leads to impulsivity, or what researchers dub "risk-taking behavior." Although it was known from animal studies and brain-injured people that the frontal cortex matures more slowly than other brain structures, it has only been with the advent of functional MRI that researchers have been able to study brain activity in normal children.

The brain scans used in these studies are a valuable tool for researchers. Never before have scientists been able to develop data banks of normal, healthy children. Outlining the changes in normal function and development will help researchers determine the causes of psychiatric disorders that afflict children and adolescents.

## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

From <http://psychology.jrank.org/pages/14/Adolescence.html>

A second element of the passage through adolescence is a *cognitive transition*. Compared to children, adolescents think in ways that are more advanced, more efficient, and generally more complex. This can be seen in five ways.

First, during adolescence individuals become better able than children to think about what is possible, instead of limiting their thought to what is real. Whereas children's thinking is oriented to the here and now—that is, to things and events that they can observe directly, adolescents are able to consider what they observe against a backdrop of what is possible—they can think hypothetically.

Second, during the passage into adolescence, individuals become better able to think about abstract ideas. For example, adolescents find it easier than children to comprehend the sorts of higher-order, abstract logic inherent in puns, proverbs, metaphors, and analogies. The adolescent's greater facility with abstract thinking also permits the application of advanced reasoning and logical processes to social and ideological matters. This is clearly seen in the adolescent's increased facility and interest in thinking about interpersonal relationships, politics, philosophy, religion, and morality—topics that involve such abstract concepts as friendship, faith, democracy, fairness, and honesty.

Third, during adolescence individuals begin thinking more often about the process of thinking itself, or metacognition. As a result, adolescents may display increased introspection and self-consciousness. Although improvements in metacognitive abilities provide important intellectual advantages, one potentially negative byproduct of these advances is the tendency for adolescents to develop a sort of egocentrism, or intense preoccupation with the self. Acute adolescent egocentrism sometimes leads teenagers to believe that others are constantly watching and evaluating them, much as an audience glues its attention to an actor on a stage. Psychologists refer to this as the *imaginary audience*.

A fourth change in cognition is that thinking tends to become multidimensional, rather than limited to a single issue. Whereas children tend to think about things one aspect at a time, adolescents can see things through more complicated lenses. Adolescents describe themselves and others in more differentiated and complicated terms and find it easier to look at problems from multiple perspectives. Being able to understand that people's personalities are not one-sided, or that social situations can have different interpretations, depending on one's point of view, permits the adolescent to have far more sophisticated—and complicated—relationships with other people.

Finally, adolescents are more likely than children to see things as relative, rather than absolute. Children tend to see things in absolute terms—in black and white. Adolescents, in contrast, tend to see things as relative. They are more likely to question others' assertions and less likely to accept "facts" as absolute truths. This increase in relativism can be particularly exasperating to parents, who may feel that their adolescent children question everything just for the sake of argument. Difficulties often arise, for example, when adolescents begin seeing their parents' values as excessively relative.

## **Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development**

**From <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/erikson.html>**

### **Stage five**

Stage five is adolescence, beginning with puberty and ending around 18 or 20 years old. The task during adolescence is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. It was adolescence that interested Erikson first and most, and the patterns he saw here were the bases for his thinking about all the other stages.

Ego identity means knowing who you are and how you fit in to the rest of society. It requires that you take all you've learned about life and yourself and mold it into a unified self-image, one that your community finds meaningful.

There are a number of things that make things easier: First, we should have a mainstream adult culture that is worthy of the adolescent's respect, one with good adult role models and open lines of communication.

Further, society should provide clear rites of passage, certain accomplishments and rituals that help to distinguish the adult from the child. In primitive and traditional societies, an adolescent boy may be asked to leave the village for a period of time to live on his own, hunt some symbolic animal, or seek an inspirational vision. Boys and girls may be required to go through certain tests of endurance, symbolic ceremonies, or educational events. In one way or another, the distinction between the powerless, but irresponsible, time of childhood and the powerful and responsible time of adulthood, is made clear.

Without these things, we are likely to see role confusion, meaning an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world. When an adolescent is confronted by role confusion, Erikson says he or she is suffering from an identity crisis. In fact, a common question adolescents in our society ask is a straight-forward question of identity: "Who am I?"

One of Erikson's suggestions for adolescence in our society is the psychosocial moratorium. He suggests you take a little "time out." If you have money, go to Europe. If you don't, bum around the U.S. Quit school and get a job. Quit your job and go to school. Take a break, smell the roses, get to know yourself. We tend to want to get to "success" as fast as possible, and yet few of us have ever taken the time to figure out what success means to us. A little like the young Oglala Lakota, perhaps we need to dream a little.

There is such a thing as too much "ego identity," where a person is so involved in a particular role in a particular society or subculture that there is no room left for tolerance. Erikson calls this maladaptive tendency fanaticism. A fanatic believes that his way is the only way. Adolescents are, of course, known for their idealism, and for their tendency to see things in black-and-white. These people will gather others around them and promote their beliefs and life-styles without regard to others' rights to disagree.

The lack of identity is perhaps more difficult still, and Erikson refers to the malignant tendency here as repudiation. They repudiate their membership in the world of adults and, even more, they repudiate their need for an identity. Some adolescents allow themselves to "fuse" with a group, especially the kind of group that is particularly eager to provide the details of your identity: religious cults, militaristic organizations, groups founded on hatred, groups that have divorced themselves from the painful demands of mainstream society. They may become involved in destructive activities, drugs, or alcohol, or they may withdraw into their own psychotic fantasies. After all, being "bad" or being "nobody" is better than not knowing who you are!

If you successfully negotiate this stage, you will have the virtue Erikson called fidelity. Fidelity means loyalty, the ability to live by societies standards despite their imperfections and incompleteness and inconsistencies. We are not talking about blind loyalty, and we are not talking about accepting the imperfections. After all, if you love your community, you will want to see it become the best it can be. But fidelity means that you have found a place in that community, a place that will allow you to contribute.

## ***Erik Erikson's Theory of Identity Development***

**From <http://www.psyking.net/id183.htm>**

The core concept of Erikson's theory is the acquisition of an ego-identity, and the identity crisis is the most essential characteristic of adolescence. Although a person's identity is established in ways that differ from culture to culture, the accomplishment of this developmental task has a common element in all cultures. In order to acquire a strong and healthy ego-identity the child must receive consistent and meaningful recognition of his achievements and accomplishments (Muuss, 1975, p.55).

Adolescence is described by Erikson as the period during which the individual must establish a sense of *personal identity* and avoid the dangers of *role diffusion and identity confusion* (Erikson, 1950). The implication is that the individual has to make an assessment of his or her assets and liabilities and how they want to use them. Adolescents must answer questions for themselves about where they came from, who they are, and what they will become. Identity, or a sense of sameness and continuity, must be searched for. Identity is not given to the individual by society, nor does it appear as a maturational phenomenon; it must be acquired through sustained individual efforts. Unwillingness to work on one's own identity formation carries with it the danger of role diffusion, which may result in alienation and a lasting sense of isolation and confusion. The virtue to be developed is fidelity. Adhering to one's values contributes to a stable identity.

The search for an identity involves the production of a meaningful self-concept in which past, present, and future are linked together. Consequently, the task is more difficult in a historical period in which the past has lost the anchorage of family and community tradition, the present is characterized by social change, and the future has become less predictable. According to Erikson, in a period of rapid social change, the older generation is no longer able to provide adequate role models for the younger generation. Even if the older generation can provide adequate role models, adolescents may reject them as inappropriate for their situation. Therefore, Erikson believes that the importance of the peer group cannot be overemphasized. Peers help adolescents find answers to the question "Who Am I?" as they depend on social feedback as to what others feel and how they react to the individual. Therefore, adolescents "are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are and with the question of how to connect to earlier cultivated roles and skills with the ideal prototypes of the day" (Erikson, 1959, p.89).

Pubescence, according to Erikson, is characterized by rapidity of body growth, genital maturity, and sexual awareness. Because the latter two aspects are qualitatively quite different from those experienced in earlier years, an element of discontinuity with previous development occurs during early adolescence. Youth is confronted with a "physiological revolution" within himself that threatens his body image and interferes with the formation of an identity. Erikson maintains that the study of identity has become more important than the study of sexuality was in Freud's time (Muuss, 1975, p.65).



Of great concern for many adolescents is the need to settle the question of vocational identity. During the initial attempts to establish a vocational identity some role diffusion frequently exists. Adolescents at this stage hold glamorized and idealized conceptions of their vocational goals, and it is not uncommon that goal aspirations are higher than the individual's ability warrants. Frequently, vocational goal models are chosen that are attainable for only a few: movie heroes, rock musicians, athletic champions, car racers, astronauts, and other glamorized "heroes." In the process the adolescent over identifies with and idolizes his heroes to the extent that he yields his own identity and presumes he has theirs. At this point, according to Erikson, a youth rarely identifies with his own parents; they often rebel against their dominance, their value system, and their intrusion into their private life, since they must separate their identity from that of their family. The adolescent must assert their autonomy in order to reach maturity (Muuss, 1975, p.66).

The search for a personal identity also includes the formation of a personal ideology or a philosophy of life that can serve to orient the individual. Such a perspective aids in making choices and guiding behavior. A personal identity influences the adolescent for the rest of their life. If the adolescent bows out and adopts someone else's identity or ideology, it is often less satisfactory than developing their own. The adopted ideology rarely becomes personal and can lead to foreclosure in adolescent development.

The positive outcome of the identity crisis is dependent on the young person's willingness to accept his past and establish continuity with their previous experiences. The adolescent must find an answer to the question: "Who Am I?" Other questions that must be answered include: "Where am I going?" "Who am I to become?" There must be a commitment to a system of values - religious beliefs, vocational goals, a philosophy of life, and an acceptance of one's sexuality. Only through the achievement of these aspects of ego-identity can it be possible for the adolescent to move into "adult maturity," achieve intimacy of sexual and affectional love, establish deep friendships, and achieve personal self-abandon without fear of loss of ego-identity (Muuss, 1975, p.66).

If the adolescent fails in his search for an identity, he will experience self-doubt, role diffusion, and role confusion; and the adolescent may indulge in self-destructive one-sided preoccupation or activity. Such an adolescent may continue to be morbidly preoccupied with what others think of them, or may withdraw and no longer care about themselves and others. This leads to ego diffusion, personality confusion and can be found in the delinquent and in psychotic personality disorganization. In its most severe cases, according to Erikson, identity diffusion can lead to suicide or suicide attempts. Once the personal identity is established, then the adolescent can move on to find intimacy or isolation in interpersonal relationships (Muuss, 1975, p.67).

### ***James Marcia's Extension of Erikson's Concept: Identity Status***

Marcia defines identity as "an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history." According to Marcia, the criteria for the attainment of a mature identity are based on two essential variables: *crisis and commitment*. "*Crisis refers to times during adolescence when the individual seems to be actively involved in choosing among alternative occupations and beliefs.*" "*Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief*" (Marcia, 1967, p. 119).

Marcia interviewed students ages 18 to 22 years about their occupational choices, religious and political beliefs, and values --all central aspects of identity. He classified students into 4 categories of identity status based on: 1) whether they had gone through an "identity crisis" as described by Erikson, and 2) the degree to which they were now committed to an occupational choice and to a set of values and beliefs.

The four categories of identity statuses as defined by Marcia are as follows:

- ***Identity diffused or identity confused.*** Individuals who had not yet experienced an identity crisis, nor made any commitment to a vocation or set of beliefs.
- ***Foreclosure.*** Individuals who have not experienced crisis, but has made commitments, however, these commitments are not the result of his own searching and exploring, but they are handed to him, ready-made, by others, frequently his parents.
- ***Moratorium.*** Individuals who are in an acute state of crisis. They are exploring and actively searching for alternatives, and struggling to find their identity; but have not yet made any commitment or have only developed very temporary kinds of commitment.
- ***Identity Achieved.*** Individuals who have experienced crises but have resolved them on their own terms, and as a result of the resolution of the crisis had made a personal commitment to an occupation, a religious belief, a personal value system; and, has resolved their attitude toward sexuality.

Most adolescents seem to progress toward a status of identity achieved. Identity achievement is rarest among early adolescents. It is more frequent among older high school students, college students and young adults.

During junior and senior high school, identity diffusion and identity foreclosure are the most common. Few differences are found between males and females on measures of identity.

The adolescent moratorium is defined as a developmental period during which commitments have not yet been made or are rather exploratory and tentative. However, there are many crises and many unresolved questions. There is an active struggle to find

an answer, explore, search, experiment, try out different roles, and play the field. It is in this sense that the moratorium is considered the adolescent issue par excellence.

According to Marcia, about 30 percent of today's college students are in this stage. The need for a moratorium is reflected in the motives for volunteering for the Peace Corps and may be one of the reasons for the past existence of the hippie cultures, according to some social scientists (Muuss, 1975, p.77).

Interestingly, some social scientists believe that schools may be encouraging foreclosure, since they demand conformity to the way things are and submission to authority rather than aiding the adolescent in his search for a unique individuality and a personal identity. Many have maintained that schools require adolescents to submit and suppress their creativity, individuality, and identity to the demands of the skill-and knowledge-oriented curriculum in order to succeed (Muuss, 1975, p.81).

According to Muuss, (1970), some of the adolescent difficulties in Western society may be better understood if one considers the adolescent as the "marginal man who stands in a psychological no-man's land without clear understanding of what is expected of him, struggling to attain adult status " (p.113). The adolescent struggle to attain an identity and achieve adult status can be a frustrating experience, and society, educational institutions, and teachers may well ponder how they can make this experience more meaningful.