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978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives

Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana

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ADOLESCENT VULNERABILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This book explores the central importance of adolescents' own activities in their development. This focus harkens back to Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology and provides a theoretically coherent vision of what makes adolescence a distinctive period of development, with unique opportunities and vulnerabilities. An interdisciplinary and international group of contributors explore how adolescents integrate neurological, cognitive, personal, interpersonal, and social systems aspects of development into more organized systems.

Eric Amsel is University Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department at Weber State University. He has published three other books: *The Development of Scientific Thinking Skills* (1998, with Deanna Kuhn and Michael O'Loughlin); *Change and Development: Issues of Theory, Method and Application* (1998, with K. Ann Renninger); and *Language, Literacy, and Cognitive Development: The Development and Consequences of Symbolic Communication* (2002, with James P. Byrnes). He has published more than twenty journal articles in such journals as *Child Development*, *Cognition*, *Cognitive Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Journal of Research in Adolescence*, and *New Ideas in Psychology*. Amsel is Associate Editor of *New Ideas in Psychology*. He also serves as a Board Member and is a past Vice President of the Jean Piaget Society.

Judith Smetana has published six other books: *Adolescents, Families, and Social Development: How Adolescents Construct Their Worlds* (2011); *Social Development, Social Inequalities, and Social Justice* (2008, with Elliot Turiel and Cecilia Wainryb); *New Directions for Child Development: Changing Boundaries of Parental Authority during Adolescence* (2005); *Handbook of Moral Development* (2005, with Melanie Killen); *Parental Beliefs: Causes and Consequences for Development* (1994); and *Concepts of Self and Morality: Women's Reasoning about Abortion* (1982). She has published more than seventy articles in such journals as *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Human Development*, *Journal of Adolescence*, *Journal of Research in Adolescence*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, and *Social Development*. Smetana has served as Associate Editor of *Child Development* and is on the editorial board of *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Human Development*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Parenting: Science and Practice*, and *Social Development*.

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities

DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONSTRUCTIVIST
PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

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Frontmatter

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental
and Constructivist Perspectives
Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Series Editor's Preface</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1. Constructivist Processes in Adolescent Development <i>Eric Amsel and Judith G. Smetana</i>	1
PART I BIOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE	
2. Structural Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging of Typically Developing Children and Adolescents <i>Jay N. Giedd, Armin Raznahan, Nancy R. Lee, Catherine Weddle, Maria Liverpool, Michael Stockman, Elizabeth M. Wells, Liv Clasen, Jonathan Blumenthal, Rhoshel K. Lenroot, and Francois Lalonde</i>	23
3. Adolescent Risk Taking: A Social Neuroscience Perspective <i>Laurence Steinberg</i>	41
4. What Are the Cognitive Skills Adolescents Need for Life in the Twenty-First Century? <i>Deanna Kuhn and Amanda Holman</i>	65
5. Hypothetical Thinking in Adolescence: Its Nature, Development, and Applications <i>Eric Amsel</i>	86

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental
and Constructivist Perspectives
Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii Contents

PART II SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

6. Testing, Testing: Everyday Storytelling and the Construction of Adolescent Identity <i>Avril Thorne and Lauren A. Shapiro</i>	117
7. Adolescents' Social Reasoning and Relationships with Parents: Conflicts and Coordinations Within and Across Domains <i>Judith G. Smetana</i>	139
8. Representations, Process, and Development: A New Look at Friendship in Early Adolescence <i>William M. Bukowski, Melissa Simard, Marie Eve Dubois, and Luz Stella Lopez</i>	159
9. Schools, Peers, and the Big Picture of Adolescent Development <i>Robert Crosnoe</i>	182
<i>Index</i>	205

Figures and Tables

FIGURES

1.1. The frequency of peer-reviewed articles in PSYCINFO containing the expression <i>Formal Operations</i> , by decade	page 7
2.1. Mean volume by age in years for males ($N = 475$ scans) and females ($N = 354$ scans)	25
2.2. Gray matter subdivisions	28
3.1. Age differences in self-reported impulsivity and reward seeking	55
3.2. Age differences in time to first move on the Tower of London task as a function of problem difficulty	56
3.3. Age differences in changes over time in pulls from advantageous and disadvantageous decks in the Iowa Gambling Task	57
3.4. Age differences in delay discounting	58
4.1. Sample prediction task	67
4.2. Sample reflection sheet	75
4.3. Proportion of utterances coded as direct counterarguments	77
4.4. Rebuttal sequence length	77
5.1. Percentage of consistently correct participants by instruction condition and age group in Amsel, Trionfi, and Campbell (2005), Study 2	94
5.2. Percentage of evidence-based responses by age group in Amsel and Brock (1996)	102
8.1. Measures of interaction with a friend are treated as antecedents of relationship measures	173

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental
and Constructivist Perspectives
Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

x	<i>Figures and Tables</i>	
8.2.	Relationship measures (i.e., security and closeness) mediate the association between measures of interactions (i.e., aid and companionship) and outcome measure	174
8.3.	The association between companionship and intimacy is stronger among early adolescents from middle levels of socioeconomic status, as measured by neighborhood <i>estrato</i> index, than among those from either the highest or the lowest groups	176
9.1.	A blueprint for the disruption of difference	194

TABLES

4.1.	Sixth-graders' responses to the opportunity scenario	72
4.2.	Sixth-graders' responses to the necessity scenario	73
4.3.	Questions posed by students during argumentation on the president topic	79
4.4.	Reflections on the value of argument	82

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives

Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Series Editor's Preface

In 1970, Jean Piaget participated in a workshop that instigated vigorous discussion in higher education circles about the importance of traversing the boundaries across the disciplines. The workshop, entitled “L’interdisciplinarité – Problèmes d’enseignement et de recherche dans les universités,” was held in Nice, France, in September 1970 and the proceedings were published in 1972 as a monograph entitled *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). This workshop and the book that resulted from it set the stage for ongoing debates about how best to view work going on at the intersection of disciplinary boundaries. Piaget’s remarks made clear that new conceptual frameworks were needed, frameworks that underscored the importance of augmenting disciplinary knowledge in order to address the enduring challenges of our times. Whether to do so from multi-, trans-, or interdisciplinary bases and what precisely each of these constructs adds to disciplinary discussions has been hotly debated for the ensuing four decades. What Piaget was wrestling with in 1970 and many others have been pursuing since then are two enduring issues: the complexity of knowledge and the importance of viewing knowledge construction as a process embedded in real time. Piaget understood early on what has become more obvious now, namely the importance of going beyond disciplinary limitations both theoretically and methodologically. This insight has shaped modern thinking on knowledge and development in significant ways.

Around the same time that Piaget spoke at the OECD workshop, a new society was formed. In 1970, the Jean Piaget Society was founded. It has since provided an internationally recognized forum for inquiry about and advances of significant problems in the developmental sciences. The Society has had a long-standing commitment to developmental perspectives

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives

Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

Series Editor's Preface

and has been deeply concerned with theories and conceptualizations of development and the ways developmental perspectives connect to and influence research. Since renamed The Jean Piaget Society for Knowledge and Development, the Society organizes and sponsors a book series, an annual meeting of plenary addresses and scholarly presentations, a scholarly journal (*Cognitive Development*), and a Web site (<http://www.piaget.org>). Across venues, participating scholars come from a range of disciplines, including departments of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, biology, philosophy, and education.

The Society has had a long-standing dedication to the publication of a book series that addresses core problems in the developmental sciences. For more than thirty years, Lawrence Erlbaum Press (currently Psychology Press/Taylor and Francis) published the series, carefully edited for its first decade by Lynn S. Liben and then by Ellin Kofsky Scholnick. Each of the volumes in the Jean Piaget Symposium series engages well-recognized scholars on a set of themes that bring together divergent disciplinary perspectives. The series, which has included nearly forty published volumes, has dealt with topics such as human understanding, developmental psychopathology, concept formation, and relations between learning and development.

In a time when there appears to be a proliferation of edited volumes, one can ask what makes this series thrive. The high regard for these volumes has been due to the careful way interdisciplinary thinking has shed light on enduring issues with which scholars interested in human development are grappling. To a large measure the rigorous system of cultivation and review plays a significant role in arriving at cutting-edge thinking that goes beyond juxtaposition of new ideas. Careful attention is given to taking a theme at the center of developmental science (e.g., epigenesis of mind; culture, thought, and development; social development and social justice; developmental social cognitive neuroscience) and weaving scholarship from neighboring disciplines into discussions in ways that hold the potential to significantly shape ongoing scientific discourse.

Each of the JPS series volumes emanates from the Society's themed annual meeting that includes plenary addresses and invited symposia, a meeting structure that itself is the outcome of a long and rigorous academic review process. Typically, several revisions are made in the proposal before it obtains approval from the full Board of Directors. The annual meeting organizers also serve as editors of the volume. To supplement chapters by the five or six plenary speakers, the volume editors typically invite other contributors to the volume. The editors also inform contributors about the requirements with regard to the volume's theme and scope. Finally, the

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978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives

Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Series Editor's Preface*

xiii

editors engage in a thorough evaluation of each contribution, providing extensive feedback and soliciting revisions until they are of the required quality. This process ensures that extraordinary scholars will contribute to the volumes. In summary, we believe the book series has provided a distinctive intellectual contribution to the study of knowledge and development by focusing on developmental inquiry from an interdisciplinary perspective. Further information about the series can be found at: <http://www.piaget.org/Series/series.html>.

The inaugural volume of our new book series *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Knowledge and Development: The Jean Piaget Symposium* series with Cambridge University Press exemplifies the strong interdisciplinary approach that has been central to all of our prior volumes. Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana, *Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives* continues the Jean Piaget Society's tradition of providing a recognized forum for advancing inquiry about both enduring and emergent problems in the developmental sciences. This volume brings together neurological, cognitive, self-system, moral, and social perspectives on adolescents' active processes for coordinating capacities, skills, and understandings. Greater than the sum of its parts, each chapter contributes to the larger conceptual framework contributing to redefining our understanding about this intriguing time of development. As such, this inaugural volume represents the goals of the series splendidly and paves the way for further interdisciplinary scholarship at the frontiers of new knowledge about human development.

Nancy Budwig, Clark University, Worcester, MA
December 2010

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

It was a brief conversation between the two of us in Atlanta at the Society for Research in Child Development in 2005 that set the wheels rolling and resulted in this book. It was a time of mounting excitement over new and broad-based findings about adolescent development, including new findings on adolescent brain development, risk taking, identity development, peer and family relations, and contextual and cultural influences. These findings were seen as evidence of biological and socio-contextual factors on adolescent development and further proof that a constructivist framework for understanding adolescent development, once in its ascendancy, is now in decline.

As developmental psychologists, we never found the new findings particularly incompatible with a broadly constructivist framework, a point we reaffirmed in our discussions in Atlanta. We decided then and there that there was value in organizing a conference on adolescent development from a constructivist perspective to make sense of the new findings. Our goal was to reinvigorate the constructivist approach to adolescent development, which we saw as being unnecessarily dismissed as irrelevant to research and theory in adolescence.

As members of the Board (JS) and Executive Committee (EA) of the Jean Piaget Society, we brought our proposal for a symposium to the subsequent board meeting. The proposal was met with positive comments and suggestions about the invited speakers and symposia. We thank the JPS board members and society leadership at the time (President Nancy Budwig, past President Elliot Turiel, and President-Elect Geoff Saxe) for their help in putting together the intellectual content of the conference and sharpening its conceptual focus.

The conference was held in Quebec City in June 2008, as the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society. The hard work of putting

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978-0-521-76846-7 - Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives

Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

Preface

on the conference was ably handled by the 2008 JPS executive committee, composed of Connie Milbrath (VP Publicity), Chris Lalonde (VP Information Technology), Colette Daiute (Secretary), and Ashley Maynard (Treasurer). Also, we extend our thanks to the many scholars who adjudicated the submitted program to the conference.

Our gratitude goes to the local arrangement team in Quebec City, led by Teresa Blicharski and assisted by Helene Ziarko, Simon Larose, Shephan Desrochers, and Margurtute Lavallee, all of Laval University. Together with an army of their graduate and undergraduate student assistants, the local arrangements team ensured that the Quebec conference ran smoothly, down to the smallest detail.

We would also like to thank a number of institutions and people for their financial and professional support of the conference. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada generously supported the conference with a grant through the Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada program. Thanks are extended to Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, and the University of Laval for their financial support of the conference. Also, a special thanks to Lauren Greenfield, whose photographic work adorned the program and poster for the conference, and to Chris Lalonde and Bill Hallam for designing the program and poster. Finally, a thank you to Aubrey Jenkins and Jessamy Comer for their help preparing the volume and to Nancy Budwig from JPS and Amanda O'Connor from Cambridge for shepherding the manuscript through to publication.

There is an old saying from J. B. Priestley that goes: "Like its politicians and its wars, society has the teenagers it deserves." The purpose of this project was to better understand teenagers and help them negotiate their transition to adulthood. As editors we would like to thank our families (EA: Judi and the boys; JS: Ron and the boys) for not just tolerating but even supporting our preoccupation with this project and its goal.

December 16, 2010