

The Struggles of an Adolescent

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Human Behavior

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Abstract

What causes depression in adolescents? This paper discusses one possible reason for depression in the years of adolescents along with detailed information about some different coping mechanisms these adolescents may use. Also, this paper discusses how globalization affects adolescents in the United States. Lastly, this paper also touches upon Universal Human Rights in relation to adolescents.

Keywords: Depression, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, globalization

1. I will be focusing on the adolescence years, and more specifically the different stages of separation within these years. Also, I will be discussing how separation causes different psychological problems, such as depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and eating disorders.
2. I picked these years because these are the years when many teens become depressed and begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol. In these years teens are very vulnerable because they begin to develop new relationships with their parents. Losing the familiar relationship they once had with their parent makes the teen feel very lost and sad, and possibly depressed. Depression differs from sadness because during periods of sadness you can still be happy and have high self-esteem, while depression is when you are completely lost and show no signs of happiness. When teens are depressed they look for ways out of their depression and often turn to drugs and alcohol as an escape. Yes, drugs and alcohol do help sadness in the short term; however, after they come down from their high they are right back where they started. It is important for teens to learn how to solve these problems psychologically, through self-soothing. That is where I come in, as their therapist or counselor.

In the future, I see myself as a counselor for teens struggling with depression or drug/alcohol problems. I think my desire to help teens with depression comes from the fact that my brother was a teen who struggled with depression. It was a difficult time for him as well as our entire family. He received counseling during this time and it helped him to overcome his depression. He worked very hard to conquer his despair. I witnessed how hard it

was for him. Working with a good counselor was an important part of his recovery. My brother went on to college, graduated Magna Cum Laude, and is currently a second year teacher. I would like to help other teens with this difficult problem succeed as my brother has.

3. Everyone over the age of 12 or 13 had experienced what has become known as the "second separation-individuation." During this time, teenagers begin to go through puberty and begin to develop sexual thoughts. As children begin to go through this physical stage in their life, many emotional changes occur as well. Teens begin to go through this stage of separation. Due to this separation from their parents, teens often get lost and do not know how to find themselves. Many teens become **depressed** from this great change in their life which in turn causes them to act out in many ways such as searching for instant gratification and experimenting with **drugs and alcohol**. Some teens even purposely get **pregnant** to make up for the perceived lost love from their parents. Lastly, many teens develop **eating disorders** in college due to the physical separation from their parents. At this point in life, while entering college at the age of 18 many teens begin to re-connect with their parents emotionally; however, the physical separation can be just as overwhelming as the emotional separation that they experienced in the previous years.

Depression has only recently begun to be studied in adolescence. Before the years of 1960's or 1970's, depression was only seen as an adult disease, "children were too developmentally immature to have developed the superego necessary for the onset of depression" (Judith Mishne). According to Anna Freud,

depression in adolescence was considered a normal part of adolescence, characterized by normal developmental confusion stemming from the separation from parents. She believed that adolescence depression was inevitable. With depression comes many difficult problems, "depressive symptoms include volatile mood, rage, intense self-consciousness, low self-esteem, poor school performance, delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, sexual acting-out, social withdrawal, problems with overeating, oversleeping, and suicidal ideation" (Judith Mishne).

Sexual acting-out and teen pregnancy is common in adolescents that deal with depression. "Teenage mothers' depression levels were already higher than their peers' before they became pregnant and remain higher after childbearing and into early and middle adulthood" (Stefanie Mollborn and Elizabeth Morningstar). This means that if a teen is depressed they are at a higher risk to become pregnant. Many teenage females feel lonely and are constantly looking for the "lost love," and they think having a child can make up for that loss. Ultimately, depression and teen pregnancy are linked, "Bivariate evidence suggests that depressive symptoms are related to subsequent teenage childbearing" (Stefanie Mollborn and Elizabeth Morningstar).

Adolescents appear to be more vulnerable to the addiction process, and this is even truer for adolescents that deal with depression. As I stated before, this is a vulnerable time in a human's life because they are creating a new and different relationship with their parent, and feel lost. Peers begin to "fill in" for their parents, and depending on what crowd a teen gets involved with, drugs and

alcohol may be the easy way out. "Adolescence is a confusing and complex period in life, a time of questioning, exploring, and risk taking" (MARTHA A. MORRISON). For children that deal with depression, drugs and alcohol may serve a double purpose. First, to "fit in" with their peer group, and second is to self-soothe, and escape from reality. It is important to teach teens that drugs and alcohol may seem to be the answer for a short amount of time; however, in the long run it only leads to more problems and teens need to learn how to deal with their problems psychologically.

Eating disorders seem to be common within the college years.

"Overwhelmed and bombarded by their feelings, college students often turn to behavioral means, like eating disorders, to cope" (F. Diane Barth). Moving out of the house and physically being separated from your parents can be daunting and scary. From the ages seventeen to twenty-two are the years that one is transitioning from adolescents to young adulthood. "This developmental stage can be exciting, challenging, and rewarding, but also sometimes distressing and difficult" (F. Diane Barth). This makes what Erickson said about crisis or transformation clearer. Erickson stated that at the end of each development stage, a person goes through psychosocial crisis; this is where one learns the basic strength that they will keep throughout their lives. This is clearly a time of huge emotional vulnerability, making crisis easier to occur. As some adolescents experiment with sex, drugs, and alcohol, many do the same with eating disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating. Obviously, the college years are not

the same experience for every adolescent, and eating disorders can happen at anytime in life, yet are most common within these years.

4. After reading more about adolescence and the "second separation-individuation" I have learned a great deal about how teens cope during this difficult time. Some teens become depressed, some choose drugs and alcohol, others choose sexual activity, and lastly some choose eating disorders. Obviously not all teens engage in these outlets, but more likely than not, you know at least one teen that has engaged in these outlets, or possibly you know a teen engaged in all four of these outlets. I learned that depression was not believed to be an adolescence disease before the years 1960's or 1970's, because the adolescents' brain was considered to be too immature. I also, learned that depressed teens are more likely to get pregnant than their non depressed peers. Lastly, I learned that there is a physical separation when adolescents leave for college which causes some of the same psychological problems as an emotional separation.
5. Globalization has a huge effect on adolescents in the United States, as stated in the article Globalization and Cultural Identity. The influence of globalization on cultural identity formation is most apparent in adolescence and emerging adulthood rather than children and adults because adolescence and emerging adults are more interested in media. "Media such as television, movies, music, and the Internet contribute to the rapid and extensive spread of ideas across cultures" (Lene Arnett Jensen, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Jessica McKenzie). Also, adolescents are not yet completely settled on particular beliefs and behaviors, making it easier to be influenced by globalization. For example, "some

research with immigrants to the United States has also shown that adolescents change their behaviors, beliefs, values, and identifications more than adults do" (Lene Arnett Jensen, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Jessica McKenzie). On the other hand, this may be an issue because while in adolescence, research suggests that there are risks for psychological and social problems while, "a person moves from childhood into adolescence. These risks may carry into emerging adulthood, where identity issues now come to the fore" (Lene Arnett Jensen, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Jessica McKenzie). With globalization, adolescence and emerging adulthood may be vulnerable developmental periods. Globalization can play an important role during adolescence. The period of adolescence is a time when teens are open to diverse cultural beliefs and behaviors and as teens are exposed to globalization it can impact their cultural beliefs and behaviors.

6. Contraception has recently been declared a "universal human right" for women and adolescents in the United Nations. Universal Human Rights, are defined as:

A common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

This is the first time the United Nations has agreed to the funding of contraception. They believe it can considerably improve the lives of women and children in poor countries.

7. Answered in number 2
8. The relationship between the "second separation-individuation" and depression is completely logical and may explain the reason why so many adolescents act the way they do. However the connections I made between depression and the coping mechanisms I have chosen could be a bit of a stretch. I believe that all teens are lost during this period of life and they need some sort of connection, so they turn to friends, because parents are "lame" and "not cool" in their eyes. These teens will do anything to "fit in" even if that means doing drugs or being sexually active. Depressed teens often use these coping mechanisms to help with their ability to self-soothe while at the same time feeling connected with their peers.
9. Throughout this semester the topic we discussed that had the greatest personal impact on me was depression. As I stated before, my brother struggled with depression through his adolescence, and since then I have wanted to help other teens that struggle with depression. We never truly know why people become depressed; however, when we began discussing "the second separation-individuation" I began to understand it more and make a connection with depression. I learned that teens begin to emotionally separate from their mother, which causes sadness in most adolescents or even depression in some which in turn can result in possible drug and alcohol abuse and sexual activity.

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