

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADOLESCENCE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide a fundamental formulation of the phenomenon of adolescence. In order to achieve this aim, the concepts of status, rational behavior, and status change are presented. In light of these concepts, adolescence may be described in terms of the development of adult competence. A person paradigmatically develops from being a very limited individual (i.e., a child), in need of help from others to make appropriate choices, into a competent adult, capable of making effective discriminations, evaluations, and decisions on his or her own. Adolescence may also be described as a time of status change. A person develops from a child whose primary status is in the family into an adult who can take his or her place in society.

Leaders within the field of adolescent psychology have expressed concern about the adequacy of our understanding of adolescents. For example, Joan Lipsitz (1977), in her landmark book *Growing Up Forgotten*, concludes that "our research is not informed by a coherent

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sense of who young adolescents are" (p. 14). Joseph Adelson (1985), a leader in the field of adolescent research since the 1950s, cautions "it will avail us little to have our research grow exponentially if it is based on an essentially incorrect or incomplete understanding of the adolescent period" (p. 249).

The sensitivity to conceptual adequacy reflected in these quotes is in part the result of a series of studies revealing the glaring discrepancy between psychoanalytic theory and the reality of adolescent development. Articles on these studies have titles such as "The Stormy Decade: Fact or Fiction?" (Bandura, 1969), "Adolescent Turmoil: A Myth Revisited" (Oldham, 1978), and "Current Contradictions in Adolescent Theory" (Coleman, 1978). As a result of the studies and critiques, the consensus among researchers today is that "normal adolescent turmoil" and "inevitable identity crises" are fictions born of theory, having little to do with the reality of adolescence.

As Powers, Hauser, and Kilner (1989) note, when such concepts about adolescents were finally set aside, "researchers and clinicians were left with little coherent conception of positive mental health in adolescence" (p. 201). Unfortunately, many people simply continued to use the old fictions. For example, the notion of "adolescent turmoil" as a "normal conflict associated with maturing" still appears in DSM-III-R as the basis for differential diagnosis of Identity Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p. 90).

Because a new, scientifically viable conceptualization of the phenomenon of adolescence is needed, the aim of this paper is to present one. In order to do so, the Person Concept (Ossorio, 1966, 1978b, 1985), an all-encompassing concept providing formal and systematic access to all the facts and possible facts about persons and their behavior, is used. In particular, the concepts of status, rational behavior, and status change, as articulated in the Person Concept, are used in understanding adolescents. The paper concludes with an examination of the concepts of identity and identity problems.

STATUS

The concept of status can be formulated in terms of position, in terms of relationships, in terms of standards, in terms of reasons, and in terms of perspectives. (Ossorio, 1983, p. 37)

Position and Relationships

A community may be partially understood as a structure of related statuses (cf. Putman, 1981). A status is a position or place within the

structure, and a given status is distinguished in part by its relationships to all the other positions within the structure. What goes with each status is behavior potential, and also certain limitations on behavior potential, for an individual who embodies the status.

Adolescence is a general status within many life-size social structures that people have created, and it is interrelated with other general statuses like child, adult, elderly person, man, woman, and parent. These statuses vary in the amount and quality of behavior potential associated with them. For example, an individual in the position of a child will have less behavior potential than an individual who is an adult.

Adolescence is a transitional status between being a child and being an adult. During adolescence, persons paradigmatically finish acquiring the abilities they will need in order to enact the status of adult more or less competently when they become adults at the age designated by their communities.

Notice that the concept of status used here is much broader than the concept of social status or rank. A person's place on the social ladder (e.g., "rich kid") is only one of his or her statuses, and general statuses like child, adolescent, and adult cut across social classes.

A person with the status of adolescent is potentially a member of the "team" of adolescents. As a member of the team of adolescents, he or she automatically has a potential relationship to any member of the team of children and to any member of the team of adults. The person also has a potential relationship to the team of children as a whole and to the team of adults as a whole. The concept of status is a way of talking about this entire network of relationships.

Standards

Statuses are distinguished in part by the standards in terms of which an individual embodying the status is properly to be judged. A person's status determines (logically, normatively) how a behavior by an individual having that status counts within a given community, and therefore it determines *what* behavior it is.

The juvenile justice system is one place in our community where the different standards that go with different statuses is obvious. The community recognizes that teenagers may do things that reflect poor judgment partly because they have not yet acquired all the knowledge and abilities of adults. In general, the community handles criminal acts committed by a teenager differently than if they were committed by an adult, and does not necessarily hold the behavior to be an expression of the teenager's character. Juvenile records are sealed in recognition of

the fact that persons may do things as teenagers that they would not do as adults.

The juvenile justice system also includes the concept of a status offense (i.e., an act or activity that is illegal only for a minor). Examples of status offenses include running away from home and truancy. The status of juvenile determines that these acts are illegal and punishable by incarceration. In contrast, nothing an adult does will count as truancy.

The standards that go with a status may be used in making judgments about how good a job a person is doing at filling the status. For example, if teenagers in our culture seem insensitive to sexual changes and concerns, they may be judged to be out of touch with some of the natural interests of teenagers and hence failing in that respect at being teenagers.

The standards that evolve in a community for a given status may be more or less appropriate. Standards themselves may be criticized as being inappropriate or out of touch. For example, some people in the psychoanalytic community believe that "a relatively strong id confronts a relatively weak ego" in adolescence, resulting in a great deal of storm and stress (Freud, 1966, p. 140). Because of this belief, they may incorrectly judge a teenager who does not experience emotional turmoil as doing a poor job of being a teenager.

Because the norms that go with a status guide our behavior, inappropriate norms may lead us to treat individuals in inappropriate ways. For example, a therapist operating in light of *sturm und drang* standards may fail to provide needed help to an adolescent in a pathological state, because the pain with which the adolescent participates is taken to be nothing more than what is "normal" for an adolescent (cf. Masterson, 1968; Rutter, Graham, Chadwick, & Yule, 1976; Weiner & Del Gaudio, 1976; Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1981).

Reasons

A person evaluates elements in the world in terms of what is significant to someone in his or her position. For example, a parent may see the latest punk hair style as offensive, but a teenager may see it as offering an opportunity for fun and self-expression. These evaluations of the hair style are examples of appraisals, that is, descriptions that carry tautological motivational significance (cf. Ossorio, 1990). In making an appraisal, a person discriminates a relationship that he has to some element in the real world (e.g., offensive to me, fun for me), and this discrimination gives him a reason to act. To appraise the hair cut as offensive *is* to have a reason for not getting one, and to appraise it as self-expressive *is* to have a reason for getting one.

The concepts of making an appraisal and having a reason are logically connected to the concept of having a status. To be in a status is to stand in certain relationships to others in a given community, and to be eligible to stand in certain relationships. The appraisal of these relationships on actual occasions gives an individual reasons to act. A person's reasons for acting are therefore an expression of his or her status (standing in relationship to some part or aspect of the real world).

Particular individuals may of course have reasons that normatively do not go with their statuses. For example, an 8-year-old girl might be worried about getting good grades so that she could get a scholarship and save her parents from having to pay for her college education. In this case, the status of child makes a crucial difference in how both her behavior and her reasons for that behavior are counted. Because hers are not the values and concerns that ordinarily go with being a child, we would wonder why she was acting on these sorts of values and reasons.

Perspectives

Depending on a person's position, he or she will look at the world differently and be sensitized to different facts. We expect the outlook of a child or adolescent to be different from that of an adult. In fact these differences in perspective may be a source of humor. For example, consider a cartoon in which two boys, one about 6 years old and the other about 8, are standing in front of a drug store window. After scrutinizing one of the displays, one boy says to the other, "But why would anybody *want* to feel 10 years younger?"

A person's perspective may shift when his or her status changes. Part of the shift in perspective that may come with being an adolescent involves seeing one's behavior not only in the context of the family but also in the context of the larger community. Adolescents generally enlarge the context within which they are operating to include more of the facts that constitute reasons for adult members of the community. Adolescents may also enlarge the temporal context within which they are operating and look at their present behavior more in light of the future. To the extent that their outlook on life expands in these ways, the significance of what they are doing will change.

Things will also take on a different significance for adolescents if they take the position that "It's *my* life." They will have a different sensitivity to opportunities and constraints if they are running the show. In contrast, children are generally not fully responsible for running their own lives. To some extent children do what they are supposed to do, and adults provide a good deal of direction for them. The outlook of a

child on what happens to him or her will therefore be different from that of an adolescent.

The shift in significance that comes with adolescence has been described as the "Big Leagues Effect" (P. G. Ossorio, personal communication, 1984). Instead of just playing little league ball, teenagers have graduated to the minors and are on their way to major league play. The game is more for real now instead of being merely play or merely practice. The decisions that the teenager makes and how he or she plays the game matter in a way that they did not before.

Because a certain level of competence may be required to see the world as a Big League player, persons may graduate to the status of adolescent but still maintain the outlook of a child. To the extent that persons are unable to make the necessary perspective shift when they change status, they will not be sensitive to facts that constitute reasons for other adolescents. In this case, they may be judged to be behind their peers (i.e., still operating as "Little League players") in light of the standards that go with the status of "adolescent."

Conceptual Coordinates

Some of the relationships between the concepts of status, standards, reasons, and perspectives have been delineated and illustrated above. Although the concepts have been illustrated with examples from teenagers in the United States in the 1990s, examples could have been drawn from any place or any point in time.

A conceptualization of this sort contrasts with traditional theories that state specific "truths" about adolescents, like "the major goal of adolescence is separation from the family." Wanting to be separate from family is just one possible reason that an adolescent may have, and one that may not carry that much weight with some adolescents (cf. McDermott, Robillard, Char, Hsu, Tseng, & Ashton, 1983). Rather than stating such truths about adolescents, the conceptualization provides a structure in which the range of facts and possible facts about adolescents can be distinguished.

Having this sort of conceptualization is like having a set of coordinates (cf. Ossorio, 1978b, pp. 171-173). These conceptual coordinates may be used to systematize possible variations as well as similarities among individuals, among sexes, among cultures, over time, and so forth, with respect to adolescence. The concepts presented thus far could therefore be used to systematize facts about the status of adolescence in its own right. But because adolescence is a transitional status leading to adulthood, our understanding of adolescence may be increased to the extent that we have a more complete understanding of what is involved in being an adult.

RATIONAL BEHAVIOR

If I am an archetypal adult human being, then I have the competence to consider, weigh, and understand behaviors from each of the hedonic, prudential, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives, and further, to do this generally without deliberation. (Ossorio, 1982a, Chap. 4)

Circumstances, Reasons, and Perspectives

The concept of a person's circumstances is a cover term for a range of facts that are relevant to a person's behavioral choices. For example, the fact that someone is a late adolescent, the fact that the members of his family have run a lucrative business for several generations, the fact that he is gifted as an artist but lacks aptitude for business, and the fact that his parents expect him to follow in his father's footsteps, might all be included in a young man's circumstances.

Circumstances include all the states of affairs that provide opportunities, limitations, and motivations for behavior (cf. Ossorio, 1982b, pp. 33-35). A person formulates these states of affairs as aspects or elements in his or her world.

This formulation of circumstances is not merely classificatory. Persons do not distinguish the elements of their worlds simply as something out there, totally unrelated to themselves. Such distinctions would not give people any basis on which to act. Persons also do not see the elements in their worlds merely in terms of how it would be appropriate for someone (else) to treat elements like that. Such distinctions would not provide reasons for behaving in one way rather than another. Instead persons primarily evaluate their circumstances with regard to their personal relevance.

The personal relevance or significance of an individual's circumstances lies in what they give the individual reason to do or not to do. In considering the set of facts presented above about an adolescent, one question that arises is "Given these circumstances, what will the young man do?" The significance that these facts have for the young man is of interest because it determines (logically, tautologically) some of the reasons he has and some of the behaviors he will engage in.

Persons' reasons may be classified in four general categories: Hedonic, prudential, ethical, and aesthetic (cf. Ossorio, 1978a, pp. 84-86). If a person sees a situation as offering him an opportunity for pleasure, this appraisal gives him a hedonic reason. If a person evaluates a situation as personally advantageous, this appraisal gives him a prudential reason. If he perceives that the circumstances require him to fulfill a duty, this

appraisal reflects an ethical reason. And if he recognizes that the situation calls for him to do the "done thing," this appraisal provides him with an aesthetic reason.

Each of these appraisals involves seeing the situation in a different light. We may therefore identify four perspectives that correspond to the four kinds of reasons. To operate from a hedonic perspective is to be sensitive to pleasurable possibilities; to operate from a prudential perspective is to look out for one's own interests; to operate from an ethical perspective is to see situations from the viewpoint of what is the right thing to do; and to operate from an aesthetic perspective is to be sensitive to what is artistically, socially or intellectually fitting.

Persons paradigmatically behave in light of all four perspectives simultaneously. Particular perspectives, however, may be more or less predominant with respect to what a person is doing on a given occasion. For example, a teenager may decide what concert to attend primarily in light of which music group he enjoys the most. In that situation, it is appropriate for his behavior to be responsive primarily to a hedonic point of view (although prudential, ethical, and/or aesthetic viewpoints may come into play as well). In contrast, if he decides what college to attend primarily in terms of where he can have the most fun, the choice would probably be ill-advised. In that situation, it is not generally appropriate to give that kind of priority to the hedonic perspective.

In situations where two or more perspectives are relevant to a significant degree, motivational conflict is possible. For example, the young man who is under pressure from his parents to enter the family business may appraise that he has an obligation as their son to do so. But he may also recognize that it is not in his best interests to pursue a career for which he lacks aptitude. In this case, he may be in conflict over what he has reason to do from an ethical point of view and what he has reason to do in light of prudential considerations.

Conflict is possible not only between perspectives, but also within each of the perspectives. For example, if the young man appraises that he would do well financially as the boss's son in the family business, he has a prudential reason to take advantage of this opportunity. This reason conflicts with the other prudential reason noted above: The young man knows that he is not good as a businessman, but he could probably be successful as an artist.

A person's total set of relevant circumstances and corresponding reasons operates as a set of logical constraints on what the person does in a particular situation. Ideally the behavior that the person enacts is responsive to this entire set of circumstances and reasons, in the way that the solution to a set of simultaneous equations fits the requirements of all the equations (cf. Ossorio, 1977, p. 140).

Of course, an ideal solution of this sort is rarely (if ever) possible, because a person has reasons both for and against a given behavior. When there is no behavior that satisfies all of an individual's reasons simultaneously, the person may give up some of the reasons that are less important to him or her and act in light of the reasons that carry more weight. A person's behavior is therefore responsive not only to *what* reasons he or she has, but also to the relative weights that these reasons carry with the person in the particular situation.

The relative weights assigned to various reasons will reflect both a person's status and his or her personal characteristics. For example, what carries weight with an adolescent will be different from what is important to an adult. And what is significant to one adolescent may not matter to another, depending on each adolescent's unique set of personal characteristics and circumstances.

Nothing in the preceding discussion should be taken to mean that a person lays out reasons, reflects on values, and thinks things over before acting. The concept of rational behavior in no way involves requirements of this sort. Persons paradigmatically appraise what the situation calls for and behave spontaneously, without deliberating about what to do. Of course if a person is stuck when it comes to making a particular decision, or the decision is of unusual difficulty or importance, a person may think things over. These qualifying conditions, however, reflect the fact that such deliberation normally is not necessary, and spontaneous rational behavior is the rule.

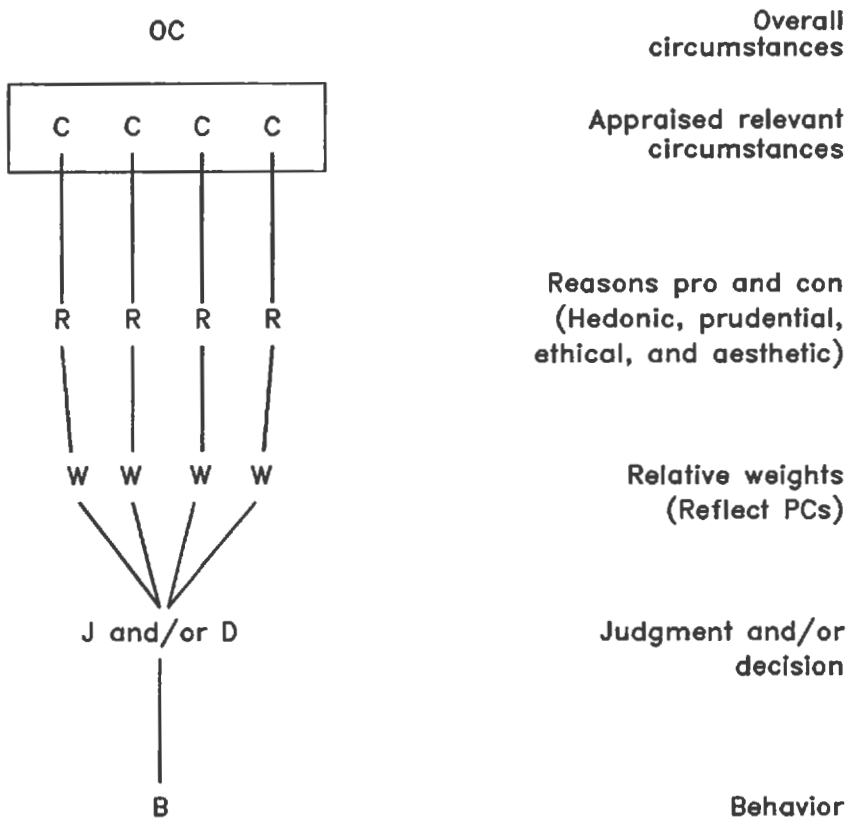
The Judgment Diagram

The concept of an adult paradigmatically acting in light of his or her total set of relevant circumstances and total set of (usually conflicting) reasons is represented in the Judgment Diagram (Figure 1). This conceptual-notational device presents the interrelationships between the concepts of circumstances, reasons, perspectives, and weights in a canonical form.

It may be used as a guide to criticize what was done or what was not done in a given situation (cf. Ossorio, 1978a, p. 90). In light of the Judgment Diagram, we may criticize an adult's behavior because:

1. He or she left out circumstances or facts that were relevant (i.e., that would have given the person reason to do something else).
2. He or she included circumstances or facts that were irrelevant.
3. He or she gave too much or too little weight to the reasons that were relevant.

Figure 1. The Judgment Diagram



The Judgment Diagram may also be used in analyzing the behavior of persons who are not yet fully competent at making rational decisions, for example, children and adolescents. We can reconstruct the decision that an adult would make in a given situation, and then compare a child's decision or an adolescent's decision in the same situation to see what kinds of facts the young person brings in or leaves out, and what weights he or she gives to different reasons.

For example, consider a situation in which a man is late for an appointment because he took the long way around to avoid a threatening crowd. The man did do something wrong, and the fact that he did it for good reason does not mitigate the fact that it was wrong. But most adults would judge that he did the *right* thing given the situation.

The situation called for him to give due weight to prudential reasons as well as ethical ones.

In contrast, elementary school children would be likely to judge that the man did the wrong thing. School children would tend to leave out the fact of the threatening crowd and give too much weight to the fact that being late is wrong. Piaget (1932) calls this "moral realism" and theorizes that children at the stage of moral realism take rules as absolute.

Piaget's notion that children take rules as absolute has a parallel in the Judgment Diagram: When a person is dealing with reasons, the reasons *are* absolute. But as the Diagram also illustrates, behaviors are situational. It is not possible to judge that a particular behavioral choice is the right or wrong one to make independently of the context in which it occurs.

Domains and Relevant Reasons

In the Judgment Diagram there is an "OC" indicating a person's overall set of circumstances, and a box of "C's" denoting those circumstances that a person appraises as relevant to what he or she is doing. This notation reflects the fact that not all of a person's circumstances will be relevant to every behavioral choice.

When persons evaluate their circumstances with regard to their significance for their behavior, they are operating within some domain. Consider, for example, a teenager playing baseball. Some of the circumstances within the domain of baseball that are relevant to the teenager's behavior include the fact that he's pitched the whole game and he's tiring; the fact that it's the middle of the ninth; the fact that the game is tied; and the fact that the batter up is a power hitter but a slow runner. Given these facts the teenager might decide to walk the batter deliberately.

There are some additional circumstances outside the domain of baseball that may be significant for the teenager's choice, however. These include the facts that the batter treated his date poorly last Saturday night, and the date was the pitcher's sister. Given these facts the teenager might decide to do his utmost to strike the batter out.

If the teenager tries to strike the batter out, his teammates may be angry that he has overlooked an important fact in the context of the game. ("Doesn't he know how good a hitter that guy is?") Or they may be angry that he has brought in facts from his personal life that are irrelevant to the game itself. ("What's he trying to do? Sacrifice the game for his kid sister?")

In order to be able to function competently in a given context (whether it be a family, a peer group, a personal relationship, a

profession, or other group), persons need to have the sensitivity to pick out those facts that are relevant to what they are doing within that domain, and that are relevant to the status from which they are operating. They also need to be able to restrict themselves to acting only on the facts that *are* relevant, without regard for any of the other reasons they might have.

In general the relevant facts and corresponding reasons will distribute across the hedonic, prudential, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives. Managing one's behavior in a given domain therefore calls for a person to be operating with the four perspectives discussed above.

Although the focus in this section has been on persons operating in limited domains and restricting the reasons they act on, there is obviously no limit to the range of facts that could be relevant to a person's behavior. The OC in the Judgment Diagram may include, if only schematically, the whole world and its past and future history in the case of a person "operating under the aspect of eternity." In fact persons may be criticized for operating only within limited contexts, that is, for not including a wide enough range of facts in their behavioral choices, with a corresponding lack of meaningfulness or effectiveness in their lives.

Competence, Character, and Discipline

Choosing wisely among behaviors on the basis of the four perspectives is an expression of a person's competence. Persons have to acquire the ability to use the four perspectives in making appraisals in the way that they have to acquire any other competence. (See Holt [1980, 1990] for a paradigm case formulation of what is involved in mastering the ethical perspective.)

To the extent that a person has mastered a given perspective, the person will routinely be able to recognize what a situation calls for in light of that perspective and act accordingly. (Cf. To the extent that a person has mastered the fundamentals of music, the person will routinely be able to hear what a song calls for in terms of melody, volume, and tempo, and respond accordingly.)

Mastery of the perspectives also involves being able to operate with all the perspectives simultaneously. Sometimes people have a grasp of each of the perspectives independently, but are unable to choose wisely within the full complexity of a situation. (Cf. A person may have a grasp of melody, volume, and tempo, but be unable to sing his or her own part in the presence of harmonious and/or dissonant voices.)

In addition to becoming competent in use of the perspectives, persons also normatively have to acquire other personal characteristics such that they are inclined to give appropriate weight to the reasons revealed by

each of the perspectives. The weights that are appropriate will depend in part on the domain (community) a person is operating within, and the person's status within that domain.

To the extent that a person possesses only those characteristics that are normative for an individual in a given status, his or her behavior will reflect precisely the weights that the particular set of reasons would carry for a person in that status. Such a person may be characterized as one of the Standard Normal Persons for that community (cf. Ossorio, 1983, pp. 27-28). For example, a "typical teenager" merely does what the situation calls for a teenager to do, and his or her behavior is responsive to the relative weights that a particular set of circumstances and reasons would carry for a teenager.

Of course persons also acquire differentiating characteristics. The weights that a person gives to the various reasons for and against a given behavior reflect some of his or her characteristics as an individual, as well as characteristics that are merely social (e.g., characteristics of a typical teenager in our society). Because the differential weights that an individual gives to a particular set of reasons reflect in part the individual's unique characteristics, behavior is an expression of a person's character as well as an expression of the person's status.

Persons may acquire some of their personality characteristics, including their competence in the use of the perspectives, through participation in the social practice of discipline. When a child or teenager makes a bad choice, parents may discipline the young person so that next time he or she can make a better choice.

The social practice of discipline may include describing the behavior as the wrong thing to do, correcting the child, providing a warning of possible consequences, and punishing the child. Options within each of these stages are presented in Figure 2. (See Kantor [1973] for a discussion of the social practice of discipline, and Kantor [1977] for a discussion of pathogenic forms of discipline.)

As an example, consider how a mother might discipline her teenage daughter who has recently become sexually active. Her daughter sees sex simply as pleasurable, and that appraisal gives her a reason to engage in it. But her mother is sensitive to the danger of her having an unwanted pregnancy. She may therefore correct her daughter's appraisal of sex as simply pleasurable and warn her about the risk of getting pregnant. She may give her new concepts (e.g., conception, fertile period) and new skills (e.g., "Have the boy use a condom" or "Let's get you on the pill") so that next time her daughter can act in light of the risk of pregnancy as well as the pleasure of sex.

Figure 2.
Stages in the Social Practice of Discipline

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1. APPRAISAL of the action as wrongdoing
Response to that appraisal
 2. CORRECTION of the wrongdoing
Options: a. Lay down the law
b. Remind and advise
 - (1) Teach proper distinctions
 - (2) Teach proper skills
 - (3) Remind/advise of the relevant reasons for choosing and/or the proper weighing of his reasons
 c. Other
Response to that correction
 3. WARNING of the consequences of certain actions
Options: a. P1 says that *he* will bring the consequences upon P2.
b. P1 says that the situation will have consequences for P2.
c. Other
Response to that warning
 4. PUNISHMENT for wrongdoing
Options: a. Retribution
b. Deterrence
c. Rehabilitation
d. Degradation Ceremony
e. Other
Response to that punishment
-

Abbreviated from Kantor (1973), *The social practice of discipline*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Disciplinarians may also allow the person being disciplined to justify his or her behavior. The young person may tell the parents what the situation *really* was; he or she may add some facts that change the picture. ("I know it's wrong to be late, but I gave my friend who was too drunk to drive a ride home.") The young person may also negotiate about the weights that should be attached to a particular reason. ("I know it counted that way when you were young, Mom, but it's just *not* that big of a deal today.") Discipline of this sort may result in an increase in a person's rational competence so that the person is empowered to make better appraisals and decisions in the future.

Of course when a child or teenager makes a bad choice, a parent may in essence take the position that the behavior is not to be excused or explained away by reference to inadequate concepts and skills, overlooked facts, or misweighed reasons. Instead the behavior is taken to be an act carried out by a particular sort of person (cf. Ossorio,

1978b, p. 48). In this case the disciplinarian criticizes the young person's character rather than his or her competence.

In the example of the teenage girl who has recently become sexually active, her mother may respond to her with punishing character appraisals like "You whore" or "You slut." Discipline of this sort does not contribute to a person's rational competence, although it may give a person reasons to behave differently in the future.

Paradigm Case Formulation

In Descriptive Psychology "paradigmatically" is a standard marker which indicates that what is being presented is to be understood as a Paradigm Case in a paradigm case formulation (cf. Ossorio, 1981, p. 94). This marker has been used in several places in this section. Examples include "an adult paradigmatically acts in light of his or her total set of relevant circumstances and total set of reasons," and "persons paradigmatically appraise what the situation calls for and behave spontaneously, without deliberating about what to do." Accordingly, these descriptions are to be understood as identifying a Paradigm Case of rational behavior.

Several transformations of the Paradigm Case have been mentioned. For example, persons may not act in light of their total set of relevant circumstances because they have not yet acquired the competence to manage the complexity of the whole set; because the situation calls for them to restrict themselves to only those reasons that are relevant in a limited domain; or because they have overlooked some significant facts.

Other transformations could be formally introduced, but this will not be done because the Paradigm Case is sufficient for the task at hand, that is, to understand the end point towards which the adolescent is developing. A person develops from being a very limited individual (i.e., a child), in need of help from others to make appropriate choices, into a competent adult, capable of making his or her own appraisals and decisions. The Paradigm Case of rational behavior presented in this section enables us to be clear about the abilities and values an adolescent needs to acquire in order to be rationally competent as an adult.

STATUS CHANGE

Much of human . . . interaction can be understood adequately as maintaining particular statuses or as presenting, rejecting, or adjudicating claims to particular statuses. (Ossorio, 1978b, p. 150)

Competence and Status

The end point towards which the adolescent is developing involves more than just the possession of rational competence; it also involves the possession of a particular status. Although the possession of a status tends to go hand in hand with the possession of the competence necessary to enact that status, this is not necessarily the case.

Persons may be elevated to a status that they in fact lack the ability to discharge (e.g., the adolescent who is left in charge of the shop by an alcoholic boss). Persons may promote themselves to a status for which they do not yet have the relevant practice and experience (e.g., the 13-year-old who hasn't been behind the wheel of a car before, but who decides to take the family car for a ride around the block).

Persons may be competent, but others may refuse to grant them a status commensurate with that competence (e.g., the adolescent whose parents do not treat him as capable of making his own decisions). And persons may be competent, but fail to assign themselves a status that reflects their actual abilities (e.g., the teenager who does well academically but is surprised at what a "dumb kid" can do).

Adolescents need to acquire both the competence *and* the status of adults. An understanding of the dynamics of status acquisition and status change is therefore essential for an understanding of adolescence.

Status Assignment

Statuses within a given community are created, assigned, and accepted by persons. When a person is offered a new status, elements of both accreditation and degradation are generally involved (cf. Ossorio, 1978b, p. 145). The accreditation element of a status assignment involves an increase in status, that is, an increase in behavior potential. Symmetrically the degradation element involves loss of status, that is, loss of eligibilities to participate in the community in various ways.

Both accreditation and degradation are involved, for example, when a person is offered the status of "adult" by the other members of his or her community. The person becomes eligible to participate in new ways in the community (e.g., to vote, to hold an elected office), but the person also loses the eligibility for special allowances generally granted to teenagers (e.g., to have criminal acts handled by the juvenile justice system).

When a new status is assigned to a person, he or she will be treated accordingly. If the appropriate behavioral follow-through is missing, that calls for an explanation ("If you know I'm an adult, why do you keep treating me like a kid?"). The person will also be judged by the

standards that go with his or her new status ("If you want to be treated like an adult, then you'll have to be accountable like one.").

Acceptance and Negotiation of Statuses

When a person is assigned a status within a given domain or community, that opens up a range of behavioral options. In general, actualizing these possibilities depends upon a person accepting the status to which he or she has been assigned. (Cf. Once players have decided who's going to be the pitcher, who's going to be first baseman, and so forth, they're ready to play the game. But if the designated pitcher refuses to be the pitcher, the players can't play ball yet.)

Moreover, if persons accept statuses that are unsuitable or inappropriate for them, it is unlikely that the available options will be realized with normative success and satisfaction. Persons who are miscast are unlikely to be able to discharge their statuses well, and/or they are unlikely to find personal satisfaction in the enactment. (Cf. If the first baseman can't catch the ball, the game won't go well and everybody may end up frustrated.)

When questions arise about whether or not a status is appropriate or right for a given individual, persons may resolve these questions via negotiation. Negotiation is for the sake of making a good decision or a fitting status assignment (cf. Ossorio, 1978a, p. 118).

Negotiation paradigmatically takes place between persons who are rationally competent, i.e., between persons who are able to judge whether a decision is correct or whether a status is appropriate. In other words, negotiation paradigmatically takes place between adults. In an adult-adult relationship, there is a basic symmetry in that each person is equally eligible to assign, accept, reject, and negotiate statuses (cf. Roberts, 1985).

In contrast, there is an asymmetry in an adult-child relationship. Because of their dependence on adults, children to some extent have to accept whatever places adults accord them; they are not generally eligible to reject these places. Moreover, children are subject to discipline by adults for their status assignments.

Parents of course may allow a child to take a stand, justify his or her status assignments, defend them against criticism, make revisions independently, and so forth during the social practice of discipline. Children who are allowed to participate in discipline in these ways are being given the eligibility to assign, reject, and negotiate statuses. During discipline, however, if a child cannot see where an appraisal is incorrect, a judgment is bad, a choice is wrong, or a status assignment is not fitting, parents need to follow through with corrections, warnings,

and/or punishment to help the child acquire the perspective and judgment that the child lacks.

To the extent that parents do a good job of disciplining and educating their children, children will learn as much as it is reasonable to expect them to learn given their limitations. Often children will get to be as good as or better than their parents at making decisions and assigning statuses. (Cf. To the extent that a music teacher does a good job, his or her students develop musically until they are able to play as well as or better than the teacher.) The closer persons come to being equals to their parents in rational competence, the more they are likely to resent being treated as children (i.e., persons in need of discipline), and the more they may claim the status of adults (i.e., fellow negotiators).

When negotiation between adults ends in disagreement, adults respect the fact that a fellow adult may see the same situation differently, given who he or she is. Adults will account for their differences using personality descriptions, and they will not (normatively) try to lay down the law, warn, or punish each other over their different points of view. It is *this* treatment, and *this* status, that teenagers seek to obtain from their parents.

Unfortunately there may be an awkward period of time in which a teenager feels that he or she is eligible for the status of adult, but parents are unwilling to bestow it (sometimes because of doubts about the teenager's competence). Eventually, however, parents relinquish the status of disciplinarian and graduate their teenagers to adult status.

Acting as a Representative

Teenagers have opportunities to acquire status in a variety of groups other than their families, and they may begin to act as members or representatives of these other groups. For example, a teenage girl may try out being an attractive young woman. Insofar as she can, she spots opportunities to wear makeup, to flirt with boys, to go to dances, and so forth. She may begin to respond to the circumstances relevant to an attractive young woman in whatever ways she can.

The teenager may also start going out on job interviews. She may try to put herself in the frame of mind of a member of the work force, and begin to perceive things the way that a person with a job would. She may begin to act on the reasons that an employed person would have insofar as she can detect them.

In each case, the teenager tries out a new position in the community and begins to see the world from that perspective. Each new position that a teenager tries out offers a new set of relationships and possible relationships, for example, possible boss, possible boyfriend (cf. Ossorio, 1982b, p. 85). These relationships provide the teenager with new

reasons, reasons that go with being in each position and with being a member of the corresponding group.

In order for an adolescent to take advantage of the opportunities to be a member of a variety of groups, a certain level of rational competence may be required. The opportunities available generally require that a teenager be able to appraise and act on his or her relations and possible relations in new situations without parental guidance.

In addition, in order for an adolescent to increase his or her behavior potential beyond the family group, the person must be able to self-assign statuses. If a teenager does not self-assign the status in question (and hence is not *being* a sexually attractive person, a member of the work force, or whatever), the teenager's behavior will not be an authentic expression of the status.

In acting as a member of a given group, the teenager acts on those reasons that carry weight with a member of that group, without regard for any of the other reasons that he or she might have (cf. Ossorio, 1983, p. 36). For example, if a teenage girl is going out on a date and her mother says "Wear your boots," that is irrelevant to the girl in what she is doing. She may have that reason as a member of her family group, but as an attractive young woman, she rejects that reason. Likewise, if she is scheduled to work and her friends say "Don't miss the party tonight," that is irrelevant to what she's doing as a worker. She may have that reason as a member of her peer group, but as a member of the work force, she rejects that reason.

By exercising their status in each of the groups of which they are members, teenagers paradigmatically are acquiring both the competence and the personal characteristics that they will need as adult members of their communities. To the extent that they are successful, they learn to perceive and appraise circumstances in terms of the values and concerns that go with being a member of each group, and they learn to restrict themselves to the reasons that are relevant to a group member. Moreover, they learn to do it without thinking, so that it comes naturally.

Sometimes teenagers may self-assign a status but lack opportunities to enact that status. For example, a teenage girl may self-assign the status "attractive young woman," but her parents may restrict her opportunities to try out behaviors expressive of that status. Likewise a teenager may self-assign the status "member of the work force," but a lack of entry level jobs in his community may limit his opportunities to actualize that status.

Even in the absence of opportunities to actualize a status, a teenager may *be* an attractive young woman, a member of the work force, and so forth "on the inside." Teenagers may have enough of what it takes to

be members of these groups so that they can be described as “unemployed attractive young women” or “unemployed members of the work force” (cf. Ossorio, 1976, p. 149). The notion of “unemployed” serves as a reminder that all the teenager lacks is the job.

If the limitations on the teenager’s opportunities are due primarily to coercive parents, the notion of “jailed peer group member” or “jailed attractive young woman” may be more apt than “unemployed” (P.G. Ossorio, personal communication, 1984). A teenager may outwardly conform to parental rules but inwardly affirm peer group values, thereby being a member of the peer group who’s in jail. The notion of “jailed” serves as a reminder that as soon as the teenager gets out of confinement, he or she will act in accordance with the values and concerns that go with being a peer group member.

Conflict

Given the variety of groups of which the adolescent is a member (e.g., the family, the peer group, the school, religious institutions, and the wider society), the teenager may be faced with conflicting reasons for acting. For instance, a teenager from a fundamentalist Christian home may find that acting as a member of most of the peer groups available at public school involves acting on reasons contrary to his or her values as a Christian and as a family member. The teenager may be in conflict because of the incompatible values of family and peer groups (cf. Ossorio, 1983, p. 36).

The question may arise as to *which* group a teenager is most likely to act as a member of when there is conflict between groups. A set of principles is presented in Figure 3 in order to answer this question. In accordance with these principles, a teenager will act as a representative of the groups where he or she has the greatest behavior potential.

For example, in a family where there is mutual trust, respect, support, and affection, a teenager probably has a lot of status. Therefore the teenager will tend to act as a member in good standing of his or her family when its values conflict with other groups. In contrast, in a family characterized by mutual distrust and degradation, a teenager probably does not have a lot of status. If the teenager from the pathological family has status with a gang, he or she will tend of act as a representative of the gang (and may be described as “rebellious against the family”).

Groups have relationships to each other. The family group itself has a status within the larger community; a gang has a status within the city; and so forth. Because of these interrelationships, teenagers may generate some interesting conflict combinations through their varied group memberships.

Figure 3.
Acting as a Representative

1. A person's behavior constitutes the exercise of his status within one or more of the groups of which he is a member.
 2. A person will act as a member or as a representative of one or more of the groups of which he is a member.
 3. A person exercises his status when he acts as a member or as a representative of a group.
 4. The amount of status that a person exercises when he acts as a member or representative of a group depends on the behavior potential that goes with his status within that group.
 5. The better the behavior potential that goes with a person's status within a given group, the more status he is exercising when he acts as a member or a representative of that group.
 6. A person will not choose to actualize less behavior potential rather than more.
 7. A person is most likely to act as a member or as a representative of that group within which he has the most status to exercise.
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Prepared from notes on a seminar given by Peter G. Ossorio at the Linguistic Research Institute, March 26, 1981.

For example, if the family has high status within the community, then a teenager has high status in the community just by virtue of belonging to that family. If the teenager does not get much accreditation within the family, he still has the rest of society to be member of and may exercise whatever status he has that way. In this case, he may turn against the family but still operate as a member in good standing of the general community (e.g., the son of a successful, controlling politician who joins the Peace Corps instead of going to law school as his father planned for him). By contrast, if a family has low status within the community but accredits a teenager highly, that teenager is likely to be with the family against society.

Notice that higher social status in the community is not the same as more status (cf. Ossorio, 1976, p. 31). A person may be higher up on the social ladder but have less status than someone lower on the social ladder. In the example above, the "rich kid" may have less behavior potential than the "kid from the wrong side of the tracks."

More status is also not a matter of a greater number or a greater range of behaviors (cf. Ossorio, 1976, p. 36). A teenager may have a relatively limited set of possibilities within a given group, but if he or she values these possibilities highly, the teenager has a lot of behavior potential within that group. Conversely, if a teenager has a wide range

of possibilities of little value to him or her within a given group, the teenager does not have much behavior potential there.

Because the amount of status a teenager has in a given group reflects not only which behaviors the teenager is eligible for, but also how much value these behaviors have to him or her, predicting which group an adolescent is most likely to act as a representative of is not merely a matter of listing and counting behaviors. An observer needs to evaluate how much value these behaviors have to the adolescent.

Part of the value of a set of behaviors lies in providing access to further behaviors. (Cf. "In general, the value of preserving or creating some possibilities for further behavior takes decisive priority over the value of achieving any particular actualities." [Ossorio, 1982b, p. 57]) An observer needs to take into account both present actualities and future possibilities in assessing the value of a given set of behaviors to a teenager.

Because an observer's judgment about which group an adolescent has the most behavior potential within may be wrong, empirical predictions based on the principles in Figure 3 may also be wrong. The value of the principles, however, does not lie primarily in making empirical predictions. Instead the principles enable us to understand and make sense of some of the teenager's conflicts, choices, and behavior during a time of status change.

IDENTITY

Erikson may have burdened us with misleading expectations of inevitable identity crises, but would anyone today consider discussing adolescent development without a central focus on the process of identity formation? (Weiner, 1985, p. 201)

Not only is "the process of identity formation" not a central focus of the preceding discussion of adolescent development; it is not even mentioned. However, because of the ubiquity of the notion of "identity" in discussions of adolescent development, some clarification as to why it is not mentioned here among fundamental concepts for understanding adolescence seems appropriate.

Developmental Tasks and Failures

A fundamental task for a developmental theory is understanding the phenomenon of infants becoming adults. A common way of approaching the task is to start with adults and then ask "How can a person fail to become a normal adult?" By taking the major ways people fail in becoming adults, a developmental framework can be generated in which avoidance of each of these failures is a developmental task. Erikson's

(1963) psychoanalytic formulation of eight stages, each with its own crisis, is of this sort.

Logically this approach is not wrong. However, the original selection of the ways of going wrong is more or less arbitrary. The ways of failing are culturally and historically relative. If psychologists try to universalize any particular set of ways people fail, they come across societies and time periods in which the framework is beside the point, because there is little risk of going wrong in the specified way.

The Elkin and Westley (1955) study is classic in this regard. Studying a suburban, well-to-do community in Montreal, they found that adolescents had no serious problems in terms of occupational choices or emancipation from authority figures. A number of other researchers in the 1960's and early 1970's reported similar results (see Petersen, 1988, for a review). In spite of Erikson's theory that a "normative crisis" was a *sine qua non* of healthy development, evidence from these studies indicated that "the great majority of adolescents in the general population experience no such identity crisis" (Coleman, 1978, p. 6).

Anthropological studies have shown that in other cultures as well, establishing one's individual identity is simply not an issue. For example, in Japan it is a given that we are born individuals, and the task of socialization is to draw us into interdependent relationships with others (Rohlen, 1976). Nonetheless, psychologists are reluctant to give up the notion of the "forming one's individual identity" in discussing adolescence in such cultures (cf. Mussen, Conger, & Kagan, 1979, p. 495). If we insist on understanding adolescents in terms of a failure that is not culturally relevant, we will not understand very many adolescents.

Identity as a Double Negative

Although identity problems certainly are not universal, in our culture people do talk about having "identity problems," and tend to think of an "identity" as something that gives a person unity over time. If a person doesn't "have one," the person is fragmented and inconsistent, and has to "acquire one" to be whole.

But can an identity be acquired? To acquire anything, a person already has to have an identity. Otherwise who is there to acquire it? Moreover, is an identity something people have? Is there some entity called "identity?" Obviously not. The term doesn't refer to anything, because there are no such things.

Then what is all the talk about? Identity is a Critic's notion, and has to do with the kind of consistency that a way of life and culture require of a person. A person has identity problems when he or she does not have the required consistency. The primary concept is identity problems, not identity.

For example, if an 8-year-old says "I'm going to be an astronaut", and the next week says "I'm going to be a policeman", nothing is wrong. We don't expect follow through to be there, because children are not in fact consistent enough. But if an 18-year-old shows too much of that, we say that "This teenager's too changeable. He doesn't know his own mind." If a teenager can't hold down a job, has a different love every week, and even his or her passions for music groups don't stay the same, we may say that person is "not all there," or more psychologically, "he has identity problems."

Identity problems reflect difficulties or failures in making long-term commitments. Identity problems can be subdivided into vocational problems, relational problems, avocational problems, and so forth. In each of these areas, some stability over time is expected.

If we say a person has a "normal identity", we are using a double negative ("not inconsistent") to say that the person has no serious identity problems. In other words, a person with a normal identity shows the required consistency in his or her way of life. From this point of view, it is easy to see that the notion of identity is not fundamental, and hence is not included among fundamental concepts in discussing development.

Moreover, in Descriptive Psychology, the concept of a person is available. A person is "an individual whose history is, paradigmatically, a history of deliberate action" (Ossorio, 1978a). Inherent in the notion of a life history is the notion of consistency over time. Therefore, nothing transcendental like "identity" needs to be "formed" in order to unify the fragments. Using the Person Concept, identity becomes redundant in most of its traditional uses.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to provide a coherent conceptualization of adolescence, one that has a place for all the facts and possible facts about adolescents. In order to achieve this aim, the concepts of status, rational behavior, and status change were presented.

In light of these concepts, adolescence may be described in terms of the development of adult competence. A person paradigmatically develops from being a very limited individual (i.e., a child), in need of help from others to make appropriate choices, into a competent adult, capable of making effective discriminations, evaluations, and decisions on his or her own. Adolescence may also be described as a time of status change. A person develops from a child whose primary status is in the family into an adult who can take his or her place in society.

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