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## Adolescence: Self-Image & Self-Esteem

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# Adolescence: Self-Image & Self-Esteem

## Adolescence and Self-Esteem: Major Issue Nowadays

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the path that connects childhood with adulthood. It is a period of ecstasy & stress, happiness and problems, exploration & mental stress. From a sociological point of view, adolescence is a phenomenon that is distinguished by the difference in terms of universality & homogeneity of its characteristics.

Developmental psychology has endowed modern man with the entrenched belief that at different age levels people understand and represent the world differently (Dimitriou, 1996). Consequently themselves, since the image of the individual for himself and the world is formed and influenced by the involvement of the individual in relationships with other individuals, within various social groups, and in relation to the ecological and social context within which lives.

The difference between the way of thinking and the sense of self between childhood and adolescence, considering that the changes that occur in the cognitive development of the individual are proportional to the changes that occur in the development of the sense of self and, therefore, the way children perceive themselves becomes more and more complex as they grow up (Nova - Kaltsouni, 2008) and their social references increase.

Adolescence is a general term that refers to all the physical and mental changes that take place in the time period between a child and an adult.

During adolescence, where the transition from the world of the child takes place, with carelessness and complete dependence, in the world of the adult, with

responsibility and complete independence, it is obvious that social demands increase dramatically.

Adolescence is considered to be one of the 'critical developmental transition periods', as significant changes occur in both the individual and his environment (Petersen & Hamburg, 1986; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Specifically, changes occur at the biological, cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional levels (Gemelli, 1996; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; ARA, 2002).

The teenager today is called in a highly competitive society, to face the enormous burden that accompanies social pressures & projected social patterns, making it difficult in his attempt to resolve the conflicts between his real, social & imaginary self.

### II. DEVELOPMENT - DEVELOPMENT GOALS & ADAPTATION

Adolescence is one of the most important stages of human development: The size, shape and functions of the body determine the biological changes of man that begin at the end of the first decade of life.

Rousseau, in Emile's treatise on human nature and education, suggests three characteristics of adolescence:

- ★ Adolescence is a period of increased instability and emotional conflict caused by biological maturation..
- ★ The biological and social changes that prevail in adolescence are accompanied by fundamental changes in psychological processes. Conscious thinking and logical reasoning are activated.
- ★ These changes during adolescence are a kind of rebirth. Thus, adolescence summarizes, repeating in a coherent form, the previous stages that a child has gone through.

According to Freud and Erikson, adolescence is the time when all previous developmental crises are summarized and resolved to form an adult identity. Failure to resolve previous seizures during adolescence leads to neurotic personality in adulthood.

Adolescence is a period during which the young person needs to manage a variety of important developmental changes.

These changes affect many areas, and are often referred to as the 'developmental tasks' of adolescence (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Christie &

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Viner, 2005; Chown et al., 2008): biological changes, cognitive, emotional, behavioral & social changes.

One of the most important developmental goals in adolescence is the formation of a complete and stable identity, ie a sense of self that is a mature and unique person, and that can create closer and more meaningful relationships (Gemelli, 1996; Martin, 1999; Cobb, 2010).

This process presupposes the synthesis of individual identities (sexual, ethnic, etc.) and the renegotiation of relationships and data so far (Tucker, 1999; Cobb, 2010).

Identity formation influences the way a young person perceives (self-perception) and evaluates (self-esteem) himself (Bolognini et al., 1996; APA, 2002).

The way a teenager perceives himself is related to his behavior, feelings, values, goals & ambitions.

Adolescence is associated with the existence of many emotions, which are experienced intensely and alternate at a fast pace. However, although negative emotions are more common in adolescence than in other periods, they do not outweigh positive emotions (Hauser & Smith, 1991; Nielsen, 1996; Arnett, 1999; Spear, 2000).

Adolescents 'emotional development is about increased understanding of others' feelings, more empathy, a greater willingness to cooperate, and a greater ability to recognize and manage their own emotions (Gemelli, 1996; Martin, 1999; APA, 2002).

### III. THE ADOLESCENT'S SELF, SELF-PERCEPTION & SELF-ESTEEM

During adolescence, the adolescent thinks a lot about what a person is and what can be done. He may just daydream and then think seriously about his future career.

Initially in adolescence the adolescent may set professional goals that are ideal or unrealistic in relation to his or her given talents and abilities. Later in adolescence your teen can set more practical goals by choosing careers that best suit his or her abilities and interests.

Mixing ideal thoughts with practical plans is another part of the maturation process.

An important aspect of personality is the view of the individual, the adolescent about himself, his abilities & his characteristics.

The concept of self is a complex conceptual construction that includes cognitive, emotional & behavioral aspects. It is generally accepted that two basic components of the concept of self are self-perception & self-esteem (Makri - Mpotsari, E. (2001).

Self-esteem differs from self-perception, although both are basic components of the concept of self, as the former represents its emotional side, while

the latter the cognitive, ie the belief that a person has about himself (Makri-Botsari, 2008).

Self-perception is the cognitive side of the concept of self & represents a statement, description or belief of the individual about himself. Self-esteem represents the emotional side and refers to the global view that one has of one's value as an individual (Makri - Mpotsari, E. (2001).

During childhood the individual distinguishes several areas of self-perception, "such as school ability, social acceptance, physical appearance, athletic ability, behavior-behavior, emotional- transgender relationships and relationships with parents" (Makri-Botsari, 2002: 23). Adolescence is characterized by the addition of several, overlapping but not the same (Harter, 1990), categories of self-descriptions. In adolescence the individual will add another dimension to the categories of self-description, transforming specific biological, behavioral or social characteristics into comprehensive abstract concepts.

This is the result of the progressive socialization of the adolescent, who activates multiple selves, often opposites, to reconcile competing social demands: "this process of compromise requires a level of systematic thinking that goes beyond the capabilities of younger children" (Cole & Cole, 2002a: 98).

Identity formation is related either to the independent conception of oneself as an autonomous individual, or to the interdependent conception of oneself as directly related to others and a slightly differentiated individual (Marcia, 1966).

According to the model of Erickson (1968) the adolescent is called to form his identity on the basis of a reworking of the previous - age - developmental crises, in order to successfully face the challenges of adolescence.

Erickson believed that the process of identity formation involves the integration of more than one individual personality; therefore, to create a secure sense of self the individual must clarify his/her identities in both the individual and the social sphere. To identify the mental processes required to construct identity, he constructed a correlation with Piaget's cognitive descriptions, suggesting a correlation between Piaget's theory of mental development and Erickson's theory of personality development (Cole & Cole, 2002b).



#### IV. SELF-MANAGEMENT & SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

The process of identity formation requires the consolidation and unification of social roles and not only characteristics of the self, which is why the importance of others and the family is crucial in this direction (Makri - Mpotsari, 2002).

According to Bowlby (1989) theory of attachment, children will form relationships based on their interaction with different forms of attachment (eg secure attachment leads to personalization and acquired identity, while insecure attachment leads to donor identity). Therefore, the quality of intra- family relationships affects the relationships that children and adolescents form with 'significant others'.

Adolescents show an increased tendency for autonomy and independence from parents. Parents, again, from childhood have adopted practices of indirect control, through persuasions, advice, so that in adolescence they are withdrawn and folded so that the personality of the adolescent can emerge (Kourkoutas, 2001).

Individuals form many sub-identities in different areas of their lives. Two areas are:

- The ideological field: includes profession, religion, politics & philosophy of life.
- The interpersonal area: is family, friendship, emotional-interracial relationships, gender pole & entertainment. (Makri - Mpotsari, 2008).

The adolescent must develop a clear idea of the role he will play in the social environment to which he belongs. He must formulate a philosophy of life regarding the profession he will follow, the religious or political ideologies he will adopt, the choice of a partner, the adoption of life attitudes & at the same time embrace an action plan for their implementation (Makri - Mpotsari, 2008).

According to Cooley, adolescents feel that they are supported by important people in their

environment... Significant others (parents, educators, adult friends of the same age.. role models...)... believe that important others provide information on alternatives & take action on problem solving.

In contrast, adolescents who feel unsupported by their social environment, evaluate events as more stressful, lack self-confidence to deal with the problems that arise in their lives & quite often show depressive symptoms.

The degree of importance of a group in the socialization of adolescents is mainly determined by the criteria of the social support it provides. Social support refers to the acceptance, interest and help offered to adolescents, which is necessary to create a positive self-image and increase their self-esteem so that they can develop normally, with security and self-confidence, in order to build normal interpersonal social relationships.

Those who provide adequate social support to adolescents are described as "significant others". For teens, parents, teachers and peers fall into the category of "Significant Others".

The role of those parents who offer their children a supportive environment & strengthen their self-image & self-esteem is special. Only when the discipline applied by the parents is consistent, immediate & correct do the adolescents manage to understand the relationship between the act & its consequence, a fact that creates feelings of security and trust (Makri - Mpotsari, 2008).

At the same time, the role of support for adolescents by teachers is also important and often fills the gaps in the adolescent's relationship with his family.

When the teacher accepts the adolescent student, understands his/her problems, encourages him/her to discover his/her own possibilities, set his/her goals, make some decisions and direct his/her life, then he/she helps to improve his/her self-esteem level., in school success but also helps him in dealing with his problems.

In terms of peer support, a positive correlation has been shown between social support from peers and the psychological well-being of adolescents.

Research has revealed that some of the children who grow up in an unfavorable environment, in an environment of poverty, rejection, abuse or indifference by their parents, manage to move smoothly towards adulthood, aided by good interpersonal relationships with their peers.

Other times, however, the inclusion of a teenager in groups of peers, who show delinquent or aggressive behavior and use drugs, is largely associated with the development of antisocial behavior (Makri-Botsari, E., 2001, pp. 89-96).

Achieving a stable and dynamic identity of the Ego also depends on achieving the developmental goal of adolescence, while achieving mental balance, while

failure can lead to the manifestation of internal tensions and conflicts, loss of inner cohesion, emotional distress and emotional turmoil. Herbert, M., 1996, pp. 32-44, Paraskevopoulos, I., 1984b, pp. 57-81 and 160-173, Cole, M. and Cole, S., 2002, pp. 145-149, Erikson, E., 1968).

It is obvious that the adolescent needs understanding, emotional support, possibility of choices, knowledge about them as well as time to complete the developmental phase of adolescence & to move forward with confidence and self-esteem in his adult life. We, as adults, have a great deal of responsibility for this smooth transition & we must acknowledge the power of rebirth that characterizes adolescence & the ability to recreate the values & purposes that accompany it, which is so necessary today.



## V. COUNSELING (INTERNAL BEHAVIOR CONTROL)

The help of a specialist, such as a counselor, can often be sought, who can be a specially trained psychologist but also an experienced teacher.

The counseling process helps teens to help themselves. It focuses on the element of self-help, ie the need to activate the internal strength reserves of the adolescent who is experiencing difficulties, resulting in the development of all aspects of the personality.

Thus, the adolescent adopts more mature modes of action and reaction, which will be characterized by less stress and conflict and the creative change of antisocial behavior is gradually achieved and the prevention of its continuation or recurrence in another form is achieved.

Of course, consultants cannot usually provide immediate solutions. Their role is to be able, through counseling, to create an environment conducive to finding solutions by the adolescents themselves, so that they can promote their own coping strategies.

There is a classic distinction of Counseling, in preventive and therapeutic, depending on the type of condition he is facing.

Individual Counseling is usually followed, where the counseling relationship is given between a counselor and a teenager. Sometimes, in the school environment, quite often, Group Counseling is applied, where the communication is expanded between the participating students, especially when there are common problems related to environmental factors.

Counseling is also applied to parents, relatives, teachers and those who are going to support the adolescent, helping them to develop skills for dealing with any problematic behavior (Herbert, M., 1996, pp. 254-257, Dinitropoulos, E., 1999, 19-23 and 28-32, Malikiosi-Loizou, M., 1998, pp. 277-296, Patsos, Ch., 2003).

## VI. DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

Greek society is going through a period of rapid change at all levels. There are intense confrontations between traditional and new institutions, values and



lifestyles. This phenomenon results in the members of the society feeling insecure, anxious and uncertain about the future.

Things are even more difficult for teenagers, because they have to deal with these rapid developments and the intense psychosocial and mental changes that occur at their age.

The search for the Ego identity and the complete development of the adolescent personality are necessary for the creation of whole social relations. The decisive influence of the family on the formation of behavior and personality of the adolescent, is a finding of all the sciences that deal with human behavior.

The adolescent experiences multiple emotional states, which are related to the development of sexual instinct, the social dimension of gender and the expansion of his social horizon. In this context, he must reconcile and balance the multiple self-roles he presents to the various reference groups, that is, to construct his own identity.

To achieve this, it must develop a more elaborate evaluation system (self-esteem and self-evaluation), while, at the same time, it must form new models of relationships with "significant others" (parents, peers, heterosexual relationship, teachers... standards ...).

It therefore implies that the state, through support agencies and parents, in cooperation with teachers, psychologists and counselors, should & can help in a variety of ways by providing social support, safety and care to adolescents.

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