8 Living in limbo

Introduction 2
Hangin' 3
Creating warriors 4
Sexuality 6
Coming of age 8
Adolescents and social change in traditional societies 9
Adolescents as students and consumers 11

Introduction

Biological maturity is associated with adolescence, but may not necessarily correlate with social maturity in all societies. Adolescence has resulted in a “youth culture” in the West, however, in some societies, adolescence may be brief or virtually, non-existent.

A distinct and extensive adolescence period exists in modern societies. Although teenage couples are capable of reproduction, society suppresses these desires to step towards adulthood. Conflicts among parental authority and adolescent autonomy arise in this state of limbo, “neither child nor adult.”

Hangin'

Boys and girls begin to segregate in the preteen years. Like primates, adolescent males often engage in boisterous behavior. US adolescents enjoy their independence, which is often perpetuated by disposable income, and participate in anti-social behavior, theoretically rejecting adult culture.

While our society may try to restrict adolescent behavior, other cultures may accommodate it. Dormitories for adolescent male groups exist in many parts of the world. These social groups may provide village labor and social relations that benefit the community economically.

Curiosity and risk-taking among adolescents may allow for social-rank advancement, new discoveries that benefit the community at-large, and increased mating opportunities. However, risk-taking may be dangerous and deplored, especially among contemporary society.

American adolescents seem to be self-absorbed. Contemporary adolescents allow peer acceptance to direct their conduct, often defying adult authority.

Creating warriors

Historically, some societies prolonged male adolescence to provide for an army. Removal from the home and family, especially the mother, was common and considered essential for the transition to adulthood. Some societies require complete isolation of both girls, generally with their first menses, and boys, who often experience complex initiations.

In societies where violence was prevalent, boys aspired to be warriors. To become “men,” boys often participate in violent rituals, displaying courage and endurance. A common component in male transition to adulthood is misogyny. Boys are taught they are superior to women, which is often emphasized through denying women access to ceremonies and cultural knowledge. However, some societies provide initiations for both boys and girls.

Adolescents often have a group-think mentality, often making them prime recruits for military, terrorist groups, or missionary work.

Initiation ceremonies, often in preparation for warriors, have influenced modern sports; athletics, such as wrestling, mimics historic or village initiation rites. Even in societies that are no longer producing warriors, adults often criticize, humiliate, or use physical violence as part of the initiation process.

Although many societies focus on physicality or biological maturation in adolescence, the acquisition of good manners may

serve as an initiation for adolescents into adulthood. Europe traditionally treated ballroom dance as a means for acquiring skills to properly function in society.

Sexuality

Where promiscuity is frowned upon, adolescence seems to be a more stressful period. A “cult of virginity” may exist in some areas of the world, such as Polynesia. However, adolescent sexuality is considered normal, and may even be encouraged in many societies.

In foraging and pastoralist societies, pre-marital promiscuity may be the norm in contrast to more complex societies where it is not accepted. Virginity is often essential to make a good marriage in many societies, and males are often given the responsibility of maintaining sexual integrity among their family members. Female circumcision or clitorodectomy, argued to restrain sexual impulses, is practiced in many societies, especially among Muslims, to reduce promiscuity.

Attitudes towards adolescents’ sexuality differ between similar cultures. Europe seems to be more permissive, while America, influenced by the Religious Right, is more repressive. In spite of these different values, sexual activity varies little between the two. Since US adolescents are less educated about the consequences, they are more likely to become pregnant or contract STDs.

Immigrants also face conflicts concerning adolescent sexuality. Parents may teach native cultural values while their children prefer to assimilate.

Boys are often encouraged to explore their sexuality while girls’ sexuality is restricted. In ancient Greece and Papua New Guinea,

homosexual relations are common in a mentor relationship with adolescent boys and older men.

Postponement of family formation has been an aspect of modern restriction of adolescent sexuality. Extra-curricular activities have been created to postpone adulthood and curtail adolescent sexuality. Although, pregnancy out of wedlock is not often accepted, some societies, such as the Inuit and poor white Appalachian communities, support their teenager's pregnancy.

Few societies allow their children to select their spouse; kin generally assume the responsibility of determining marriage. Marriages often provide a family with wealth or labor, and girls must ascribe to cultural expectations to insure a "good" match. Consequently, societies that value chastity marry off their daughters at the first sign of puberty.

Coming of age

Initiation practices are common throughout the world and deems a child capable of starting a family, especially among girls. Girls' circumcision, although sometimes used to deter sexuality, often leads to adult status. "Fattening" is a common theme in preparing girls for childbirth. With the onset of puberty, girls are often expected to assume women's responsibilities.

Initiation rites may include painful body modifications; scarification and teeth modification are common. These initiations often lead to adult status. Although marriage is generally a rite of passage, some societies require the formation of families and stability in order to obtain full adult status.

Adolescents and social change in traditional societies

Adolescent males have often been the first members of their community to leave the village for the city to work. They often bring back material goods and new ideas, which often contributes to the decline of traditional culture and disrupts the social structure.

Christian missions and government schools offer alternative lifestyles to village children, but often do not socialize or prepare them for the modern economy.

Barriers to opportunities for women are decreasing. Women often avoid pregnancy to continue their education. However, with rising school fees, they may seek to earn money through sex. Also, employers are beginning to hire women over men because they are more reliable and cheaper. Hence, men find it difficult to provide for their families when women can support themselves and their offspring, which may result in the decline of nuclear families.

Contemporary governments and terrorist groups seek to exploit adolescents. “Living in limbo” perpetuates adolescent psychology that terrorists use to their advantage. The introduction of modern education that inadequately prepares individuals to succeed economically also provides governments with prime targets for military service.

A sense of anomie is also created in developed societies often through poverty and unclear expectations and roles. Political and economic forces enhance instability among those who cannot support family formation and face remaining in adolescence.

Adolescents as students and consumers

In societies where education leads to employment, children contribute little to the household and parents work more. Schoolwork and extra-curricular activities take up much of a student's time and is considered their "job." Adolescent employment is most common in the US and has resulted in a distinct adolescent culture.

This commercial culture, including entertainment, clothing, dating, etc., fueled by adolescents, has spread cross culturally, and is most prevalent among those who live similar lives as American youth.