Seminar in Adolescence
HDFS 539
Fall, 2001

Professor: Nancy Darling
Office: 110 South Henderson
Phone: 5-2648
e-mail: ndarling@psu.edu (This is the best way to get hold of me.)
Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-2:30 or by appointment. Or please drop by or send me an e-mail if you have a question or want to talk about the class.

Required Texts: Readings for the class are on reserve in 110 South Henderson


Course Description:

As children grow and interact with their environment, the processes underlying their development become increasing complex. By adolescence, the biological, cognitive, social, and cultural have become so intertwined that untangling their separate influences becomes very difficult -- especially because few of these processes are amenable to experimental manipulation. Further, the complexity of these processes produces much greater variability in adolescent development than there is in development during infancy and childhood. So how do we try to understand adolescent development? The readings for this seminar provide an overview of adolescence. Each week, our discussion will focus on a particular question relevant to the readings and an overview of the work of a particular investigator associated with that area.

Format and Goals:

This course has five primary goals:

1. to learn the factual information that is the basis of our scientific understanding of adolescent development;
2. to address the primary psychological literature as it relates to adolescent development;
3. to gain a better understanding of the importance of theory in influencing empirical research and to learn to recognize the implications of theory for research;
4. to get a better grasp on the variability of adolescent experience in the United States;
5. to encourage you to work with other students in the class to improve your understanding of the material.
6. to improve your written and oral communication skills.

Course Requirements:

This class only meets once a week, so it is very important that you attend and come prepared for all classes. You are also responsible for keeping yourselves informed of any changes that are announced in class or through the e-mail system regarding assignments and changes in schedule. The better prepared you are, the more you can contribute to all of our learning experiences. Reading assignments should be completed before class on the dates indicated on the syllabus.

Evaluation:

For a seminar to work, all the participants have to come to class prepared. There are four major criteria on which you will be evaluated: class participation and attendance, an oral presentation, participation in a computer discussion group, and an integrative analytic paper linking theory with empirical research.

Class Participation. Class participation is graded each day on a 3 point scale. You get 1 point for coming to class, 2 points for coming prepared and participating (i.e. asking a question or making a comment), and 3 points for making a particularly good contribution to class.

Computer Discussion Group. Writing about what you’ve read is one of the best ways to process and expand upon new ideas. A computer list server has been created to allow people in the class to share their thoughts about the readings prior to class. The purpose of the list server is to provide a forum for people to think about, critique, and speculate about our readings outside of class. It lets you comment, ask questions, and read what other people in the class are thinking.

How does it work? The forum basically takes the form of e-mail. You write an essay, a comment, or a question about the reading, send it to the list server, and it is distributed to other people in the class. Other people in the class can add their own speculations, comment on what you said, or answer your question. Although your postings can be any length, I’d try to keep it to no more than 1 single-spaced page. They can be as short as a sentence or two.

Requirements: There are two requirements for this part of the course. First, you need to participate by making at least one posting each week about the class readings. Because one purpose of the discussion is to help you prepare for class and for me to know what people are thinking about before we get started, this posting must be made BY SUNDAY MORNING BEFORE class. Second, you
should generate a portfolio of your best postings, to be turned in the last week of class. This portfolio should consist of at least 6 different postings from 6 different weeks, and include at least one critique of a reading that involves presenting an alternative interpretation of the results, at least one essay that ties together different readings and discusses the implications, at least one essay that speculates on new research that grows out of the readings, and at least one response to something that someone else in the class wrote.

To improve the quality of your postings as well as your spelling and to make it easier to put together your portfolio, I strongly suggest you read what other people have posted before you post yourself, you write your answer in your word processor, rather than in your e-mail program, paste what you’ve written into your e-mail program, and then reread and edit it there before mailing.

**Semester Project.** Each student will be assigned one of the focus topics covered in class. The week of that class, you will be expected to review the work of one prominent scholar in that area and summarize key contributions the person has made to the field. The goal of this assignment is to help both you and the class become familiar with important figures in adolescent development and to provide you with experience lecturing.

**Paper:** You will also write a formal paper linking theory and research in your assigned area. You may do this in one of two ways. In the first option, you can choose to focus on one researcher’s work, and discuss its development and theoretical underpinnings. The goal of this paper is to examine how an individual’s work is influenced by his or her theoretical perspective and by other work in the field. The second option is to present two or three dominant theoretical approaches to the topic and to discuss specific examples of empirical work, analyzing how the theoretical perspective has influenced the choice of question, methodology, and interpretation of the research. The goal of this option is to gain skill in understanding the implications of theory in empirical investigation. This assignment is due the last week of class.

### CLASS SCHEDULE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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September 10  
**Adolescence as a Social Transition:**

September 17  
**Adolescence as a Biological Transition:**
September 24

Adolescence as a Cognitive Transition:

October 1:

The Family:
October 10: The Peer Group:

October 15: Schools:

October 22: Work and Leisure:
Identity

ATT: Harter


Intimacy and Friendship


Autonomy and Ego Development

Blos, P. (1967). The second individuation process of adolescence. In R. Eissler


November 19

Sexuality and Romantic Relationships


November 26

Achievement

ATT: Henderson & Dweck


December 3

Psychosocial Problems:

