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Abstract

The behavior of adolescents can be very challenging to parents and educators. These young people have the ability to change moods and behavior day to day, with their emotions being up or down at any given moment. Also, they are often confused and look for security in their turbulent world. Their inconsistency in behavior and emotions tests the patience and understanding of adults who try to guide and direct them through these hectic years. According to Newman (1985) adolescence has been characterized as a period of inevitable stress and conflict, with adults almost helpless to intervene productively.

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Egocentrism and Adolescent Development

The behavior of adolescents can be very challenging to parents and educators. These young people have the ability to change moods and behavior day to day, with their emotions being up or down at any given moment. Also, they are often confused and look for security in their turbulent world. Their inconsistency in behavior and emotions tests the patience and understanding of adults who try to guide and direct them through these hectic years. According to Newman (1985) adolescence has been characterized as a period of inevitable stress and conflict, with adults almost helpless to intervene productively.

The dramatic change from childhood to adolescence involves a critical process during which a child leaves the dependency of his/her parents in an attempt to be an adult. The youngster progresses through early and mid-adolescence experiencing changes in perceptions and interests. This process is not without difficulties.

Adults need to understand what goes on in the adolescent's mind in order to assist in the process of change and discovery. It is important that school counselors understand the stages of development that

grasp this person and often dictate his/her behavior and emotions, because without a basic understanding and appreciation for these youths, counselors and other adults may perceive them in a negative manner and may actually harm their psychological development (Tierno, 1983). Early adolescents rebel against adults both at home and in the classroom in an attempt to demonstrate their growing autonomy.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and clarify selected aspects of psychological development which typically occur approximately during early and mid-years of adolescence (10-16 years of age). Emphasis will be placed upon self-other perceptions common to the early and mid-years of adolescence, upon adolescent psychological development and upon components of egocentrism such as imaginary audience and personal fable. A review of current literature will be presented.

This area of research was chosen because the writer works with intermediate and high school-aged students who fall into this category (ages 10-16). The researcher observes, and on a daily basis deals with, their psychological stages of development, as well as

egocentrism. As an educator, it is beneficial to understand the adolescent and the developmental stages unique to adolescents.

Psychological Characteristics During Early Adolescence

Adolescents are in a transitional stage in cognitive development, moving from concrete operational thought to the formal operational stage or abstract thought (Tierno, 1983). During this stage (early adolescence), adolescents develop the capacity to organize data, to reason scientifically about abstract ideas and to generate hypotheses. They develop a complex and abstract approach to issues. They often make simple matters complex and have difficulty deciding which choice would be appropriate according to adult standards.

Psychological development, which involves sociological and physiological changes as well, is complex in adolescents (Hartzell, 1984). The young person attempts to adjust to rapid and often confusing changes over which they may have little control. Although stages of development can be defined, some individuals are early to develop while others plateau at a particular level (Greydanus, 1986). The events of

puberty cause swift psychological and physiological changes between the ages of ten to fourteen years (Hartzell, 1984). Youths become preoccupied with their quickly changing bodies (Greydanus, 1986). They are seldom pleased with this given change and are quick to make comparisons.

Authors vary to exact years that the different stages begin. Due to cultural factors, maturity and personal environment, there are wide individual differences. Egocentrism begins about 11 or 12 according to Elkind (1985) and Riley, Adams, and Nielsen (1984). Muuss (1982) claimed that it begins around age 11, Greydanus (1986) after 12 years and Newman (1985) between 12-14 years of age. All ages are approximate because of individual differences and egocentrism falls between early and mid-adolescence, which is approximately 10-16 years of age.

Greydanus (1986) cited five characteristics, or cognitive stages, of early adolescent (ages 10-14) development which bring changes. These changes include preoccupation with rapidly changing events of puberty, the beginning of a symbolic move away from home environment, worry over imagined abnormalities and peer

comparison, same sex friendships, and initial abstract thought development.

Adolescents unhappy with inevitable changes seek assurance and self worth through friends (Greydanus, 1986). This is the beginning of a symbolic movement away from the home environment. It is a common move as the early adolescent begins to rely on friends for support. Parents may find it difficult to understand the sudden switch from dependency to an attempt to be independent (Calabrese, 1987). Adolescents at this early stage also bounce back and forth between dependency and independence (Greydanus, 1986).

Typically, strong friendships will develop with the same sex in mid adolescence (Greydanus, 1986). Boys will form a strong bond with other groups of boys and will have their own clique of friends. Girls usually have one or two close friends. They place importance on comparing themselves with other girls, hoping to be equal or superior in all methods of comparison. To establish and maintain same sex friendships, hairstyles and clothing become worthy of notice and are often used to determine self worth.

Concrete Operational Thought

Greydanus (1986), stated that depending on the developmental pace of an individual child, the psychological development of concrete operational thinking usually occurs from late childhood through early adolescence (ages 7-11). Most authors do not go that young as a starting point. Parents often notice increased capacity for logical thinking. Children at this stage seem to understand more. At this point, if the child feels secure in the home environment, if the school works with individual abilities and the child has a healthy self-image, this child will learn to enjoy school and take pride in learning (Protinsky, 1975).

Concrete operational thinking in late childhood and early adolescence (ages 7-11) does have a major limitation, in that the individual has difficulty thinking into the future (Greydanus, 1986). The search for self-worth and acceptance by friends causes the individual to think in terms of the here and now. He or she only perceives and places importance on the wants of the day and can not relate to anything months or years in the future. In dealing with this

situation, one must use practical present-day terminology, or the discussion will be lost (Lapsley, 1985).

Miller (1978) stated that concrete operational child adopts the hypothesis that seems most likely to fit him/her. They are unable to consider all possibilities in their thought process. The facts must be clear and simple. Answers and solutions to situations are clear to the adolescent at the concrete operational stage.

Miller (1978) stated that concrete operational thought empowers the child to formulate hypotheses by deductive reasoning for explanations about concrete matters. With this system of thought, he or she answers questions with flat answers, as if stating a fact. If challenged on an answer, the child does not change his or her stance, but simply reinterprets the data to fit their assumption. The child (ages 10-14) gives priority to what seems permanent and necessary in their thought. Elkind (1967), reiterated that these operations are mental tools whose products are not regulated by experience. The child takes him/her perception of the environment at face value. An

example of this would be that a child at this stage of development would think that a person who has an automobile accident is a bad driver. They do not take into account any other reason, such as road or weather conditions.

Functioning at the concrete operational level of development includes the inability to compare the products of one's own mental reasoning and what is perceived with some degree of accuracy (Muuss, 1982). Persons at this level of development cannot always tell the difference between a hypothesis and a fact. This can be seen when a child makes up a story or an excuse. He/she believes their own fabrications and defends them as though they were true. Muuss further stated that the inability to differentiate between an assumption and a fact is what constitutes concrete operational thought.

Newman (1985) stated that at the concrete operations stage the youngster has difficulty organizing complex material and that his or her thinking is unsystematic. When a situation can be dealt with in the here and now, such youngsters can deal logically. However, according to Newman, longterm

implications and hypothetical situations cause problems. Characteristic to this particular developmental period, the youngster may stubbornly insist their answer is correct and may rationalize any way they can to maintain their position.

Formal Operational Thought

The preceding section showed that early adolescents (approximately 10-14 years old) display the beginning of a symbolic movement away from the home environment. Mid-adolescents, beginning around age 14 exhibit a markedly significant movement away from the home environment as their peers become more important to them. Altruistic nature emerges as they become very close to peers (Greydanus, 1986). A high priority for the individual adolescent at this developmental stage is to help peers with the same struggles they experience themselves. This strong reliance on peers is also responsible for setting standards of behavior and personal rules which often conflict with those of parents. These new rules and standards represent an attempt for independence and acceptance outside the home. During this time the teenager wants to be gone from home as much as possible. They experience mood

swings and try to establish freedom to do things their
own way. Their moodiness and irritability is a result
of not having enough life experiences to make the best
decisions, and yet they dare not rely on parents for
help (Muuss, 1982).

Many difficulties are associated with the
mid-adolescent stage for parents, society and this age
group themselves (Elliott, 1982). Although thinking
skills have improved, mistakes are not uncommon at this
time despite warnings from adults (Greydanus, 1986).
Their lack of life experiences, their need for peer
approval, their attempt at independence and wanting to
be adult, leave them vulnerable to turbulent times.

Formal operational thinking develops during the
middle adolescent years (Greydanus, 1986). This stage
after age 12 shows an improvement of inductive and
deductive reasoning ability. Deductive reasoning
ability refers to the ability to go from general to
specific conclusions, and inductive reasoning ability
refers to going from specific to general conclusions.
The individual cultivates the capacity to think about
the thought process. This process normally starts to
develop in early adolescence and finalizes in

mid-adolescence. The thinking process matures and assists mid-adolescents to advance. The individual who wants to be an adult actually start to look, sound and act like one at times. They also have the ability to present a forceful argument when challenged by adults (Greydanus, 1986).

Muuss (1982) maintained that formal operational thought is a major task of adolescents and begins at about age eleven. This thought process is both logical and abstract. The ability to think about one's own thinking and the ability to perceive possibility as well as reality are typical capabilities of formal operational thought. The result is a failure to discern between the particular individual's point of view and the point of view of the group. This feature is one of the most characteristic of adolescents.

Formal operational thought coincides with the onset of egocentrism (Riley, Adams, & Nielson, 1984). They begin to reason and can construct contrary-to-fact theories. They continued that the issue which now arises is that while the adolescent can perceive the thoughts of others, he/she fails to differentiate

between where the thoughts of others are directed and their own focus of interest.

Elkind (1978) stated that formal operational thought emerges at about the age of eleven or twelve, dependent upon individual differences. At this stage of development, individuals tend to make simple matters complex by over-intellectualizing and by an eagerness to make a decision. Although they are able to conceive alternatives to a situation, they are unable to decide which choice is appropriate (Newman, 1985). By making simple matters complex, they often try too hard when making decisions. As a result, they often appear absurd, which is frustrating to the adolescent.

Newman (1985) stated that arrival of formal operations usually begins between the ages of twelve and fourteen and reaches its peak at age fifteen. Thinking is often reflected in an all-knowing attitude and obnoxious behavior. They can not see the validity in adult thinking (Mitchell, 1980).

Based on the above review, there are some differences about when these developmental stages occur; however, the general consensus is that there are characteristics which do appear at each stage, although

at what age each adolescent goes through the stages
varies. Cognitive operational thought is characterized
by the fact that he/she can not think into the future
and think only in the here and now. They are also
unable to consider all of the possibilities and adapt
conclusions most likely to fit him/her. Formal
operational thought is characterized by the fact that
he/she can perceive possibilities as well as reality.
They begin to reason and although they perceive the
alternatives, they often make inappropriate choices.

Egocentrism

Egocentrism has been described as a state of mind
which is characterized by preoccupation with the self
and the inability to separate the self from the
external world (Elkind, 1978). It is characterized by
a lack of awareness of anything outside one's own
experience. Egocentrism also includes failure to
differentiate between actions of the self and actions
of others (Gray & Hudson, 1984). It results in an
overall confusion of one's environment and how it is
perceived (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985).

A review of several sources has revealed a number
of definitions pertaining to egocentrism which are not

limited to the adolescent years (Muuss, 1982; Elkind, 1967; Elkind & Bowen, 1979; Elliott, 1982; Protinsky & Wilkerson, 1986; Greydanus, 1986). However, for the purpose of this researcher's study, adolescent egocentrism will be the focus of the review.

Adolescent egocentrism usually appears at the beginning of early adolescence at approximately the age of eleven or twelve. At this time abstract reasoning allows the individual to produce thoughts about thoughts. They begin to think about others' thoughts and start to wonder about what others are thinking about them (Elkind, 1967). The adolescent at this age, is sure he/she knows what others are thinking (Enright, Lapsley, & Shukla, 1979).

Adolescence is a period of time of conflicting and vacillating demands and expectations. Because of lack of experience and maturity, adolescents do not always act according to socially accepted norms established by adults. According to Elkind (1967) two aspects of egocentrism serve to explain their behavior and their perception of self and others. These aspects are comprised of the imaginary audience and of the personal fable.

Gray and Hudson (1984) as well as Enright, Lapsley, and Shukla (1980) made the observation that failure to differentiate the perception of self from the perception of others leads to heightened self-consciousness. The adolescent believes that others are just as concerned about his/her thoughts, feelings, and behavior as he or she is (Lapsley, Milstead, Quintana, Flannery, & Buss, 1986). Adolescents perceive themselves as being on display at all times (Elkind, 1978). These beliefs help adults to understand many behaviors, such as careful preparation of appearance and why adolescents sometimes hide in their rooms. They are skeptical of the ever-present critical eyes in their environment (Elliott, 1982). Adolescents set their own standards, based on the fact that they think they know what everyone is looking for (Gray & Hudson, 1984). In other words, the adolescent believes he or she knows what is going on in everyone's mind (Enright, et al, 1980). This then, is a personal fable.

Muuss (1982) defined egocentrism as the inability of an individual to differentiate him/herself from the reality of his/her environment. Egocentric adolescents

assume that others instinctively participate in their despair and in their enjoyment. They are unable to put themselves in the position of others as they are not receptive to nor able to accept a different point of view. They believe everybody has the same perspective as they have (Riley, Adams, & Nielson, 1984). Egocentric adolescents regard themselves as the focus of the universe. With the emergence of formal operational thought, at about the age of eleven or twelve, the adolescent is unable to share the thoughts of others. The inability to decenter is intrinsic to egocentrism (Riley, Adams & Nielson, 1984).

Gray and Hudson (1984) defined egocentrism as the failure to take the perspective of others. It is a confusion of the self with the world around such an individual. The adolescent develops the inability to separate the actions of others from their own actions.

Imaginary Audience

The rise of a formal operational thought process brings about what is called the imaginary audience (Anolik, 1981). This is the belief that the individual is on stage for everyone to view critically (Hudson & Gray, 1986; Elkind, 1978). Lapsley and Murphy (1985)

elaborated on the fact that adolescent egocentrism brings about the belief that everyone knows what the adolescent is thinking about. There is a widespread concentration on the self and the belief that others are constantly focusing attention on them (Lapsley, et al, 1986; Muuss, 1982). The adolescent has created what Elkind (1967) has termed the "imaginary audience." This is a result of the adolescent's perceptions and inability to share thoughts of others (Enright, Lapsley, & Shukla, 1979). It is the belief of individual adolescents that they are highly visible and on stage for everyone to see all the time (Newman, 1985). They believe that everyone will notice if they have a hair out of place or if their shoes are not untied. Attention-getting behavior may reflect behavior related to imaginary audience. Adolescents often use different aspects of thinking about the self and others that can lead to inappropriate behavior (Anolik, 1981).

Elkind (1985) stated that it is important to understand that the imaginary audience is a fantasy invented by the mind of the adolescent. It is not reality. The adolescent creates audiences in their

head. The adolescent reconstructs the thoughts of others and makes mental representation to fit their audience. They believe they are the complete focus of others' attention. They also believe the audience will be as critical, or hold somebody or something in as high regard as they do themselves (Lapsley, et al, 1986).

Adams and Jones (1982) and Muuss (1982) maintained that the focus is usually aimed at one's own environment. Because of the focus on the self and the environment, the adolescent often feels embarrassed because of the novelty of their own behavior. They feel they are always observed and being evaluated. This is why they often pay very close attention to their physical appearance and are in close touch with their feelings.

It is not surprising that the imaginary audience will bring about a feeling of self-consciousness. In a situation in which they feel uncomfortable, adolescents may conceal certain facets of the self. The desire and ability to disguise the real self is evidence of the power of the imaginary audience (Elkind & Bowen, 1979). Hudson and Gray (1986) reiterated this when they found

that if one is experiencing heightened
self-consciousness and is worried about the reactions
of others, there must be a reluctance to divulge one's
true feelings or thoughts.

Elkind (1978) stated that the young adolescent has
a strong interest in physical features, personal
qualities and traits which makes them feel special in
themselves. Each young person becomes a spectator to
everyone else and in doing so acts accordingly before
their audience. Because they cannot differentiate
between what is of interest to others and what isn't,
they often use loud and annoying behavior to create an
audience (Muuss, 1982). The adolescent is unable to
discriminate between what they believe is attractive
and what others admire. This helps to explain the
faddish dress, loudness and inappropriate behavior
(Newman, 1985).

Personal Fable

Another dimension of formal operational thought,
and possibly a result of the imaginary audience, is
again what Elkind (1967) has proposed as the
development of a "personal fable." Greydanus (1986)
referred to the aspect of personal fable as magical

thinking. Personal fable refers to the perception that the particular individual is special, exceptional, unique and indestructible (Enright, et al, 1979; Lapsley & Murphy, 1985; Elkind, 1967; Lapsley, et al, 1986; Elkind, 1978). The personal fable causes the individual to feel important to so many people that he or she cannot differentiate their feelings or thoughts. Adolescents believe that they must be special and unique since they are the focus of everyone's attention. The individual adolescent often becomes annoyed at others for not understanding him or her. Their behavior may be that of frustration. These feelings of an exclusive self cultivate the personal fable (Enright, Lapsley, & Shukla, 1979).

Adolescents who indulge in personal fable thinking believe they are indestructible as they get caught in a mental fantasy which is replaced by reality. For example, many young girls and boys convince themselves, through personal fable, that they will not suffer the consequences of pregnancy, or that nothing bad will happen to them (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985). As a result, they end up not taking precautions, only to find the consequences of their personal fable to be shattering

(Elkind, 1967; Elkind, 1978; Greydanus, 1986; Newman, 1985; Muuss, 1982).

Lapsley and Murphy (1985), having agreed with Greydanus (1986), and Elkind (1967), referred to the personal fable as a construct of egocentrism. Because adolescents believe their thoughts and feelings are unique and that they are understood by no one, especially not by parents. They conclude that harm will not come to them regardless of their behavior (Newman, 1985). With this attitude, adolescents will often act spontaneously and in a perilous manner with no consideration for possible consequences. Self-destructive behavior, loudness, faddish dress and rude behavior are typical results of this belief (Lapsley, et al, 1986; Elkind, 1967).

Lack of experience adds to the adolescent's incompetencies to struggle with daily situations. They learn by testing reality, which can set them up for failure because they have not learned the cause-effect structure of their world. They believe that the cause-effect structure does not apply to them. This leads to a feeling of uniqueness which is referred to as the personal fable as stated previously by Greydanus

(1986), Elkind (1967), and Lapsley (1985). Their lack
of consideration for their behavior and not
understanding the consequences leads to unfortunate
statistics in terms of pregnancy, drug abuse,
risk-taking activities and regrettable situations
(Newman, 1985).

Summary and Conclusion

The review of literature has shown that adolescent
egocentrism involves a necessary process of
development. Concrete operational thought, which
begins at approximately ages 7-11, is characterized by
development of the ability for logical thinking. This
stage is characterized by the limitation of the
individual not being able to think in the future.
Thinking is in the here and now and children believe
there is one simple answer to situations. They cannot
think through complex situations and accept alternative
solutions at the concrete operational level of
development (Muuss, 1982).

Formal operational thought usually begins at the
age 11 or 12 and peaks at the age of 15. Again, this
depends on individual differences. This stage
includes, or is characterized by a more complex process

of thought and the expression of idealistic standards (Mitchell, 1980). Adolescents now begin to perceive the thoughts of others and to think in more complex terms. However, adolescents at this developmental stage are unsuccessful in differentiating where the thoughts of others are directed. They believe that others' core of thought shares their same focus of interest. This brings up feelings of self-consciousness and heightened self awareness. He/She make simple matters complex, and construct contrary-to-fact theories (Riley, Adams, & Nielson, 1984).

The dimension of the imaginary audience is brought about with the onset of formal operational thought. Believing that others' thoughts have the same focus as theirs, the adolescent believes they are always the center of attention (Elkind, 1978; Adams & Jones, 1982). It is fantasy created in the mind of the adolescent rather than reality. He or she believes that he or she is on center stage for all, and that the audience will be critical or praising, depending on how the particular adolescent in question perceives the audience. The formal operations stage is a stage of

self-consciousness and of being in touch with personal
feelings. These adolescents think they know what
others think about them (Enright, et al, 1980).

Newman (1985) stated that the other dimension of
adolescent egocentrism is the personal fable. This
develops from the belief that the individual adolescent
is the center of attention and always has an interested
audience who is always evaluating their actions. With
this belief, it follows for the adolescent that they
are special, unique and indestructible. As a result,
their actions are often spontaneous and without thought
of possible consequences. Their behavior can become
risky and rude. Also, personal appearance becomes
very important. They become frustrated as they feel
they are not understood by adults (Lapsley & Murphy,
1985).

Like any stage of development, adolescent
egocentrism does not have exact time frames in regard
to years. Stages overlap and vary because of
individual differences. Developmental stages are
natural steps toward maturation. Adolescent
egocentrism can be an exciting and fulfilling time, or

a time of frustration and problems, and can be resolved with the passage of time.

As can be seen from the literature review, adolescent egocentrism does exist among our intermediate and high school-aged students (ages 10-16) and can be related to certain developmental stages from concrete to formal operational thought. During these stages certain behaviors are exhibited, and can be expected to be observed by the school counselor. As the adolescent matures, it can be expected that many of the egocentric behaviors exhibited during 6th grade will have diminished by the time he or she reaches their final year in High School.

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