Course Syllabus

The Adolescent Paradox: Emotions, Behavior, and Identity
Course Number: CAMS-UA 142

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Course Overview:
Adolescence is a remarkable time of growth and development; in just a few years, children transition dramatically towards adulthood across multiple domains. While adolescence is physically the healthiest period of the lifespan, it is also marked by an enormous rise in morbidity and mortality. This seeming paradox can be explained, in part, by biological, psychological and social phenomena that affect emotion regulation, cognition, and consequent risk-taking behavior. At the turn of the twentieth century, adolescence was described as a developmental period inevitably filled with “storm and stress.” In what ways does this vision of adolescence still apply? How should current scientific findings inform our understanding of the propensity for risk-taking behavior during this period (including substance use, increasing sexual activity, and disordered eating)? In exploring the factors that shape emotions, behavior, and emerging identity during adolescence, this course will examine such questions from biological and psychosocial perspectives.

Organizational framework of course:
Following today’s introductory session, this course will be divided into two main parts, culminating in a final wrap-up session. Today’s session will introduce the historical framework for the questions examined and describe the course expectations. The first part of the course (Current Perspectives on The Adolescent Period) will consist of an overview of current perspectives on adolescence, organized into: 1) biological, 2) psychological, and 3) social perspectives. Upon conclusion of the first section, a midterm essay assignment will require students to analyze live interviews with adolescents, thereby demonstrating their understanding of the range of normal development and the typical struggles encountered during adolescence.

In the second part of the course, we will consider how the biopsychosocial considerations learned about in the first half come together to impact emotional and behavioral development during adolescence. In the concluding session, we will revisit the larger historical context, incorporating a movie to try and identify whether adolescence should be viewed as a time of storm and stress.

Required Text:

Course Expectations:

a. Class Attendance and Participation (15%): Students are expected to attend and participate actively in ALL classroom sessions and to demonstrate familiarity with the content of the assigned readings during class discussions. The textbook is meant to provide a cursory overview of the topics to be discussed during class; the majority of the learning will be based on classroom lectures, discussions and activities. Attendance will be taken, and any absences should be excused prior to class. For those of you who miss a
maximum of one class, the final exam will be optional. If two or more classes are missed, you will be REQUIRED to take the final exam (regardless of whether absences are excused).

b. Response Papers (35%): Students will complete SEVEN 1-page single-spaced response papers, correlating with sessions noted in the syllabus. The paper will be due by the beginning of the following class. To earn full credit, each response paper should present a thoughtful answer to any 1 of the questions that will be posted online after each lecture. These papers must demonstrate a mastery of the lecture material, supported by the readings, as well as an ability to reflect, synthesize, and think critically about the material presented. Other sources, ie. websites, magazine articles, etc… are encouraged in order to support opinions and ideas, ie. ‘Research shows’, ‘Looking up [topic]’... Papers should be submitted on NYU Classes at any point before class, AND a hard copy should be brought to class as well.

c. Midterm Exam (25%): For the midterm, students will complete an in-class multiple choice and short answer exam, as well as a take-home midterm essay focused on developing a biopsychosocial formulation of the adolescents interviewed in class.

d. Final Exam and Presentation (25%): For the final assignment, after an in-class final exam, students will be broken up into groups of about three students each, and conduct a short in-class debate on pre-determined topics. Grading for the presentation will be based on accuracy, planning, and thoughtfulness of information presented.

e. Extra Credit: If students are interested in receiving extra credit, additional response papers can be done after the minimum number have been written. For each additional paper, depending on the effort and thoughtfulness of the responses, extra points will be counted towards the student’s overall final grade in the class.

Response Paper Grading: The grades for response papers will be on a scale of 1-5, as follows... 5 = A+, 4+ = A, 4 = A-, 3+= B+, 3 = B, 3- = B-, 2+ = C+, 2 = C, 2- = C-, 1+ = D+, 1 = D, 1- = D-, 0 = F

*CAMS Policy on Late Submissions: Late papers will be accepted. However, grades on all late papers will be lowered by 1/3 for each day late (e.g., from an A- to a B+ on late day #1, from a B+ to a B on late day #2, etc.). Under no circumstances will any response papers be accepted after 12pm on the last day of classes. Papers received after this date will not be graded and will receive a score of zero. Students requesting an exemption from the late submission policy must present a written note from a school Dean, Academic Advisor, or personal physician (e.g., not the student’s parent or family member) justifying the late submission, which will then be considered by the instructor.

Brief Outline of Course:
Introduction.
Session 1: Overview of “The Adolescent Paradox”

Current Perspectives on the Adolescent Period:
Biological Factors
Session 2: Puberty, Sleep and the Developing Brain
**Psychological Factors**

Session 3: Cognition; Personality, and temperament  
Session 4: Identity and Gender

**Social Factors**

Session 5: Peers and Relationships  
Session 6: Parents and School  
Session 7: Midterm exam; Media lecture part I

NO CLASSES SCHEDULED – SPRING BREAK  
Session 8: Interview with Adolescents; Media pt II (REQUIRED CLASS)

**Emotions and Behavior in Adolescence:**

Emotions and mood in adolescence  
Session 9: Debrief interview; Motivation and Emotions  
Session 10: Mood and Anxiety

Behaviors in adolescence  
Session 11: Sexual Behaviors, Eating & Body Image  
Session 12: Self-Injury, Alcohol & Drugs  
Session 13: Risk and Resilience; Conclusion

**Conclusion classes**  
Session 14: Final oral exam AND presentation (REQUIRED CLASS)

**Expanded Outline, with Readings:**

Note assignments subject to change; any modifications to syllabus will be posted online.

**Session 1: Introduction - “The Adolescent Paradox,” and the History of “Adolescence”**

Only recently has adolescence been identified as its own stage of development, occurring between childhood and adulthood. In the past century, the teenage years have frequently been portrayed as a time fraught with irrational and emotionally influenced behavior. Over the past few centuries, particularly in western societies, this transitional stage has become longer, with normative life stages such as marriage and child-rearing occurring later, and puberty and sexual maturity beginning earlier. How has the perception of adolescence evolved over the years, as evidence has emerged about the myriad of biological, psychological and social factors that affect this part of the life span? While this stage serves as a great opportunity for growth, identity and development, and most adolescents go on to become healthy and productive adults, there is also a high risk of morbidity and mortality as teenagers navigate their way towards independence. In this class, we will begin to examine the forces behind this “adolescent paradox,” while studying how the concept of adolescence has been defined and revised throughout history. Students will be introduced to the concept of adolescence as a period of “storm and stress.” We will also review expectations, requirements and assignments for this course.

**Optional reading (based on first class):**

1) McMahan Ch 1 “Adolescence: Past, Present, and Future”
Session 2: Pubertal changes; Sleep; the Developing Adolescent Brain
Response Paper #1 due
Puberty brings many physical changes, including a growth spurt and sexual development. In this session, we will review the biology of the endocrine system that governs such changes. We will look at how alterations in neuroendocrine factors during this time, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis, affect adolescent behavior. We will also consider the effect of timing of pubertal maturation on adolescent development, behavior and the risk of psychopathology. Finally, we will examine changes in circadian rhythm and sleep patterns during adolescence and the implications of these changes on teenage life. We will further explore “the adolescent brain,” as determined by neuronal pruning and prefrontal cortex maturation.

Required Readings (to be read before class each week):
1) Adolescent Brain Development: A Period of Vulnerabilities & Opportunities by Ronald E. Dahl (posted)

2) McMahan Ch 3 “Puberty and Physical Development”

3) Sleep In Adolescents: The Perfect Storm by Carskadon M (posted)


Session 3: Cognition, Personality and Temperament
Response Paper #2 due
In this session, we will examine cognitive changes that typically occur in adolescence, transitioning from biological perspectives to a more developmental and psychological perspective. Notions of egocentrism will be explored, as well as how aspects of cognitive processing affect risk-taking behavior during this period. We will then study the concept of temperament and examine how it affects attachment, both positively and negatively. We will also explore biological factors related to the physiology of personality.

Required Readings:
1) McMahan Ch 2, pt 1 “Theories about Adolescence” (pp 30-39)

2) McMahan Ch 4, pts 1 and 2 “Piaget's Approach” and "Beyond Piaget" (pp 106-121)

3) Article: Temperament, Development and Personality by Rothbart, M (posted)

Session 4: Identity and Gender
Response Paper #3 due
What is identity? When does it emerge? How stable is it? What influences it, in broad terms? What is the difference between personality, identity, self-concept, and self-esteem? In this session we will examine these concepts and how they play out during the adolescent period. We will also explore the role of morality in development. Last but certainly not least, we will explore the concept of gender roles in today's society. Over the last few decades, gender-role attitudes and behaviors have become less traditional in adults, a phenomenon that has also trickled down to impact adolescents. While gender roles have become less strictly defined, such as with careers, sports and family responsibilities, these roles still significantly impact self-esteem and school
performance, among other things. Gender roles are strongly influenced by how the sexes are portrayed within a family, by peers, and in society.

Required Readings:
1) McMahan Chs 10 AND 11

Session 5: Peers and Romantic Relationships
Response Paper #4 due

Peer groups serve as a distinct and critically important contribution to social development for the majority of adolescents. Accordingly, peer groups become a prevailing factor in an adolescent’s life, often superseding parental influence in many regards. This session will examine the significance of peer groups on adolescent development, taking a closer look at bullying and cyberbullying as well. The emergence of romantic relationships also plays a significant role in an adolescent’s life, and can contribute to the formation of a secure sense of self.

Required Readings:
1) McMahan Chs 6 AND 12

Session 6: Parents and School
Response Paper #5 due

Adolescence is a period of changing social dynamics, characterized by increasing independence from parents along with greater rebellion against parental rules and authority. Furthermore, despite universal changes such as puberty and cognitive development, adolescents’ experiences vary considerably across cultures and throughout history. Peer groups serve as a distinct and critically important contribution to social development for the majority of adolescents. Accordingly, peer groups become a prevailing factor in an adolescent’s life, often superseding parental influence in many regards. This session will examine the significance of parents on adolescent development, while also discussing the impact of school, given that the majority of an adolescents’ typical day is spent in these social environments. Creative thinking and critical thinking will be discussed, along with the impact of intelligence on an individual’s development.

Required Readings:
1) McMahan Chs 5 AND 7

Session 7: MIDTERM EXAM; Media Lecture Pt I
NO RESPONSE PAPERS OR REQUIRED READINGS ASSIGNED FOR THIS WEEK
Media has been a powerful source of information for adolescents over many decades, and it’s influence only continues to grow over time. New forms of media are always being developed, such as texting and social networking, and become more and more alluring to the developing mind. This class will examine how teenagers hear the information presented to them, and are socialized by that information, particularly in regards to body image and sexual behavior. We will also analyze different forms of media and deconstruct the methods they use to entice adolescents.

Session 8: Interview with Adolescents; Media Lecture Pt II
Response Paper #6 due

This session will consist of an interview with adolescent high school students from the James Baldwin school (West 18th Street, New York, NY), each at a different stage of development and coping with different stressors affecting teenage life. After the interviews, the participants will be
discussed in class. We will end with a discussion of the midterm exam and finishing up the lecture on media from the prior class.

**Required Readings:**
TBD

**Session 9: Interview Debriefing; Motivation and Affect Regulation**

*MIDTERM PAPER DUE (no response papers assigned)*

Debriefing of interview with adolescents from prior class. We will then consider how emotions are regulated and manifested during adolescence. In doing so, we will review the notion of affect regulation.

**Required Readings:**
TBD

**Session 10: Emotions and Mood**

*Response Paper #7 due*

In this session, we will consider the impact of mood and anxiety disorders on emotional states during this period. In order to fully examine these questions, we will explore how we draw boundaries between “Normal vs. Abnormal” with the aide of perspectives drawn from theories of health and illness. We will also review what determines how we classify mental illness. Finally, we will discuss how these concepts shape our understanding of psychopathology in adolescence.

**Required Readings:**
TBD

**Session 11: Body Image, Disordered Eating and Sexual Behaviors**

*Response Paper #8 due*

Taking chances and trying new things are normative processes for adolescents in order to develop into healthy, mature adults. Furthermore, some element of risk and chance is necessary in order to develop. Along the way, however, many adolescents engage in what are considered to be unnecessarily high-risk behaviors, which may still fall within the range of “normal” adolescence and not necessarily signify mental illness or psychopathology. Risk taking helps shape a person’s experience, which ultimately leads to the development of one’s identity. However, increased risk-taking behavior also leads to a significant increase in morbidity and mortality. Adolescence is strongly associated with an increase in risk-taking and sensation-seeking behavior, such as increased sexual activity, disordered eating patterns and substance use. What factors determine whether such behaviors disrupt or enrich normal development? These next two classes will examine risk-taking behaviors and how they are influenced by various biopsychosocial factors.

**Required Readings:**
1) *Chandra A et al.* “Does Watching Sex on Television Predict Teen Pregnancy?” (posted)


3) TBD

**Session 12: Self-Injury and Suicide, Alcohol and Drug Use**

*Response Paper #9 due*
This session will continue to examine risk-taking behaviors and how they are influenced by various biopsychosocial factors. This class will focus on alcohol use, along with adolescent self-injury and suicide. We will conclude our sessions on high-risk behaviors by looking at drug use in adolescence.

Required Readings:
1) Greydanus D. and Shek D. “Deliberate Self-harm and Suicide in Adolescents” (posted)


3) Epidemiology of Adolescent Alcohol Abuse article (posted).

4) Hall W. and Degenhardt L. “Adverse health effects of non-medical cannabis use” (posted)

**Session 13: Risk and Resilience, Conclusion**

**Response Paper #10 due**

In this session, we will examine why it is that some children grow up in adverse circumstances and still have a relatively positive psychological outcome. What allows some individuals to engage in high risk behaviors and to learn from them, while others fall victim to psychopathology? We will explore the concept of resilience, and focus on protective factors that contribute to the development of resilience in an individual, particularly in the face of genetic or environmental risk factors. Furthermore, we will consider how the concepts of risk and resilience impact later development and the transition to adulthood.

Required Readings:
1) **TBD**

2) Guerra N. and Bradshaw C. “Linking the Prevention of Problem Behaviors and Positive Youth Development: Core Competencies for Positive Youth Development and Risk Prevention” (posted)

**Session 14: Final Exam and Oral presentation**

For the final assignment, students will be broken up into groups of about three students each, and conduct a short in-class debate on pre-determined topics. Topics will be given out 2-3 weeks beforehand, and the entire class will have the opportunity to participate in each topic discussed. Each student is required to participate in the oral presentation. The final exam is optional for those who miss NO MORE THAN ONE class total this semester.