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It is difficult to top a classic work. Thirteen years ago, Charles Corr and David Balk edited a volume, the *Handbook of Adolescent Death and Bereavement*, which quickly became the standard text on adolescence and death. Few books matched either its breadth or its depth.

Yet, lightning does strike twice. In *Adolescent Encounters With Death, Bereavement, and Coping*, Balk and Corr again have edited a book that will set the direction of the field for yet another decade.

*Adolescent Encounters With Death, Bereavement, and Coping* breaks new ground in many ways. Some of these chapters highlight changes in adolescent experience since the first book was conceived. For example, Carla J. Sofka’s chapter, “Adolescents, Technology, and the Internet: Coping With Loss in the Digital World,” reflects on the wide-ranging use that adolescents now make of the Internet as they cope with loss and grief. Craig Demmer’s chapter on HIV/AIDS encounters another, much more difficult reality, the number of adolescents throughout the world who have developed HIV infection, died of AIDS, or have been orphaned by the disease—the infected and affected.

Other chapters, among them chapters dealing with humor about death in adolescence, ethical issues, and therapy with adolescents experiencing prolonged grief, add new depth and insight on areas seldom explored as an aspect of adolescence. Taken together, all the chapters reaffirm another critical aspect of thanatology—the value of its multidisciplinary character. The authors here view adolescence and death from a variety of perspectives—including sociology, psychology, education, family studies, social work, nursing, philosophy, and anthropology—as well as from a number of different cultures. The result is a rich tapestry where every chapter makes a unique contribution while leaving the book as a whole strengthened by these varied voices.

Thematically the book makes some critical points. The first is that adolescents do encounter death in their journeys to adulthood. It is an inherent aspect of adolescence. Identity, independence, and intimacy
are often considered the three Is of adolescent development. Yet, death is the ultimate challenge to each of these processes—the end of intimacy, the obliteration of identity, the demise of independence. If adolescence is the time during which one begins to recognize that one is unique, death becomes the ultimate threat. Mortality reminds one that the cost of uniqueness is finitude. While the very present orientation of adolescence and the invulnerability that arises from the emerging strength and mastery found in that period protect against the threat of death, it remains, emerging in the humor, song, games, films, and even books such as *The Outsiders*, which resonate with adolescence.

Death exists not only as a developmental recognition. It is an ongoing reality in the lives of adolescents. Parents and siblings sometimes die. Adolescents live with and sometimes die from life-threatening illnesses. Many of these deaths—by accidents, suicide, or homicide—are both sudden and deeply traumatic, complicating grief. Many adolescent losses, such as the deaths of friends and celebrities, can be disenfranchised, ignored by others. Death, these authors reaffirm, is not something just out there on the developmental horizon; it is also in here, a present, often unrecognized event that adolescents encounter.

While adolescents do encounter death, they cope with it using all their developmental strengths and resources. They find community with one another—even in an increasing digital world. Yet, the authors of these chapters, while acknowledging the adolescent’s considerable assets, assert that caregivers have much that they can offer. Education, support groups, therapy, and grief camps can all add to the ability of adolescents to cope with loss. Camps and support groups, for example, build on the strong peer ties that are so critical to adolescents—creating communities where they can both take and offer support and solidarity.

The very nature of that support, as well as the inherent volatility and vitality of adolescence, takes a toll on the adult caregivers who so critically assist the adolescent coping with death. The editors were especially wise to end their work with a chapter focusing on caregiver fatigue.

Caregivers now have one more resource in their arsenal as they assist adolescents in coping with death, loss, grief, and bereavement. They now can count on this book, *Adolescent Encounters With Death, Bereavement, and Coping*, for insight and intervention.

*Kenneth J. Doka, PhD*

*Professor, The Graduate School, The College of New Rochelle*

*Senior Consultant, The Hospice Foundation of America*
Adolescent encounters with death and bereavement, as well as efforts by adolescents to cope with these encounters, frequently do not receive full-scale exploration. There are many reasons for this deficiency. All too often, these encounters are subsumed into examinations of childhood experiences, without taking into account the distinctive qualities of adolescent life. In addition, while many investigators have recognized that adolescence in general is a healthy time of life, one in which its members have escaped the problems of early childhood but have not lived long enough to face the problems of adulthood, they have incorrectly concluded that death-related encounters during adolescence occur only in small and insignificant numbers with little impact on the lives of the adolescents involved.

We believe there is need for a robust focus on death, bereavement, and coping during adolescence in its own right. Such a focus needs to include, but go beyond, investigations of familiar topics, such as suicide, HIV/AIDS, and parental or sibling bereavement during the adolescent years. We offer this book as part of a new effort to provide a broad resource to guide care providers, such as nurses, counselors, social workers, educators, and clergy, who seek to understand and help adolescents as they attempt to cope with death-related issues.

Writing separately and together, we have attempted over the years to contribute to the literature on these topics. One or both of us has also edited two prior books in this subject area. The first book devoted to a comprehensive survey of interactions between adolescents and death-related issues, Adolescence and Death (Springer Publishing Company, 1986), was edited by Charles A. Corr and Joan N. McNeil. Ten years later, that was followed by our coedited book, Handbook of Adolescent Death and Bereavement (Springer Publishing Company, 1996).

We agreed to undertake a third book in this field, the one you now hold in your hands, because we recognized that a great deal has transpired
since the 1980s and 1990s in terms of theoretical understandings, research advances, and clinical management. For example, much has been learned about complicated bereavement in recent years. In addition, imaginative conceptual frameworks and models have appeared on the scene, such as the dual process model for understanding loss, ideas about assumptive worlds, debates about the benefits or potential harm of grief counseling with the normally bereaved, efforts to bridge the gap separating researchers and practitioners, and stimulating essays about recovery and resilience following bereavement.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September of 2001 changed the world in many ways. Compelling events of many types followed, such as conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq; genocide and ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe and Darfur; violent rites of passage into adulthood; epidemics of HIV infection among many third world adolescents and young adults; heightened environmental concerns about global warming and various forms of natural disasters; and the ongoing burdens of disease, poverty, and malnutrition on populations. There also has been the exponential spread of the Internet. We now live in Marshall McCLuhan's worldwide media village, but with consequences that it is doubtful McCLuhan had forecast.

Closer to home, the need for increased understanding of cultural diversity has become the norm within thanatological scholarship, as well as in the everyday practice of professionals (for instance, teachers, nurses, counselors, and other care providers) who come into contact with adolescents coping with death and bereavement.

We approached the best experts in their respective fields as contributors to this book. In so doing, we emphasized that their chapters should make every effort to synthesize contemporary scholarship and examine topics with more than mainstream American culture in mind. The contributing authors come from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, as well as from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, psychology, education, family studies, social work, nursing, medicine, philosophy, and anthropology. Coverage includes a focus on differences in socioeconomic class, ethnic/racial identity, family composition, and the influence of coping with death and bereavement on adulthood sequelae.

As these contributors delivered their manuscripts to us, we were delighted to realize that we ourselves were learning new lessons about death, bereavement, and coping in the dynamic worlds of adolescents. New evidence, scholarly research, exciting interpretations, and practical
insights came together in important ways. As a result, we believe *Adolescent Encounters With Death, Bereavement, and Coping* provides an overarching framework for understanding these topics, offers persuasive syntheses of specific areas of inquiry, and initiates scholarly discussion on subjects not previously examined. We trust you will share our judgment once you have had an opportunity to examine the contents of this book.

*David E. Balk*

*Charles A. Corr*
The three chapters in part I provide essential background for all understandings of adolescent encounters with death, bereavement, and coping. In chapter 1, David Balk addresses the many changes occurring in early, middle, and late adolescence as individuals move from childhood to adulthood. In particular, these relate to the developmental challenges and tasks that are critical in each adolescent’s quest to establish a distinct and stable identity, one that will serve the person well into his or her future. Balk brings out, on the one hand, the many dimensions of adolescent life—cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions—and, on the other hand, the critical relationships through which adolescents engage with themselves, others, and the external world.

In chapter 2, Jane Ribbens McCarthy draws attention to processes involved in making meaning when adolescents encounter death and other types of major losses. These events do not merely “happen to” adolescents, as if that was all there was to it. In fact, finding or making meaning is central to the processes through which adolescents engage in “making sense of” or “finding a purpose through” their losses. Culture and context are key variables in these processes, which are affected by obvious material inequities and inequalities of power, as adolescents around the world “frame” or interpret their experiences.
Finally, in chapter 3 Alicia Skinner Cook examines ethical and methodological issues that arise when scholars and researchers seek to explore various aspects of bereavement and grief during the adolescent years. Cook shows why it is crucial to study adolescent grief experiences. She also recommends including adolescents in sound empirical research, even as she takes note of both the benefits and risks that must be faced in such explorations. Cook insists on attention to the unique circumstances of the adolescent’s global situation and takes note of the emerging importance of the cyberworld in this type of research. That leads to the underlying key point in her argument: the need to avoid treating bereaved adolescents as subjects and to engage them, instead, as partners in describing and helping to understand their own experiences.

A basic lesson that reappears throughout these and subsequent chapters in this book is the need to listen actively and carefully to each adolescent as he or she shares descriptions and explanations of his or her experiences.
Existential phenomenology has proposed that human existence involves relationships to oneself, to others, and to the external world (Attig, 1996; May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958). Separately, researchers into adolescence and proponents of the hospice philosophy have argued that being human involves cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions (Balk, 2007; Corless & Nicholas, 2003; Corr, 2007). Both the three-fold schema from existential phenomenology and the holistic template informing hospice care provide important conceptual frameworks for understanding adolescence, death, and bereavement.

In this chapter, these two frameworks are the conceptual scaffolding for examining central topics in the lives of adolescents who encounter death and bereavement. The overarching perspective, is that the self, what Leighton (1959, p. 16) called “the acting of a person considered as a living, self-integrating unit,” is the unifying and coherent assumption behind all these comments. Presented visually (see Figure 1.1), our argument has the holistic template nested within the three relationships from existential phenomenology and all of these ideas contained within the “living, self-integrating unit” of individuality we call the self.
EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ONESELF

A compelling task our society imposes on adolescents is to fashion stable, mature identities. According to Erikson (1968), the search for identity is the hallmark of adolescent psychosocial development. Forging a stable, mature identity cannot take place apart from expectations to master certain marks of maturity, sometimes called developmental transitions. Among these transitions are psychosocial expectations to gain increasing skill in maintaining intimate relationships and to decide on a career. It takes little imagination to see the connection between these transitions and the existential phenomenologists’ emphasis on relationships with others and with the external world.

EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

Developmental phases within adolescence only accord with chronological age as broad and rough generalizations: Typically, it is thought that early adolescence begins with puberty (as early as age 10 in many
cases) and lasts until about age 14, middle adolescence lasts from ages 15–17, and late adolescence ranges from ages 18–23. In each of these phases, adolescents (at least those in westernized, developed countries) face distinctive tasks and conflicts (see Table 1.1) vis-à-vis other persons.

As individuals mature from early adolescence through later adolescence (Blos, 1979) they typically gain increasing skill in understanding the points of view of others. This growth in interpersonal maturity occurs in the midst of a maddening preoccupation with self that borders on solipsism in the early and middle adolescent years (Elkind, 1967): Adolescents seem convinced that they are the center of everyone else’s thoughts, overreact to what others say or do, and consider that no one can understand how special they really are. An influence that alters this solipsistic preoccupation is relationships with peers, who can (a) disabuse each other of self-centeredness, (b) provide sources of support and understanding, and (c) foster empathy and love (Ladd, 2005; Parker & Gottman, 1989; Sullivan, 1953).

### Table 1.1

**Tasks and Conflicts for Adolescents by Maturational Phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>11–14</td>
<td>Emotional separation from parents</td>
<td>Separation versus reunion (abandonment vs. safety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>14–17</td>
<td>Competency/mastery/control</td>
<td>Independence versus dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>17–21</td>
<td>Intimacy and commitment</td>
<td>Closeness versus distance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EXTERNAL WORLD

Deciding what to do to earn a living is a major developmental transition imposed by society on adolescents. Persons in later adolescence who don’t know what they want to do feel anxious. Some are simply late bloomers yet to have their imaginations captured by the appeal of a career or vocation. Some are adrift and remain so through their adult lives. There is a fundamental link between self-concept and occupational choice (Super, 1957), and later adolescents and young adults adrift about what career choices fit them provide clear examples of persons with marred relationships vis-à-vis self and the external world.

THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: COGNITIVE ASPECTS

The cognitive revolution in psychology, exemplified in such different approaches as Bandura’s social learning theory and self-efficacy ideas (1977, 1997), Beck’s cognitive therapy strategies with emotional disorders (Beck, 1976), Kelly’s personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), and the analysis of decision making by Janis and Mann (1977), set the stage in psychology for today’s almost unquestioned acceptance of constructivism as the paradigm for explaining human learning and adaptation to stress. Neimeyer (e.g., 2001) is the major figure within thanatology who has championed constructivism.

For years scholars have accepted Piaget’s (1929) description of cognitive development moving from preoperational to formal operational thinking. These notions still inform many within human development circles and within thanatology as well. While acknowledging the contributions that Piaget’s model gave to considering the dynamism involved in an individual’s forming increasingly complex comprehensions of reality, advances have been made that also need to be accommodated into our schemas of how our minds change over time.

According to Piaget, cognitive development culminates in formal operations. Clearly, evidence gained about lack of self-reflection suggests that concrete operations remain the norm for many into adulthood (Josselson, 1996; Shain & Farber, 1989). And yet there is striking verification gained in both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies of 18- to 23-year-old college students that the experience of a university education leads college seniors to think critically in ways that surpass how they reasoned when freshmen (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
These gains in critical thinking are not restricted to college students. Skilled craftsmen (male and female) reason about their work in ways that clearly demonstrate abstract thinking; for example, in working on and designing engines, in imagining spatial relations, and in fabricating fine arts (Crawford, 2006). Shifts from concrete to formal operations have been invoked to explain the increasing realization within middle adolescence of the ambiguity of the social world (Adelson, 1971).

Two major advances in considering changes in cognition during adolescence involve (a) research on brain imaging and (b) research on subtle shifts in college students’ reasoning. Magnetic resonance imaging has disclosed both structural and functional changes in the brains of adolescents (Giedd, 2004). These changes involve both neuroanatomy and neurophysiology and manifest themselves as “significant improvements in cognitive processing speed” and as vivid advances “in the development of executive functions including abstract thought, organization, decision making and planning, and response inhibition” (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007, p. 251; see also Whitford et al., 2006). These developments in brain structure and functioning become crucial in other aspects of adolescent growth, such as emotional understanding and interpersonal skill: As they mature cognitively, adolescents gain skills in metacognition, empathic understanding, and role taking.

A Harvard University educational psychologist gathered data from hundreds of students about how they reason (Perry, 1970). The picture that emerged is of movement from simplistic dualism through more complicated relativism to mature, committed relativism.

In their early years in college, students typically understand reality in terms of opposite values: right/wrong or good/bad, for instance. Dualists have a penchant for facts, and have trouble synthesizing competing points of view. Interested in facts, dualists do not consider that shades of meaning exist. They believe that facts are true or false and understand answers to be correct or incorrect. Rather than a changing, evolving body of understanding, knowledge for dualists is stable, unchanging, and true. Connections between ideas are difficult for dualists to comprehend; combining disparate information to form theories is beyond their capacity.

Relativists have reached more advanced intellectual development than dualists. Relativists engage in a more critical, skeptical approach to claims about truth and to claims based on authority. They expect that evidence will support claims. They appreciate that several sides can exist to a story and that alternative points of view compete for allegiance. Relativists appreciate that some ideas explain reality more adequately
than other ideas. But they also accept that all ideas are open to revision. Relativists can synthesize information to form theories, and they do more than engage in rote memorization of unconnected facts. They apply and analyze the connections between ideas and facts. They see no basis for choosing one position over another. While convinced that relativism is correct, they can show the subtlety of arguments for and against an issue and can compare competing points of view. However, they make no commitment to a position other than relativism.

Committed relativists have achieved a level of cognitive development beyond that of relativism. They can compare competing points of view. They choose positions based upon evidence and reasoning. Unlike dualists, committed relativists see the ambiguity in knowledge and the need to remain open to new information. Unlike relativists, committed relativists weigh evidence and choose a position. They take provisional stands and remain open to revising their views should new information enter the picture.

THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: EMOTIONAL ASPECTS

Individuals typically gain increased emotional competence in their movement from early through later adolescence. In part these gains manifest themselves in self-referent attributions such as self-efficacy, shame, and pride (Reimer, 1996), and in other-directed responses such as sympathy and empathy (Barnett & McCoy, 1989). Increased emotional competence comes from the adolescent’s mounting emotional lexicon, growing skill in managing emotional expressiveness, and responsiveness to the emotionality of others (Saarni, 2007). Again, the influence of brain changes allowing for metacognitions can be seen.

Emotional competence also occurs due to social influences, underscoring the interrelatedness of the holistic aspects illustrated in Figure 1.1. During adolescence the social context for emotional development expands increasingly beyond the family to include peers, teachers, school environments, and the media (radio, TV, the Internet, and films) (Balk, 1995; Cottrell, 2007; Larson & Richards, 1991).

Individual differences in temperament and character also contribute to the development of emotional competence. Attributions the adolescent makes about (a) the controllability of events, “the extent to which volitional control over an outcome could be exercised” (Reimer, 1996, p. 331), and about (b) the locus of causality, “factors within the person
vs. factors within the environment” (Reimer, 1996, p. 331), provide significant influences for adolescents in parsing emotional understanding of and reactions to experiences.

**THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS**

Adolescents engage increasingly in actions outside the supervision of parents, and this behavior signaling growing autonomy is fully expected: We count on adolescents to exercise increasing competency as reliable and trustworthy members of society. How would adolescents master the developmental tasks of forming autonomous identities and of entering into mutually satisfying, intimate relations if not allowed freedom to act beyond close parental supervision? Of course, the groundwork for such adolescent explorations has been established in early and ongoing parent–child relations whereby parents gradually shape independence and guide their children. Consider this example: One understands the anxiety of a parent whose 2-year-old daughter is missing in a large department store but also understands the full willingness of a parent to allow a 17-year-old daughter to shop on her own.

Whereas children’s behaviors are marked primarily by physical activity, adolescents’ behaviors show a distinct “decline in physical activity” (Hills, King, & Armstrong, 2007, p. 37). Evidence that sedentary behaviors are becoming pronounced during childhood has led to growing concerns that adolescent obesity will rise and become a continuing health risk, perhaps even contributing to a decline in life expectancy for whole generations.

Two categories of behavior have been employed traditionally to differentiate typical male and female adolescent behavior: externalizing versus internalizing behaviors. Externalizing behaviors are actions clearly visible and noticeable by others; internalizing behaviors are self-reflective thoughts known to the person thinking them and only to others if the person discloses them. How these two categories of behaviors are often applied is in differentiating girls’ and boys’ responses to distressing experiences: Boys act out in such ways as aggression and property destruction, while girls turn inward with self-accusatory thoughts (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007).

This externalizing-internalizing dichotomy may be too neat and simple. There are many more opportunities these days for girls to engage in physical activities such as sports, and it is too simple to think
that adolescent males are insensitive troglodytes who never engage in self-reflection. Surely in one arena (expression of emotions) the opposite of this externalizing-internalizing dichotomy seems the norm: Girls are much more likely to express their emotions publicly, whereas boys are much more likely to turn inward and be reflective. Yet on the whole it has been noted that bereaved males are more likely than females to do something active (externalizing behavior) (Martin & Doka, 2000).

**THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: PHYSICAL ASPECTS**

What principally demarcates adolescence from childhood are the physical changes of primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Primary sexual characteristics for females involve the ability to conceive, and for males the ability to impregnate a female. Secondary sexual characteristics are more or less physically noticeable: Breast development in girls and menstruation would be chief examples, as well as growth in height and in weight and in pubic hair development; growth in height, changes in voice timbre, facial and pubic hair development, and genital development would be the chief examples of secondary sexual characteristics in boys. A system for assessing sexual maturity divides levels of sexual maturity into five grades according to the extent to which secondary sexual characteristics have matured (Tanner, 1962).

Many studies have examined the short-term and long-term consequences for male and for female adolescents whose sexual maturation occurs on time, early, or late (Brooks-Gunn, 1987; Nishina, Ammon, Bellmore, & Graham, 2006; Peskin, 1967; Petersen, 1983; Tobin-Richards, Boxer, & Petersen, 1983). There have been some shifts in the cohort effects associated with the timing of sexual maturation. First, findings up into the 1990s will be covered.

Evidence into the middle 1990s indicated that early maturing boys gain a lasting psychological and social edge over on-time and later maturing peers in terms of self-confidence, independence, and attractiveness to others. On-time boys were seen as less attractive than early matures and more attractive than late maturing boys. However, late maturing boys eventually demonstrated social and internal competencies such as willingness to explore options not seen in on-time or early maturing boys. Early maturing girls experienced considerable personal and social distress; their self-concepts suffered as the girls compared their increases in weight and body fat to the societal ideal of thin females. Early maturing
girls looked older than their actual age, and older adolescent boys showed interest in them beyond the girls’ social skill or emotional development. On-time girls had more positive body images and perceived they were more attractive to others than did early and late maturing girls. Late maturing girls were seen to be at the greatest social disadvantage: delays in puberty created barriers causing late maturing girls to lose social prestige and to adjust poorly. By the end of high school, early maturing girls were considered to be the most socially and intrapersonally advanced of all the girls: The early onset of puberty had forced them to find internal and social resources for dealing with adults and peers (Balk, 1995).

Recent research with an ethnically diverse sample of early adolescent boys and girls, as well as another study with early adolescent boys (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Nishina et al., 2006), found that early maturing boys were dissatisfied with their body images and had adjustment difficulties: many felt overweight and rather than being admired by peers were targets for social abuse. Furthermore, these early maturing boys engaged in activities to lose weight and develop muscle. Late maturing boys were concerned about being underweight and underdeveloped. In all cases, the issues of appearance mattered greatly, and given early adolescents’ tendency toward the imaginary audience and the personal fable (Elkind, 1967), one can see the psychological difficulties for boys dissatisfied with their body image. Early maturing boys who actually were overweight and dissatisfied with their bodies were likely to be targeted by peers for teasing and bullying. It was not clear if the boys’ self-consciousness gave off cues that elicited harassment from peers, and the researchers noted that peer aggravation of early maturing boys was “somewhat surprising because developing faster may have been expected to be protective for boys” (Nishina et al., 2006, p. 199).

Early maturing girls were still considered to experience the same short-term psychological disadvantages as had early maturing girls in previous cohorts. The social value of thinness in females presented stark contrast to the actual physical developments early maturing girls saw reflected in their bodies. However, because early maturing girls appeared older than they were, when moving from a middle school to a high school they were buffered from being victimized by older high school students (Nishina et al., 2006). Nothing was mentioned about social pressures from older boys and girls for which early maturing girls had not developed socioemotional competency. However, unlike what had been found in former research, physical development more mature than seen in same-aged peers protected the early maturing girl from being teased and bullied.
Outcomes of girls’ dissatisfactions with their body images were the same regardless of the ethnic background of the girls: If dissatisfied, the girl felt depressed. African American females expressed more body satisfaction and more positive perceptions of their weight than did girls in other ethnic groups (White, Latina, and Asian). Across all the ethnic groups, there were more similarities than differences in boys’ reactions to the onset of puberty (Nishina et al., 2006).

The hormonal changes that produce primary and secondary sexual characteristics traditionally are invoked to assert that adolescence is a time of conflict, storm, and stress (Hall, 1904). Depicting adolescence as a time of upheaval was furthered by psychoanalysts who maintained that abnormal psychology was so characteristic of adolescents that distinctions between normality and pathology in adolescence would be difficult to determine. Indeed, Anna Freud remarked that the one thing normal about adolescence is abnormality (Freud, 1971). This depiction of the impulsive and tumultuous adolescent has retained a strong staying power despite longitudinal and cross-sectional evidence that the great majority of adolescents experience their adolescent years as a time of relative calm and stability, and that only a minority of youths experience adolescence as a time of turmoil (Bandura, 1980; Offer, 1969; Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1977).

Developing a sexual identity is an important challenge for adolescents. This challenge is part of the overarching demand to form a stable sense of self, as well as to form lasting, intimate relationships. There is abundant anecdotal evidence that American culture (as well as most other cultures) holds forth heterosexual identity as the norm; empirical estimates indicate that same-sex orientation is the norm for approximately at least 10%–12% of the human population (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Sell, Wells, & Wypij, 1995).

**THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS**

Advances in social development occur during the adolescent years. Social development fits well with the developmental task of entering into and maintaining intimate friendships, as well as with existential phenomenology’s emphasis on the centrality of relations with others.

Part of adolescent social development involves advances in reasoning about social situations. Such reasoning is an outgrowth of more nuanced perspective taking about social reality that marks adolescent cognitive
development as well as increased opportunities during adolescence to engage in diverse experiences (Kohlberg, 1969).

Kohlberg (1971) analyzed 25 aspects he considered present in all societies as (a) how individuals reason about what is the moral thing to do when presented with a dilemma and (b) how to assess the stage of development of a person’s moral reasoning. He developed criteria for determining which aspect(s) a person is using when reasoning about a situation. He said all the aspects reduce to principles about justice. To assess developments in reasoning about social situations, Kohlberg wrote vignettes with dilemmas and asked research participants what is the moral thing to do.

He analyzed answers to the moral dilemmas and said they fell into one of six stages of moral reasoning, with more advanced reasoning evident as one moved up the stages. Females produced answers that Kohlberg considered less advanced than answers from males, and at one point he concluded females could not reason beyond the middle stages in his model. A multiyear longitudinal study with males from various socioeconomic conditions produced results that Kohlberg said indicated gradual advances over time in moral reasoning so that by age 22 most participants were in or in transition to stage 4 of his moral reasoning scheme (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983).

Gilligan (1977) challenged Kohlberg’s approach because she said it presented hypothetical rather than real dilemmas. She also argued that the scoring criteria for determining stages of moral reasoning were fundamentally unfair to and inappropriate for assessing how females assess social situations. According to Gilligan (1982), females are much more inclined than are males to examine the interpersonal or relational aspects in a social situation, not the justice aspects. Gilligan maintained that Kohlberg’s scheme is insensitive to the feminine perspective on moral reasoning and biased against them. There is no doubt that Gilligan’s analysis struck a positive chord with many women.

Walker (1989) compared Kohlberg’s and Gilligan’s perspectives in a 2-year longitudinal study including 240 persons from 80 family triads (mother, father, child). The 80 children in the study varied in age from 6 to 16 at the start of the study, and 97% of the 240 participants stayed in the research for the full 2 years. Walker used three of Kohlberg’s hypothetical dilemmas and asked all participants to select and review a dilemma from their own lives. When analyzing responses Walker used separate scoring schemes developed by Kohlberg and by Gilligan. Rather than there being a perspective favored by males and another
perspective favored by females, Walker found that persons used both perspectives.

It would be a worthwhile project to examine the social reasoning of dying and of bereaved adolescents: devise social dilemmas involving death and bereavement, as well as ask the adolescents to select and review a dilemma of their own, and then examine responses in light of the scoring schemes devised by Kohlberg and by Gilligan. If done longitudinally with both bereaved and nonbereaved adolescents matched for age, gender, and other relevant social factors, and if valid measures of grief were obtained, one could assess whether over time bereaved adolescents’ moral reasoning differs from the moral reasoning of nonaffected peers. One study of sibling death during adolescence that measured self-concept dimensions found that bereaved adolescents had responses about morals that were one standard deviation higher than the scores of the norm groups on which the measure had been standardized (Balk, 1983).

During adolescence individuals usually gain increasing skill in social perspective taking (sometimes called interpersonal understanding). A model of the growing complexity in social perspective taking presents five levels of qualitatively distinct and increasingly more intricate types of interpersonal understanding (Selman, 1980). This model has many features similar to Kohlberg’s model of moral reasoning. The model allows researchers to understand what adolescents understand about such interpersonal issues as trust, jealousy, reciprocity, and conflict resolution.

Family relations and interactions play a significant part in the activity and the formation of the self. However, Harris (1995, 2002) challenged assertions about parental influence on children’s development, asserting that parents exert minimal influence on the development of children and adolescents outside the home. Most research focus in human development has documented how parents do make a difference not only for children but also for adolescents (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003).

Longitudinal studies of parentally bereaved children and adolescents (Haine, Wolchik, Sandler, Millsap, & Ayers, 2006; Sandler et al., 2003; Worden, 1996) have provided persuasive empirical evidence that the major difference in outcomes for children and adolescents is positive parenting. Caregiver warmth and consistent discipline characterize positive parenting: Attentive listening and emotional acceptance are indicators of a parent’s caregiver warmth; setting and enforcing limits and being fair
are indicators of consistent discipline. In a study of sibling bereavement during adolescence, a key aspect that differentiated emotional responses of the adolescents was the level of positive communication and the extent of emotional closeness between family members (Balk, 1983).

THE HOLISTIC TEMPLATE: SPIRITUAL ASPECTS

While recently there has been more attention paid to spirituality and adolescent development, contemporary literature reviews (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Boyatzis, 2003) estimate that at most 1% of all scholarly articles have addressed the spiritual development of adolescents. Given the drive during adolescence for finding meaning, establishing relationships, and moving “beyond concrete childhood impressions of religion to reflect on issues and concepts that are embedded in existential and transcendental realms” (Markstrom, 1999, p. 205), this scholarly neglect is puzzling. One likely reason for the neglect is the embarrassment or awkwardness—in some cases, contempt and hostility—that empirical scientists feel toward spirituality and religion.

What is meant by the term spirituality is not an easy matter to settle. Bregman (2006) noted that the term is elusive, with numerous meanings described as “glow words” hiding a fundamental confusion. Bregman claimed to have found 92 definitions for spirituality. These 92 definitions have resulted from strains that secularism places on accepting religion: Spirituality is differentiated from religion, so that a person can speak of being spiritual without being religious. On the whole, these many definitions of spirituality refer to seeking meaning, connections with transcendence, and purpose.

Applied developmental scientists who have examined adolescence and spirituality consider that religion and spirituality interact with one another as complex, multidimensional constructs (Benson, 2004). They look for the social spheres within which religion and spirituality take shape for adolescents, and they consider simplistic definitions of the terms of no help in learning the impact they have on adolescents. As an example, one dissertation examined the spiritual development of modern Orthodox Jewish middle adolescent girls (Weiss, 2007); the author found each person influenced deeply by socially embedded themes, among them, music, tragedy in the lives of the Jews, and the State of Israel. As another example, a study of intimate conversations between later adolescents and their mothers examined “personal religious and
spiritual beliefs and practices” (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008, p. 62); attachment, relationship satisfaction, and disclosure in general between the adolescents and their mothers emerged in analysis of results, and the researchers noted that spiritual disclosure enriched the maternal-adolescent bonds.

Fowler (1981) produced a model of spiritual development over the life span. This model is based on the search for meaning and identity, a search considered at the core of human existence (Campbell, 1949; Erikson, 1968). Fowler acknowledges his indebtedness to three main figures who have impacted thinking about human development: Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg. Fowler’s model of spiritual development, which he terms “stages of faith consciousness,” is closely modeled on the stages of development found in the writings of these three men. Fowler proposed that faith consciousness moves from an undifferentiated impulse to establish meaning to an outcome of “universalizing faith” that few persons achieve (no one under the age of 60 in Fowler’s research participants had reached this final stage of faith consciousness). The two stages of faith consciousness typical of adolescence are (a) “a synthetic-conventional faith” in which early adolescents encounter people from a variety of backgrounds and make accommodations to their understanding about what to believe and about what commitments are worthwhile, and (b) “an individuative-reflective faith” in which later adolescents engage in what Perry (1970) would call committed relativism—in this case, the adolescents make conscious, examined choices from alternatives and decide on roles and responsibilities to adopt in life. This movement in faith consciousness links both to Perry’s views on cognitive development and to the developmental tasks of deciding on a career and forming an autonomous, stable identity.

SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The three-fold relations fundamental to human existence and the multiple dimensions holism presents about human existence provide overarching frameworks for understanding adolescent encounters with death and bereavement. The conceptual scaffolding provided by existential phenomenology and by holism provides an organizing scheme for understanding the backstory to these encounters. The backstory is the expectation that adolescents will accomplish certain developmental tasks and make the transition to mature young adulthood.

Encounters with death and bereavement in adolescence, though more common than many persons realize, are not central to adolescence.
When such encounters do occur, they do so within the milieu of the individual's ongoing development. That milieu is the backstory influencing how adolescents respond to death and bereavement. Within the backstory are detailed means to gauge the cascading effects that death and bereavement have on adolescents. Within the backstory are foci for determining growth through crisis, resiliency in the face of misfortune, and problems in coping with the pressing life events that are part and parcel of an adolescent's encounter with death and bereavement.

REFERENCES


