The New Adolescence: Ideas, Inspiration, Information for Youth Services Librarians

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Starting Points

- Themes from my book
- Subsequent research
A few notes about scholarly work

- Basic v. applied research
- Empirical v. critical research
- Literature review
- Translational research
- Think pieces
A Short Introduction to Adolescence
Adolescents and Adolescence

- Adolescence, defined: “the transition between childhood and adult life” (Bright Futures, 231)

- Adolescence v. puberty, adolescence and puberty ...

- Age range
  - “Teens, aged 12-18” (About YALSA)
  - 11-21 (Bright Futures, 231)
  - Puberty as young as 8, brain development as old as 25 (Giedd)
Dahl’s “Paradox of Adolescence”

- Defined: High morbidity and mortality rates despite physical health

- Sample statistics
  - Teens 15-19 years old die most often because of
    - Accidents
    - Homicide
    - Suicide (CDC Fast Stats 2010)
  - 20 percent of U.S. teens are obese (CDC Fast Stats 2011-12)
Adolescents in America

- Approximately 40 million teens in the U.S. (2)
- Nearly 20% of U.S. young people are “immigrants or children of immigrants” (2).
- Slightly more than 20% of U.S. young people live in poverty (2).
- “Children of mixed race grew at a faster rate than any other group over the past decade, increasing by 46%” (2).

-- YALSA’s Future of Teen Services report
Adolescents and Libraries

- Historically, a relationship with ups and downs
- Recent public opinion focuses on libraries’ ability to limit teen misbehavior (Long Overdue)
- Usage is mixed: 25% of public library users, 72% have been at least once; 62% of schools provide libraries to young people (YALSA’s Future of Library Services, 1)
The Teen Brain
Jay Giedd: “The teen brain isn’t broken…. It’s different.”

- Maturation takes place slowly & affects young men and women differently
- Maturing brains exhibit two mechanisms: connections and specialization
- Specialization prevails after adolescence; actual use creates specializations
- Context affects teen decision making
- It’s not the hormones ...

-- NIMH, 2014
The take-away

- Developmental schemas articulated by Freud, Piaget, et al., are history

- Knowledge about the new developmental paradigm is very much still in development
Teens & Media & Technology
Two Much Noted Concepts

- Digital natives
  - 2001: Prensky

- Digital addiction
  - 1995: Ivan Goldberg coins the term as satire
Internet Addictive Disorder (IAD)
Diagnostic Criteria

A maladaptive pattern of Internet use, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as manifested by three (or more) of the following, occurring at any time in the same 12-month period:

(I) tolerance, as defined by either of the following:

(A) A need for markedly increased amounts of time on Internet to achieve satisfaction
(B) markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of time on Internet

(II) withdrawal, as manifested by either A or B below

(A) the characteristic withdrawal syndrome, 1, 2 and 3 below

(1) Cessation of (or reduction) in Internet use that has been heavy and prolonged.

(2) Two (or more) of the following, developing within several days to a month after Criterion 1:

(a) psychomotor agitation
(b) anxiety
(c) obsessive thinking about what is happening on the Internet
(d) fantasies or dreams about the Internet
(e) voluntary or involuntary typing movements of the fingers

(3) The symptoms in Criterion 2 cause distress or impairment in social, occupational or another important area of functioning

(B) Use of Internet or a similar on-line service is engaged in to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms

(III) Internet is often accessed more often or for longer periods of time than was intended

(IV) There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control Internet use
What We Know About Teens & Technology

- In 2012, nearly all teens reported daily television viewing

- U.S. teens and technology use: 9 hours daily
  - Cell phones a dominant tool
  - Videos a dominant medium/content
  - This doesn’t include school and homework ....

- Media effects
  - Giedd: media expands “the world of peers”
  - Jane Brown: media as “super peer”

-- CommonSense Media, Pew, NCHS Data Brief
danah boyd on networked publics

- Persistence: “durability of online expression”
- Visibility: “potential audience”
- Spreadability: sharing
- Searchability: “ability to find content”

-- It’s Complicated, 11
“The importance of friends in social and moral development is well documented. But the fears that surround teens’ use of social media overlook this fundamental desire for social connection” (17).

“Taken out of context, what teens appear to do and say on social media seems peculiar if not outright problematic” (30), and “The context of social media sites is socially constructed” (39).

“Social media ... is a release valve, allowing youth to reclaim meaningful sociality as a tool for managing the pressures and limitations around them” (95).

“Technology makes the struggles youth face visible, but it neither creates nor prevents harmful things .... It simply mirrors and magnifies many aspects of everyday life, good and bad” (212).
A Contrasting Perspective

  - “Many parents are quite unaware of the kind of social and cultural worlds young people are creating online.”
  - “The nature and norms of these cultures can be very much influenced by adult rules, regulations, & participatory monitoring.”
  - “None of the developmental issues raised is unique to the Internet” (760).
“Being a fan is so much a part of young life right now.”

-Sarah Urist Green
NerdCon: Stories

- 2015 convention organized by Hank Green and others
- “All stories matter”

Themes:
- Multiple modes of storytelling
- Teens as media creators
- Continuing education in privacy and self-protection
The Take Away

- There’s a lot of popular terminology without an empirical basis.

- Advocates can demonstrate instances of teens’ positive, productive, “pro-social” online behaviors; scholars can demonstrate what goes wrong.

- Inclusive approaches to collecting media are best from a developmental standpoint.

- Allie’s observation: teen social media use doesn’t mean they know the library is online.
Sex and Sexuality
Some Statistics

- Nearly half of both male and female teens (aged 15-19) reported having had sexual intercourse.

- CDC reports that this represents a significant trend of decreasing teen sexual activity since 1990.

- 79-84 percent of teens reported using birth control.

Some Further Statistics

- An estimated 4-10 percent of the population may fit into the LGBTQ category/categories.

- Advocates (GLSEN, PFLAG, HRC) note threats and harm to LGBTQ teens.

- The CDC says, “Most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth are happy and thrive during their adolescent years. ... However, some LGBTQ youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to experience difficulties in their lives and school environments, such as violence.”
26% of LGBT youth say their biggest problems are not feeling accepted by their family, trouble at school/bullying, and a fear to be out/open. 22% of non-LGBT youth say their biggest problems are trouble with class, exams and grades.

4 in 10 LGBT youth (42%) say the community in which they live is not accepting of LGBT people.
Resolving Reporting Disparities

- The CDC’s qualifier: “Going to a school that creates a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and having caring and accepting parents are especially important. This helps all youth achieve good grades and maintain good mental and physical health.”

- What else the CDC/YRBS reports (2001-09):
  - 12-28 percent were threatened with a weapon at school;
  - Approximately 20-30 percent experienced violence in an intimate or romantic relationship; rates of rape are similar;
  - “LGBTQ youth are also at increased risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, suicide attempts, and suicide.”
A new novel ... & the 2015 nerdfighter census

16. Gender?

- Female
- Male
- Genderqueer
- Androgynous
- Intersex
- Transgender
- Transsexual
- Trans man
- Trans woman
- Gender fluid
- Questioning

Other (please specify)

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/xg96qsh
The Take Away

- Teen sex and birth rates are declining in the U.S., reversing late 20th century trends.
- Increasing attention to LGBTQ issues and identity has not translated to equity for youth.
- Sexual health is complex and multi-faceted.
- There’s an app for that: tech tools to report harassment are proliferating.
Teens in our Libraries
Rewards
- More immediate, smaller rewards work for this age range
- What you praise matters

Teens learn by example: “Every moment, every day, you’re on” (Giedd on parenting).
Evans in YALSA discusses:

- Brainstorming list of approaches to reference interactions;
- Active rather than passive service; and
- Suggested messages/utterances for working with teens.
Atwell discusses managing teens:

- How she characterizes adolescence:
  - A “special and important” developmental stage (54)
  - “They may not be as charming in their attempts to learn as their little brothers and sisters, but adolescents, too, need to be seen as individuals and responded to as people who want to know” (54).
Atwell discusses managing teens:

- Three aims in working with teens:
  - “Accept the reality” and “Find meaningful ways to channel their energies and social needs” (54).
  - See adolescence as an important stage of life.
  - Teens need to “begin to understand and participate in adult reality” by inviting them “inside [institutions] by showing them that inside is a worthwhile interesting place to be” (54).
Agosto & Hughes-Hassell on serving urban teens

- Teens use the library ...
  - “information gateway” (2010, 91)
  - Social space
  - “beneficial physical environment” (2010, 91)
Agosto & Hughes-Hassell on serving urban teens

- Know the community (2010, 33)
- Consult teens themselves about their needs (Wallace, 2001; 2005, 162).
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