

# Psychosocial Development and Adolescent Risk - Taking



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Workshop: Individual Processes  
and Adolescent Risk Behavior

Committee on the Science of Adolescence, Board on Children, Youth, and Families  
National Academy of Sciences. Washington, D.C. November 20, 2008

# Three issues

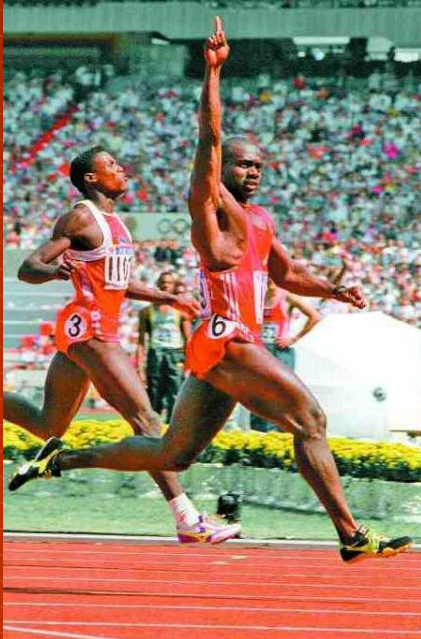
- o *What are the major psychosocial tasks of adolescence?*
- o *How is negotiation of these tasks related to risk taking?*
- o *What questions remain?*



What are the major  
psychosocial tasks  
of adolescence?

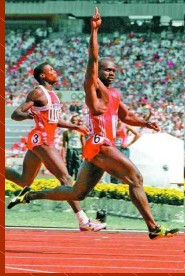
Measure up

Stand out



Fit in

Take hold



Stand out

**Identity / Autonomy**



Fit in

**Affiliation / Acceptance**



Measure up

**Competence / Achievement**



Take hold

**Commitment**

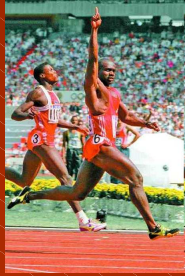
# Two ways tasks affect risk - taking

*“Type 1” Risks foster / inhibit achievement of developmental tasks*

*“Type 2”: Risks help adolescents cope with failure to achieve tasks*

Psychosocial tasks  
and risk - taking

# Identity

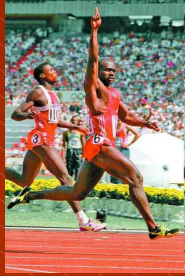


Psychological process

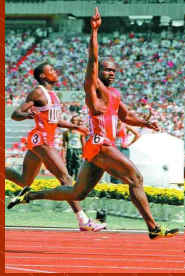


Social process

# Identity

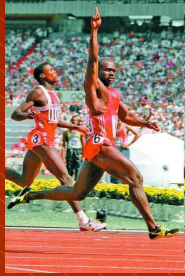


Psychological process



# Identity as a psychological process





# Identity as a social process

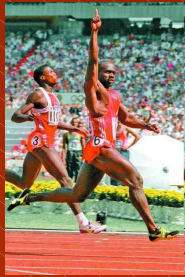


Impression  
management



Reflected  
appraisals





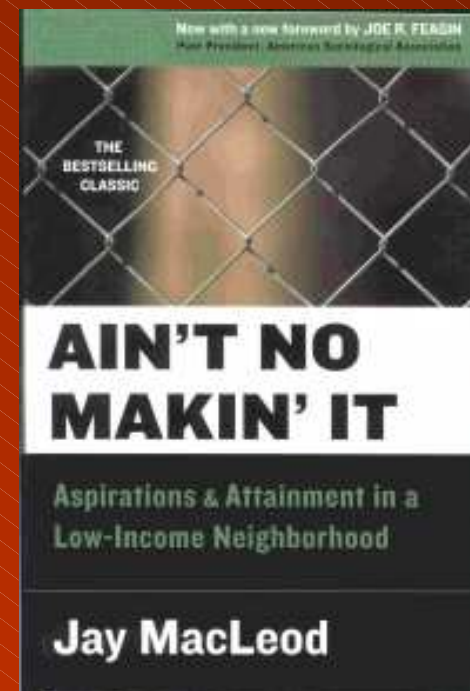
# Identity as a social process

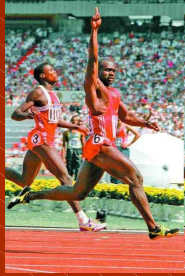


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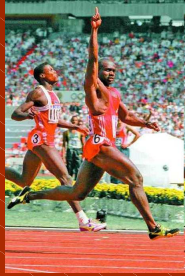




## Identity “components” (gender, ethnic, sexual)

Adolescents must *discern* the *criteria* for, then *evaluate* the *value* of achieving a gender / ethnic identity, then *decide* how to *pursue* the identity component.

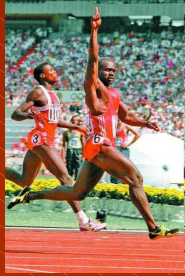
Special case for immigrant youth.



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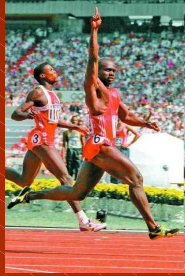
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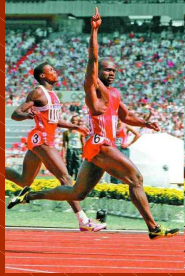




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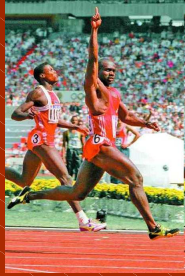




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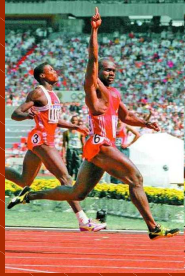


# Autonomy

Conceptualized either as primarily psychological (self-determination theory) or interpersonal (expectancy-violation-realignment theory).

Multidimensional: thinking, feeling, acting.

Universal?



# Autonomy



Cidgem  
Kagitcibasi

High agency



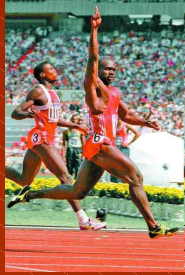
High interpersonal  
relatedness



*Autonomous  
relational self*

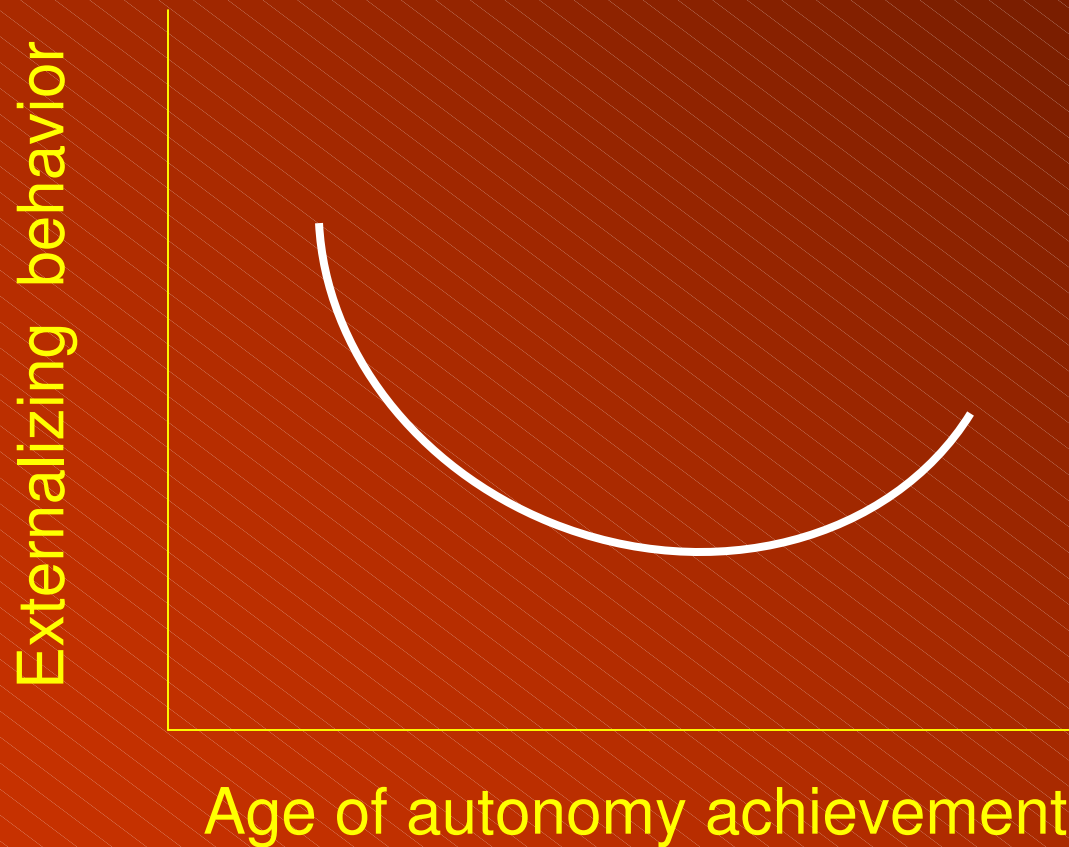


Positive  
Outcomes  
(low risk - taking)



# Autonomy

*Too much too early or too little too late leads to poorer outcomes (Feldman, Mason)*



# Affiliation / Acceptance

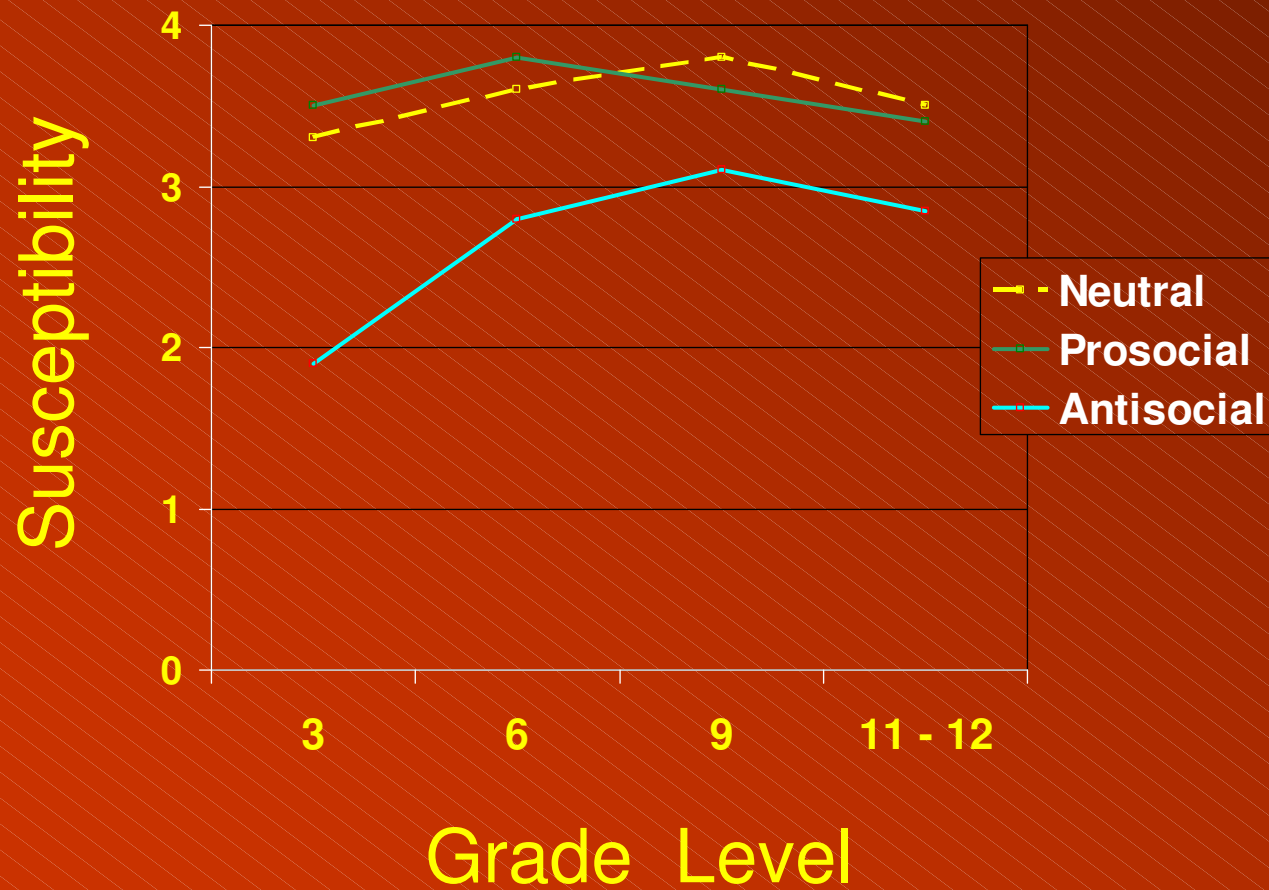


Two sample issues:

1. Openness to peer influence
2. Negotiating new relationships



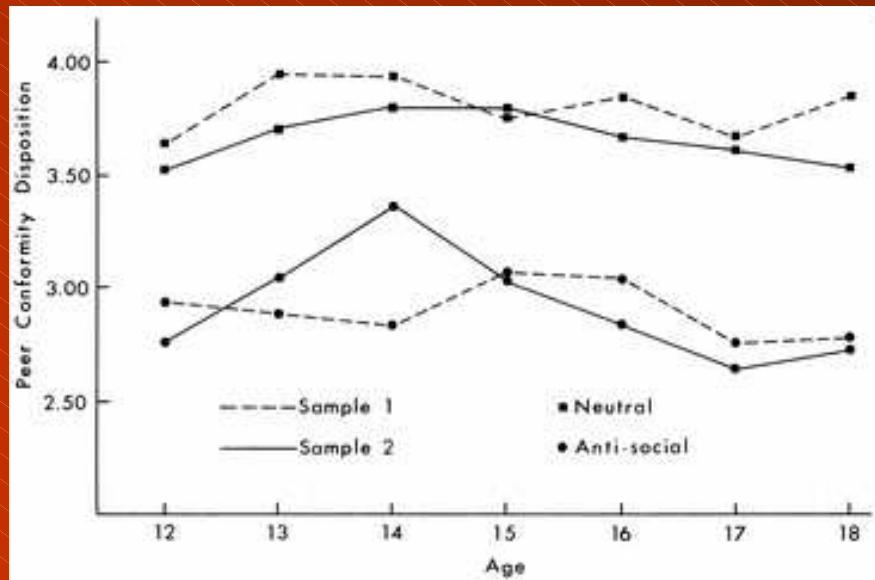
# Openness to Peer Influence



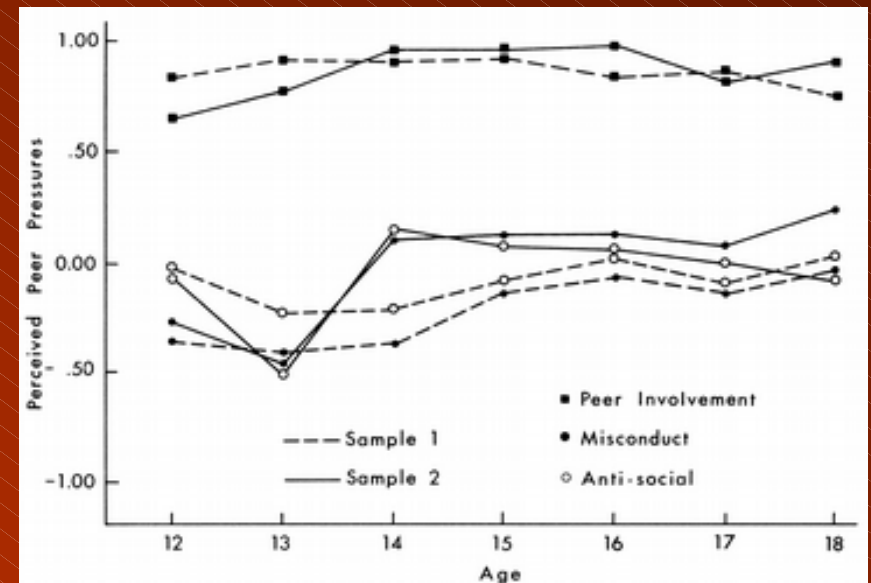
*Berndt, 1979*



# Openness to Peer Influence



Susceptibility trajectories



Perceived pressure trajectories

*Brown, et al., 1986*



# Openness to Peer Influence

*Age differences in openness to peer influence*

*Also, “stage of relationship” differences*

*Do these facilitate identity and autonomy?*



# Negotiating new relationships

"Mastering" romantic and sexual relationships is a crucial adolescent task in most cultures.



**But . . .**





# Negotiating new relationships

Risky behavior is correlated with  
(often predicted by):

- *Early initiation*
- *Association with older peers*
- *Permissive peer group norms*
- *Having older partners*
- *Lax supervision*





# Negotiating new relationships

What is the meaning of risky behavior within the context of romantic relations?

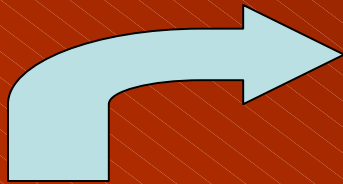
- Does risky driving make one more attractive?*
- Does unprotected sex signal purity, fidelity?*



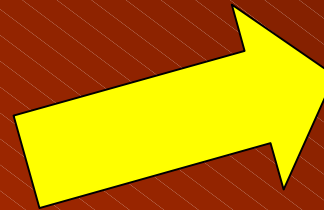


# Affiliation / Acceptance

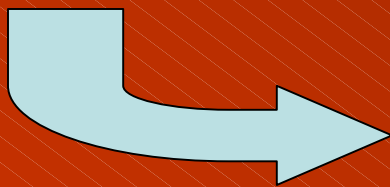
Interest in  
acceptance



Openness to  
peer influence



Risky  
behavior



Mastering  
romantic  
relations



# Competence / Achievement



## Social skills

1. Impulse control
2. Emotion regulation



# Competence / Achievement



# Social skills

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# Competence / Achievement

## 1. Impulse control



Aggressive  
group

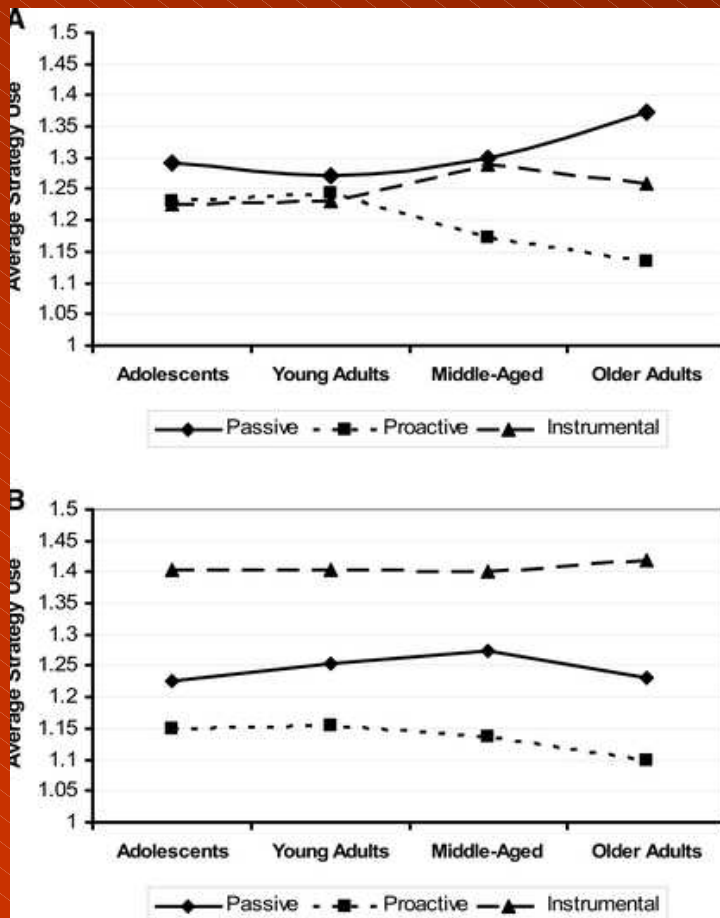
Aggressive  
group

*Cairns, et al., 1998*



# Competence / Achievement

## 2. Emotion regulation



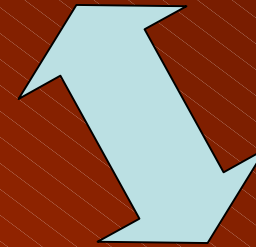
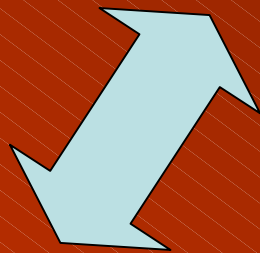
*Blanchard-Fields, 2008*

# Commitment

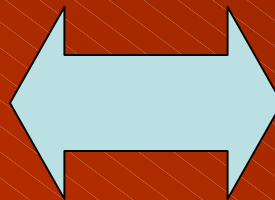


Religious and civic involvement associated with low rates of deviance

Social  
competence



Identity /  
autonomy



Affiliation

Some questions  
to pursue

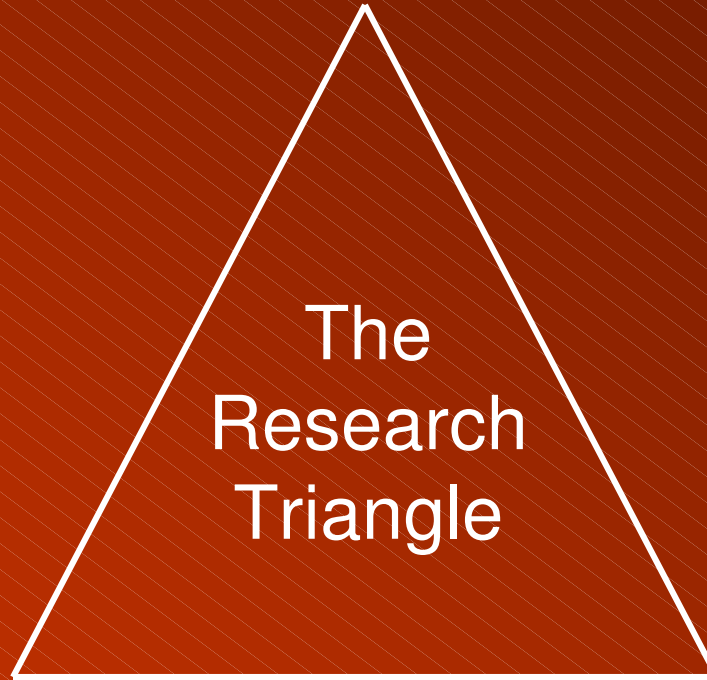
- How much cultural variability is there in normative scripts for psychosocial tasks?
- How do social contexts affect psychosocial tasks, especially types of risky taking?
- Connection between psychosocial tasks and bio-cognitive-neural development?

Individual  
behavior

The  
Research  
Triangle

Social  
institutions /  
relationships

"Internal"  
development





Parent relationships, emotion regulation, psychosocial maturity and college student alcohol use problems. Preview Fischer, Judith L.; Forthun, Larry F.; Pidcock, Boyd W.; Dowd, Duane A.; Journal of Youth and Adolescence, Vol 36(7), Oct 2007. pp. 912-926.

The experience of anger and sadness in everyday problems impacts age differences in emotion regulation. Preview Blanchard-Fields, Fredda; Coats, Abby Heckman; Developmental Psychology, Vol 44(6), Nov 2008. pp. 1547-1556.