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Adolescents' Experience of a Life-Framing Decision

Kathleen M. Galotti[1] and Steven F. Kozberg[2]

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High school students participating in a year-long longitudinal study of the college decision-making process described their experiences in open-ended essays, and rated their reactions to the process on several different Likert scales. Students' certainty in the decision and readiness to make a decision rose over time. As the process continued, students reported increasing satisfaction with the information they had obtained, and more comfort with the process itself. However, overall levels of reported enjoyment of the process were low to moderate, and overall ratings of the stressfulness of the decision remained high. Students gave evidence of seeing this decision as a life-framing one.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging cognitive abilities together with a growing sense of autonomy and greater societal expectations make adolescence a time of "increased pressure for problem solving and personal decision" (Worell and Danner, 1989, p. 3). During a 10–15 year period, adolescents are expected

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[1]Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. Received a Ph.D. in psychology and an M.S.E. in computer and information sciences from the University of Pennsylvania. Current research interests include everyday reasoning and decision making, and the development of these skills.

[2]Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. Received a Ph.D. in counseling and guidance from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Research interests are in adolescent development and adolescent psychopathology.

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to make a number of important academic, vocational, and interpersonal commitments, many of which have far-reaching consequences (Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1972; Marcia, 1966).

In many ways, it is appropriate for adolescence to be the time in which major life decisions are first confronted. Many cognitive developmental psychologists, especially those working in the Piagetian or neo-Piagetian traditions, see adolescence as a time of a profound revolution in cognitive ability (Danner, 1989; Keating, 1990). Specifically, adolescents are often described as possessing a number of newly emerging cognitive abilities: the ability to think about possibilities, distinguishing the real from the possible; the capacity to think of hypotheses and how to test them; the capacity to think ahead, and to plan and anticipate consequences; the propensity and ability to reflect on their own thinking; and the ability to think beyond old limits, and to discover new horizons (Keating, 1980).

Further, the transition from early to late adolescence includes a dramatic change in the degree to which adolescents view themselves as capable of making important decisions. According to Erikson (1968), as cognitive growth enables older adolescents to think more abstractly and less egotistically than younger adolescents, they begin to feel societal pressure to answer questions such as "Who am I?", "Where am I going?", and "Who am I to become?" Erikson believes adolescents must search for and establish a sense of personal identity, because failure to do so results in self-doubt, role diffusion, and role confusion. Experimentation with different roles and choices is a critical part of this process.

Although a growing literature reports on adolescents' thinking about both specific life decisions or commitments (Blustein and Phillips, 1990; Galotti and Kozberg, 1987; Marcia, 1966, 1983; Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973; Rowe and Marcia, 1980; Scheidel and Marcia, 1985; Trad, 1993), and about the nature of commitment in general (Galotti and Kozberg, 1987; Galotti *et al.*, Appleman, 1990; Marcia, 1966), little work has examined the thinking actually involved at the time a commitment or life decision is actually made, much less the events leading up to the final decision and the ways in which the decision evolves over time.

The life decision studied—choice of college—was selected for a variety of reasons. First, it is an important and difficult life decision, faced by many adolescents and their families. It has ramifications for family ties, friendships, and educational/vocational plans. The choice of college is likely to determine whether the student will live away from home, will need loans, will maintain the same relationships with high school friends. Moreover, one's ultimate choice of college may serve as a "proxy attribute," or indirect measure, of other desired objectives, such as career opportunities, admission to graduate or professional school, intellectual development, and social

status (Fischer *et al.*, 1987; Litten, 1991). College can also provide adolescents with " . . .a slowed passage to certain adult behaviors and a safe haven to experiment with a variety of adult behaviors, values, and life styles" (Sherrod *et al.*, 1993, p. 219).

Second, this decision is one that occurs during a well-delimited time period. Few other life decisions of this magnitude occur on such a well-defined schedule, allowing better predictions about where in the process a student is likely to be at any given point. Third, for many students this will be the first major financial, educational, social, and vocational decision they have had much responsibility for and choice in. Finally, like most complex decisions, the choice of college requires the student to seek out and integrate information from various sources.

Other aspects of this short-term longitudinal study of the way high school students make college decisions have been reported elsewhere.[3] Galotti and Mark (1994) described the type of information students seek, while another paper (Galotti, in press) explores the ways in which students integrate various sources of information. Yet a third aspect of the decision studies was students' memories of how they had made the decision (Galotti, 1995). In the current paper, we describe the ways in which students reported the overall experience of their involvement with this important life decision.

Because so little existing literature examines longitudinal changes in real-life decision making, we opted to frame the questions guiding the research descriptively. Our questions included the following: First, how do adolescents experience the college decision? What affective responses do they have to the process? How confident are they about their procedures in making the decision? How do these feelings change over the course of the decision-making process? Do adolescents have different experiences of the process, as a function of factors such as gender, or academic ability?

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 322 high school students (88 males, 234 females) participated in one or more sessions. The breakdown of participation is as follows: One hundred and twenty four students (29 males, 95 females) were originally recruited in spring of their junior year of high school, and participated in the first round of sessions in April of 1991. Of these, 101 (26 males, 75

[3] Copies of these reports are available from the first author.

Table I. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Measure	All Participants (N = 322)	Core Sample (N = 90)
ACT composite score	24.05 (SD = 4.28)	23.83 (SD = 4.38)
SAT Verbal + Math	1117.26 (SD = 164.74)	1141.91 (SD = 165.13)
Class rank (percentile; computed at end of junior year)	73.55 (SD = 22.77)	73.96 (SD = 20.79)
Family income		
<10K	3.5%	1.3%
10K–39K	22.6%	22.1%
40K–79K	43.9%	41.6%
80K–119K	19.9%	20.8%
120K–149K	6.3%	9.1%
>150	3.8%	5.2%
Averaged level of parental education		
High school or less	28.0%	38.8%
Some college or college graduate	29.2%	23.3%
Some post graduate or more	42.8%	37.8%
Gender		
Male	27.6%	27.7%
Female	72.4%	72.2%
Race/ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	93.2%	93.3%
African-American	1.0%	0.0%
Latino/Latina	0.6%	1.1%
Asian/Asian-American	4.5%	4.5%
Other	0.6%	1.1%

females) participated again in the second round held in October of the senior year (1991), when an additional sample of 99 students (22 males, 77 females) joined the study. Ninety of the original sample who had participated in Round 2 (24 males, 66 females), and 75 of the second sample (17 males, 58 females) again participated in the final round of sessions, held in April of the senior year of high school (1992), and were joined by a third sample of 99 subjects (37 males, 62 females), who participated in the last round only.

Students were drawn from 19 rural and suburban, mostly public, high schools in southeastern Minnesota. Table I presents demographic data for the sample as a whole, and for those students who participated in all three rounds of data collection, henceforth referred to as the "core" sample.

Analyses of the demographic data revealed no differences between core and noncore participants, except for the variable "parental education," which indicated a contingency between group membership (core vs. noncore) and averaged parental education ($\chi^2[2] = 7.56, p < .05$).

Students were recruited through high school homeroom announcements (or, one school, through letters sent to each student's home address). A letter described the study as one of people's college decision making, and asked interested participants to provide us with their name and phone number.[4] The letter also asked for written parental consent for students under the age of 18, and asked both the student and the parent to sign a release authorizing the authors to examine schools' records regarding transcripts, class rank, and standardized test scores (PSAT, SAT, and ACT). Students received $5.00 for participating in each session, with a $5.00/session bonus for participating in a second or third session.

Instruments and Procedure

Students participated in one-hour sessions scheduled at their high school, either in the evening or after school. Sessions included up to 12 students, but averaged approximately 5. At least two researchers were present at each session to hand out forms, answer questions, scan completed forms to detect errors or omissions, and to pay participants at the conclusion of the session. Participants completed six, seven, or eight (depending on the session) different color-coded forms at their own pace. Some students took as little as 35 minutes, others took slightly over an hour, but most took about 55 minutes for their initial session, and about 45 minutes for subsequent sessions. Throughout the session, researchers were available to answer questions about the meanings of instructions or other issues of clarification, but otherwise kept interaction with participants (or among participants) to a minimum.

Presented here in the order of administration, the form relevant for this paper[5] were as follows:

1. *Background information sheet* (filled out at the first session the student participated in only). This asked for name, address, date of birth, year in school, and personal information such as favorite academic subjects; jobs held and hours worked; club memberships,

[4]We do not know the number of students who heard the announcements and declined to participate. Anecdotally, we found high school students to be remarkably busy with a number of activities and employment, such that scheduling out-of-school sessions was often quite difficult.

[5]A description and copy of these and other instruments are available from the first author.

hobbies, or other interests; current career plans; college subjects the students plan on taking. In addition, students provided information on the number and ages of siblings, the current marital status of parents or guardians, and the educational backgrounds of parents or guardians. The students were also given the option of providing information about family income, religious preference, and racial/ethnic preferred designation.

2. *Essays*. Students were asked, "Please describe, in your own words, how the process of making decisions about college has been and how you've felt about it. Be as detailed and specific as possible," A second essay (added to Rounds 2 and 3) asked students "In your opinion, what would it take to make a *good* choice (or series of choices) about what college to attend? In other words, if you were giving advice to a younger friend or sibling, how would you tell them to go about this process?"
3. *Feelings About the Decision-Making Sheet*. Using 7-point Likert scales (1: not at all; 7: completely), students rated their current feelings about the process. Table II presents the scales included.

RESULTS

We begin by describing results obtained from the last-described instrument, in which students rated their feelings and reactions to the process. The first analysis assessed the effects, if any, of repeated participation in the study. We analyzed the responses to the rating scales from the April 1992 session as a function of cohort of students (those joining the sample in April 1991, October 1991, or April 1992). Those students in the first cohort would have responded to many of the rating scales three times; those in the second cohort, twice; and those in the third cohort would be seeing the rating scales for the first time. At the same time, we also assessed

Table II. Items from the "Feelings About the Decision-Making Process" Sheet[a]

How certain are you of your decision about what college to attend? [CERTAIN]
How ready do you feel to make a decision? [READY]
How sure are you that your decision will turn out well? [SURE]
How satisfied do you feel with the amount of information you have obtained? [SATISFIED]
How comfortable are you with the way you are making this decision? [COMFORT]
How stressful is it to make this decision? [STRESSFUL]
How much do you enjoy making this decision? [ENJOY]
How difficult is this decision, relative to other decisions you have previously made? [DIFFICULT]

[a]Terms in brackets will be used in other tables and figures.

Table III. Mean Ratings by Time of Session[a,b]

Rating scale	Session		
	April 1991	October 1991	April 1992
[CERTAIN]	3.79_a	5.17_b	6.16_c
[READY]	3.32_a	4.84_b	5.68_c
[SURE]	4.53_a	5.22_b	5.78_b
[SATISFIED]	4.02_a	5.34_b	5.66_b
[COMFORT]	4.54_a	5.30_b	5.83_b
[STRESSFUL]	5.33	5.30	4.93
[ENJOY]	3.70	4.00	3.99
[DIFFICULT]	5.70	5.63	5.67

[a]Data are from core subjects, who participated in all three rounds (N = 90).
[b]Numbers with different subscripts within the same row differ reliably at the .01 level, by a Tukey HSD test.

overall differences in ratings as a function of gender, academic ability, or the interaction of these with cohort.

To assess academic ability, we computed equally weighted z scores of eleventh-grade GPA, eleventh-grade class rank, and standardized test scores (ACT composite scores and SATV + SATM scores were converted to a common scale; students who took both tests had the higher score used). We then divided students into three groups, based on whether their z scores fell into the top, middle, or bottom third. For ease of exposition, we refer to students as being in the "higher ability," "average ability," or "lower ability" group, although it is important to keep in mind that all of our students, being college bound, exhibited a rather high degree of academic performance, as shown by the data in Table I.

A 3 (cohort) × 2 (gender) × 3 (ability group) × 11 (rating scale) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no overall statistically main effects for cohort, gender, or academic ability. Moreover, there were no significant interactions among any of these three variables. The lack of statistically significant effects or interactions with cohort as a factor implies that repeated testing did *not* reliably affect students' responses to the process.[6]

We next examined the changes in ratings over time. To do this, we looked at data from the core subjects, who participated in all three sessions. Table III presents the mean ratings, by time of survey. These responses were analyzed to determine which feelings changed over time, in a 3 (session) × 8 (rating) × 2 (gender) × 3 (ability group) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the first two factors. (The analysis included only

[6]Indeed, we found very few cohort effects in any of the measures we examined (Galotti and Mark, 1994; Galotti 1995; Galotti, in press).

those items that had been included in all three sessions). These analyses revealed a significant main effect for rating scale ($F[7,588] = 10.26$, MS error = 3.42, $p < .001$). Specific comparisons (Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) tests) showed that the overall rating for [ENJOY] was significantly lower than the ratings of all other items except [READY], which itself was significantly lower than the ratings for the item [DIFFICULT] (all comparisons are with $p < .01$). No other significant differences emerged.

A second significant main effect emerged for session ($F[2,168] = 39.29$, MS error = 3.48, $p < .001$). Overall ratings (collapsed across items) were 4.37, 5.10, and 5.46 for the April 1991, October 1991, and April 1992 rounds, respectively. Tukey HSD tests indicated that the first and third means differed significantly ($p < .01$). Finally, a significant interaction emerged between rating scale and session ($F[14,1176] = 14.68$, MS error = 1.16, $p < .001$). Results of specific comparisons (Tukey tests) are shown in Table III.

As expected, students' sense of certainty and readiness to make a decision rose during the decision-making process. They also became more optimistic ("sure that the decision would turn out well") and more satisfied with the information they had gathered as the process went on. In contrast, students' ratings of the stressfulness, difficulty, and enjoyment of the process remained constant over time, although they reported feeling more comfortable with the process as time went on.

One interaction with gender as a factor achieved statistical significance, this with rating scale ($F[7,588] = 3.05$, MS error = 3.42, $p < .01$). However, specific comparisons did not reveal a significant difference in the average ratings by males and females for any individual scale. No effects or interactions with ability group emerged as statistically significant.

The rating scales provide important information about how students are experiencing this decision-making process. However, they constrain students' reports to those dimensions of the experience about which we had asked. Another way of examining students' reactions to the decision-making process comes from analysis of the students' own thoughts as expressed in the essays. These open-ended items allowed students free reign in describing the significant aspects of the situation for them, and their feelings about it.

The essays confirmed for us, first, that the students were taking the decision seriously. Of the several rather poignant essays we received, a few are presented here for illustrative purposes:

> I also think that choosing what you're going to do for a living and going to college are really big decisions that are going to affect the rest of your life and if you don't choose what's best then you have screwed up your life! There is a lot of pressure

> to go to college, for me, because my brother and sister both screwed up and quit high school so I feel I have to be extra good to make up for them.
> It's a rather confusing and bewildering decision. There are many colleges to choose from and they all seem alike. The brochures for colleges tend to seem similar to any other college brochure. It's one of the first large decisions in a person's life and it can affect the rest of life. That prospect is daunting.

> This is a tough question! It has required a lot of soul searching. Everyday [*sic*] I test myself and question myself about being far away from home, can I handle it? . . .My mom and I are very close and even as I sit here and write this I get teary when I think of leaving her. It's all so overwhelming, sometimes I just want all of the college stuff to go away. I'd like to live in my protected environment for a while longer.

> I definitely feel intimidated by "the system." I have been told by society, "that if one attends a prestigious/Ivy League school, that one will be successful" . . .I have had to learn for myself that education is what I make of it.

These and several other essays confirm the ideas that students do experience stress, do see this as a difficult decision, do understand that the decision has many ramifications, and is, in several ways, life framing.

To analyze these data, we adapted techniques from Galotti and Kozberg (1987) and Galotti *et al.* (1991). The first author and a research assistant first read through a sample of the responses, and discerned 10 "themes" or dimensions along with essays seemed to vary. A list of these dimensions is presented in Table IV. Next, the author and research assistant, along with a third coder who had not created the list of themes, coded each essay response on each dimension using a 9-point scale (one end of the scale corresponded to one end of the dimension, e.g., "Autonomous," the other end of the scale to the other end of the dimension, e.g., "Controlled"). Table IV lists the overall interrater reliability among these three raters (using coefficient alpha), for each dimension and for each round of interviews.

For each respondent, we computed a mean rating on each dimension by averaging over the individual ratings of the three raters. We first sought to assess whether repeated participation in this study affected the themes found in essays. To do this, we conducted 3 (cohort) × 2 (gender) × 3 (ability group) × 10 (theme) mixed ANOVA, with repeated measures on the last factor, on the mean ratings from the April 1992 session. Recall that those students in the first cohort would have responded to the essay task three times; those in the second cohort, twice; and those in the third cohort once.

The ANOVA revealed a main effect of theme ($F[9,2187] = 128.95$, MS error = 1.59, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between cohort and theme ($F[18,2187] = 2.87$, MS error = 1.59, $p < .001$). However, Tukey's HSD tests indicated that significant differences in mean ratings as a function of cohort did *not* occur for any of the 10 themes. The

Table IV. Dimensions of Coding of Essays[a]

	Interrater Reliabilitites for Each Survey Period		
Autonomous–controlled (e.g., by parents)	.68	.82	.75
Certain–uncertain (e.g., how far along in process)	.86	.86	.89
Focused (e.g., one school, one criterion)–unfocused	.84	.84	.85
Explicit criteria–no explicit criteria	.77	.76	.75
Active in process–passive in process	.76	.78	.69
Analytic procedure–impressionistic procedure	.61	.67	.50
Confident–nervous	.87	.89	.88
Easygoing–rushed/pressured/frustrated	.83	.90	.89
Enjoys process–does not enjoy process	.87	.88	.89
Frames rest of life–does not frame rest of life	.70	.73	.74

[a]Terms in parentheses will be used in other tables and figures. The three numbers after each dimension indicate the overall interrater reliability (computed with coefficient alpha) for the ratings, based on three raters, for essays gathered in April 1991, October 1991, and April 1992, respectively.

analysis showed no significant effects for either gender or academic ability group.

Finally, again using data from the 90 core participants, we assessed the degree of change in the presence of the 10 themes over the various times of testing. Mean ratings of themes from essays written in April 1991, October 1991, and April 1992 were subjected to a 3 (session) × 10 (theme) × 2 (gender) × 3 (ability group) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the first two factors. There were no main effects or interactions with either gender or ability group as a factor. However, there were main effects for both theme ($F[9,756] = 10.81$, MS error = 2.08, $p < .001$), and session ($F[2,168] = 13.00$, MS error = 6.34, $p < .001$), and a significant interaction between theme and session ($F[18,1512] = 23.40$, MS error = 1.26, $p < .001$).

Table V presents the mean ratings. Tukey HSD tests indicated that mean ratings of themes changed significantly over time for the theme "Certain–Uncertain," with students growing increasingly certain over the sessions, and for the theme "Focused-Unfocused," with students growing increasingly focused on criteria and/or schools over time. No other mean ratings differed as a function of time of session.

DISCUSSION

Over time, students reported feeling more certain of their decision, comfortable with their approach to the decision, confident of their ability

Table V. Mean Rating of Essays by Theme and Time of Session[a,b]

	Session		
	April 1991	October 1991	April 1992
Autonomous–controlled (e.g., by parents)	4.82	4.62	4.27
Certain–uncertain (e.g., how far along in process)	6.10_a	4.87_b	2.70_c
Focused (e.g., one school, one criterion)–unfocused	5.58_a	4.73_a	2.58_b
Explicit criteria–no explicit criteria	4.87	4.81	4.65
Active in process–passive in process	5.29	4.92	4.99
Analytic procedure–impressionistic procedure	5.14	5.37	5.51
Confident–nervous	4.51	4.72	4.04
Easygoing–rushed/pressured/frustrated	4.58	5.11	4.60
Enjoys process–does not enjoy process	4.75	5.13	5.00
Frames rest of life–does not frame rest of life	4.22	4.36	4.51

[a]Each essay was coded by each of the dimensions listed above on a 9-point scale. A rating of 1 indicates an essay high on the first-mentioned end of the dimension (e.g., "autonomous"); a 9 indicates an essay high on the second-mentioned end of the dimension (e.g., "controlled"). Data are from core subjects, who participated in all three rounds ($N = 90$).

to make a decision, and satisfied. In contrast to their growing good feelings, however, we found that their perception of the process as difficult, stressful, and pressured changed very little throughout the process. Moreover, throughout the process, students report only a moderate level of enjoyment.

Indeed, the picture that emerges from the essays and the ratings is that this decision is one in which students feel overwhelmed at times. Sherrod *et al.* (1993) asserted that "Educational attainment is one of the most potent predictors of life-course trajectories in adulthood, and late adolescence represents an age at which critical decisions about education are made." Our participants apparently agree. They recognize the fact that the college decision is one of great magnitude, with many ramifications for career and family choices. Many feel stressed, especially by the amount of information that is potentially relevant to the decision and the short time they have in which to process it, as quotes from four of the participants indicate:

> Since I took the PSAT, I've been absolutely showered with mail. Initially, this was exciting and somewhat helpful, but now I'm not so sure. Every school looks wonderful on paper. Also, they don't really seem all that different from each other. They all have pictures of happy people sitting under trees saying wonderful things about their school . . .it's at the point where I couldn't possibly take the time to carefully read and consider all the brochures and catalogs I get each day. It kind of bothers me, because it makes me wonder if I'm overlooking my ideal college . . . .

> For me this process has been long and confusing. After a while of looking at [all the brochures and pamphlets] they all seem the same. Now I am starting to go by what my gut feeling is about them.

> Word of mouth isn't always reliable and the viewbooks are biased. I feel like I'm making a blind decision, and it would be just as effective to draw a school out of a hat.

> It's very frustrating because there are so many institutions that claim to be the best in whatever field you're looking at. I wish a very objective survey would be taken to actually finish the "ranking" thing once and for all.

These last quotes suggest that the ways in which those assisting in this decision (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors) could be most helpful is to help students determine a decision-making strategy or plan, to help them manage the information overload. Students appear to need the most help in sorting through the volume of information that is readily available. The college decision may be a prime one for offering decision aids, or programs designed to teach rational decision-making strategies.

We found few differences in the emotional experience for students of differing levels of academic ability, or for students of different genders. Findings reported elsewhere (Galotti and Mark, 1994; Galotti, in press) indicated that students of differing levels of academic ability *did* differ in decision-making performance, with more able students considering more criteria, especially early in the process. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that no corresponding differences emerged for affective experience of the process. Male or female, more or less academically talented, our students paint a similar picture of the process: one of stress and difficulty.

Of course, the limitations and constraints on this study must be acknowledged and considered in assessing the "take-home" message of the findings. First, this sample is not a random subset of all high school students, nor, perhaps, even of all college-bound high school students. Participation in the study, particularly for those students who came to multiple sessions, may have required a great deal more than average level of motivation. It may be that less motivated students would have different reactions, and face different needs (e.g., they might need someone to provide more information to them, or to prod them to seek more information). The gender imbalance in the sample also was nonoptimal, and may be a reflection of different levels of motivation in male and female high school students (as the imbalance occurred in roughly the same proportion in each of the 19 high schools we recruited from).

Throughout this study, we have treated the college decision as a single decision, which might oversimplify the process. Students might experience this process as consisting of a number of subdecisions: Should they consider college at all? If so, how should they go about gathering information? When and where should they apply? To whom should they turn for guidance and support? Further research might investigate each of these potential "parts" of the process in more detail.

Nonetheless, the data we report is the most comprehensive on high school students facing college decision-making that we know of. Taking these findings in the context of the literature on adolescent development, we suggest that variations in decision-making skills may be related to the ways in which adolescents resolve developmental tasks. Given the relationships among identity formation, cognitive development, and educational/vocational decision making (Blustein and Phillips, 1990; Miller-Tiedeman, 1980; Rowe and Marcia, 1980; Scheidel and Marcia, 1985; Super, 1976), schools might be encouraged to design guidance activities that not only provide specific information, but also teach exploration and decision-making skills as well as promote self-understanding. The adolescents in our sample repeatedly expressed a need for help in managing the amount of information they received. We argue that future work might fruitfully examine the ways in which such help can and should shape adolescents' emerging sense of identity on this as well as on other important life decisions.

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Social Support in Healthy Adolescents

Conrad U. Frey[1] and Christoph Röthlisberger[2]

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Social support is examined in a representative sample of 141 healthy adolescents. By means of a revised version of the Mannheim Interview on Social Support, the number, type, perceived adequacy (satisfaction), and quality (importance) of the social relationships available were assessed. While peers were found to provide prime supportive functions in day-to-day matters, the social support provided by parents has a stress-buffering effect in emergency situations. The role of other family members is discussed. Differences in gender and education are moderate. The data suggests the adequacy of social support and social integration, contrary to the traditional view of adolescence as a time of crisis and conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Social networks and social supports are considered to be key intervening variables in illness and health (Cassel, 1975, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Berkman and Syme, 1979; Antonovski, 1988; Sarason *et al.*, 1990). Despite the fact that these two concepts are often used interchangeably, they should be distinguished from one another. Social network refers to the range of social relationships available to an individual. Social support describes the provisions obtained through these relationships that are largely determined by their perceived adequacy. Obtaining an optimal amount of social support

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[1]Head of the Psychosomatic Unit in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Berne, Inselspital, 3010 Bern, Switzerland. Received M.D. from University of Berne. Has conducted research on chronic illness (cystic fibrosis), minimal brain dysfunction, and suicide prevention in children.

[2]Clinical psychologist of the Psychosomatic Unit in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Berne, Inselspital, 3010 Bern, Switzerland. Received Ph.D. from University of Berne. Has done research on coping in cancer and cystic fibrosis.

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