

Social Status in Adolescent Transitions into Adulthood

Madison Delk

DePaul University

Due to changes in status, defined as the age of majority, the most important transition an individual can go through is social transitions since the adolescent is now recognized as a legal adult in society. When an individual experiences social transitions during adolescence they experience a redefinition of status, going from a legal minor to a legal adult, as they gain certain rights and responsibilities a child or younger adolescent would not experience. These rights and responsibilities include gaining the legal right to buy cigarettes, voting rights, entitlement to enlist in the military, the act of buying lottery tickets and gambling, the right to watch and purchase X-rated films, utilizing abortion facilities, and the ability to rent a hotel room permitting state and the hotel regulations. Another social transition an adolescent gains is the right to enter into the job force as a full-time employee. This is a promotion from the previous right to hold a part-time job. "When they become adults, individuals are given greater privileges but are expected to take increased responsibility for self-management and participation in adult society," (Steinberg, 97).

Along with a redefinition of status, there is a societal shift where adolescents experience adult consequences as punishment for violations. This is seen when an adolescent is charged with statutory rape, where two individuals engage in the act of sex, even when consensual, if any of the participants are under the legal age of consent (Steinberg 2014). Depending on what violation is committed and the extent of the offense, the line of where the legal boundary line is blurred. For example, depending on the state's compulsory school attendance law, an individual is required to be in school from ages five to seven. The adolescent becomes legally allowed leave school on their own accord, without experiencing legal consequences, from the ages sixteen to eighteen. A minor who leaves school before the legal age can receive a status offense; but, after the social transition, the adolescent cannot be legally punished for leaving school. If a minor

completes certain crimes, they are tried under the juvenile justice system, instead of being tried by the harsher, criminal justice system adults face when being charged with a crime. The lines blur when a minor is charged with a major or violent offense, such as murder. This topic is currently controversial, with the argument that minors are less competent to their rights. Minors may be ignorant to transactions of the criminal justice system, and therefore it is argued minors should not be tried as an adult from lack of understanding of the severity of the committed act, the physical trial process itself, and abilities to make decisions involving court proceedings.

There are a number of court rulings listed in the book, ranging from censoring of materials, to rights of a student lead religious group, to parental consent, to the death penalty – in which all of the rulings mention either the maturity or the immaturity of minors as reasoning for the case to pass. Court rulings and criminal punishment is not the only inconsistencies of legal rights that fluctuate. For example, there is no longer a legal age limit for an individual to buy contraceptives because it is viewed as a potential benefit. On the other hand, one must be 18 years of age, depending on the state, to get an abortion because it is not viewed as such a benefit. Just as, an individual, in the United States, is allowed to purchase cigarettes legally at the age of 18, but cannot legally purchase alcohol until the age of 21. There is a clarity problem in the United States on a national level when it comes to inconsistencies in the legality of Adolescents transitioning into adults.

Some religious groups, like Judaism, or nationalities, such as Latin Americans, who celebrate a predetermined, universal age signifying an individual's transition into adulthood. Some examples of this are bar (bas) mitzvahs and quinceaneras. For a majority of the United States, these types of formal initiation ceremonies are alien and are not considered meaningful. Therefore, "Students sometimes overlook important similarities between the processes of social

redefinition in traditional and contemporary societies,” (Steinberg, 99). According to Schlegel (2015), when there is no universal ceremony and adolescents experience major milestones, such as graduating from high school, going to college, entering the labor force as a full-time employee, getting married, and reproducing, all happen at different times, in a different order, to different people, originating from the same community, there are no clear boundaries from the transition of adolescence into adulthood.

On top of clarity issues concerning social transitions, “In contemporary society, we tend to exclude young people from the world of adults; we give them little direct training for adult life and then thrust them abruptly into total adult independence. Transitions into adulthood in contemporary industrialized society are therefore more discontinuous than in other cultural or historical contexts,” (Steinberg, 103). Adolescents are no longer gradually prepared and trained for transitions into the fields of work and family like they were a few decades ago. Compared to the continuous transitions of an adolescent into the workforce, adolescents no longer start working under their parents at an early age, such as on the family farm, and therefore no longer benefit from completing work that would later help the adolescent when going off to continuing to work on, let’s say their own farm. Adolescents also no longer leave home at the early age of 12 to 15, to work as apprentices, learning valuable domestic and workforce skills. Due to our modern education systems and social expectations of completing school through (at least) an undergraduate degree, the only transition into the workforce an adolescent may experience is the act of holding an unpaid internship. An adolescent, especially the eldest child, would benefit from larger family sizes, as they would be expected to help their parents with taking care of the younger children. This would help prepare for an individual to start their own family because they would already be comfortable and knowledgeable about how to raise an infant. Modernly,

schooling can prepare an individual for his or her line of work – it is the discontinuous transition into the family life where there is no preparation or training for the adolescent. School does not teach classes on family relationships or how to raise a child 101. Adolescents are expected to jump into the deep end when it is that time to become married and start reproducing, if an individual chooses to do those things. The fact of the matter is, “modernization and globalization have made the transition from adolescence to adulthood longer and increasingly more discontinuous all over the world,” (Steinberg, 104).

Relating to the modern discontinuous transitional problems in the United States a research study titled, *Social Status Attainment During the Transition to Adulthood*, was conducted in order to track the advantages and disadvantages of modern transitions of adolescents and their social status attainments, specifically in the areas of income, education, work experience, and independence. Lui’s (2014) study concluded the following:

With a better understanding of the timing of key events that affect the different social status dimensions, we can develop appropriate interventions that function as safety nets during the transition to adulthood. These interventions can focus on elements of social status development (e.g., academic or vocational counseling for continuing adult education) or transition to adult roles (e.g., support for new parents, childcare services). Furthermore, public policies that account for these variations in status attainment during the transition to adulthood can serve to buffer against times of economic uncertainty, create stronger links between school and work, and prevent build-up of disadvantages.

Along those lines, Komosa-Hawkins (2012), created a multiple-baseline design was created to track the impact of a one-on-one peer based mentoring system, monitoring emotional health,

impacted by the lack of continuous transitions in the public education system. Outcomes suggested a positive impact for peer support and when it comes to the emotional protection of students when completing the transitions of adolescence.

Furthermore, adolescents can no longer afford to be 100 percent independent by the time they move away from college. If a psychology student attends an average school, such as DePaul University, the cost of tuition each year is over \$36,000. After factoring in the cost of owning an apartment in Chicago, depending on the neighborhood and the number of other roommates, is around \$2,000 each month for rent, on top of grocery expenses, gas expenses or a public transportation pass, and other leisurely monetary budgeting one would have to account for. An 18-year-old, straight out of high school, would have nowhere near the capacity to be fully financially independent.

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