

What were you THINKING?!?

Adolescent Decision-Making Behavior



2005 U.S. Supreme Court Decision

Roper v. Simmons

- Unconstitutional to impose capital punishment for crimes committed while under 18
 - Overruled *Stanford v. Kentucky (1989)*
 - Response, in part, to *Atkins v. Virginia (2002)*
 - Overturning death penalty for mentally retarded
 - “A national consensus has developed against the execution of juvenile offenders”

- *Supreme Court of Missouri*

What's the Big Difference?

Why do *you* think adolescents make decisions differently than adults?

Sodom and Gomorrah Party Barn

Jimmy is a sophomore at the local high school. His parents are out of town for the weekend. He decides to have a handful of his close high school friends over on Friday night.

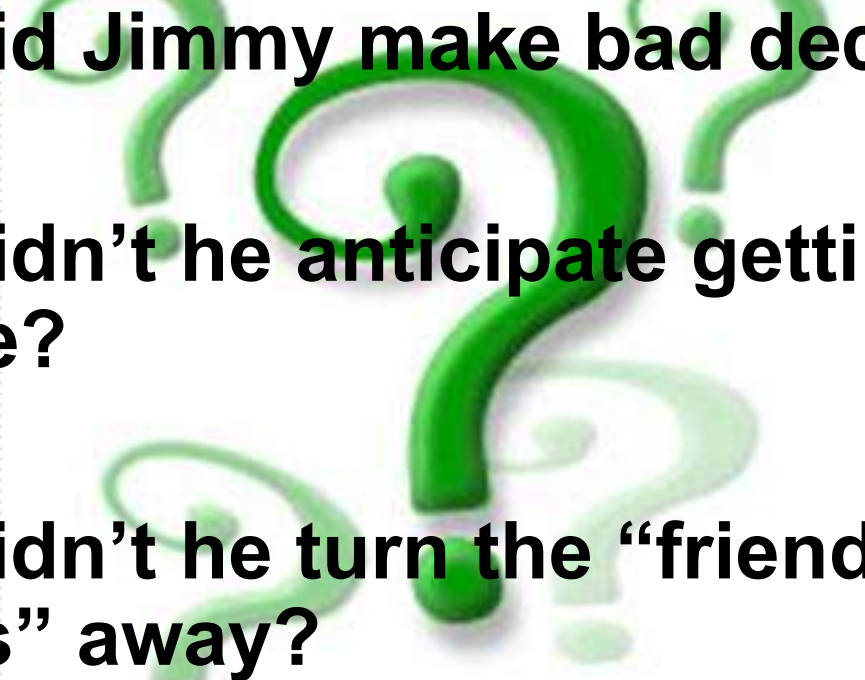
Jimmy's older friend, Jane, offers to buy a case of beer for the party. She also tells some of her friends about the party...

Fifty people end up in the barn drinking, etc.

The cops come, cite Jimmy and company, now they are in your court.



What Were They THINKING?!?

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- Why did Jimmy make bad decisions?
 - Why didn't he anticipate getting in trouble?
 - Why didn't he turn the "friends of friends" away?
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Risk & Protective Factors that Contribute to Adolescent Decision-Making Behaviors



Risk Factors

❖ Psychological

- Personality, Emotional Instability, Mental Illness, Multiple Risk Behaviors, Abusive Past

❖ Familial

- Lack of Support, Overly Permissive or Neglectful, Distant or Hostile, Lack of Values, Low SES, Single-Parent or Blended Family

❖ Social

- No Attachment to School or Religious Institutions, High Risk Peers (e.g., gangs)

❖ Contextual

- Too Much Down Time, Drug Prevalence, Lack of Law Enforcement, High Unemployment, Low Educational Quality and Resources, Lack of Community Support or Resources



Protective Factors



- ❖ Positive Mental Health
 - High self-esteem
 - Absence of depressive symptoms
 - ❖ High Academic Achievement
 - ❖ Engagement in School
 - ❖ Close and Nurturing Family Relationships
 - ❖ Involvement in Religious and Other Extracurricular Activities
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Adolescent Development and Decision-Making Behavior

Biological, Cognitive, and Social-Cognitive Changes

Biological Changes

□ Pubertal Changes

- Direct and Indirect Influences of Hormonal Changes and Physical Development



Direct Influences

- Sleep patterns become delayed - a key shift from childhood
 - When are teens most often awake and what impact does this have on their behavior?
 - Late morning, but not early morning
 - Secondary schools begin early, so tough to motivate
 - Late night (*midnight-1 a.m.*)
 - What activities fill up their time after school and in the night?
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Indirect Influences

- Primarily are reactions to pubertal development
 - May engage in “distancing” behaviors with caregivers so that their own privacy and space are maintained
 - Examples: Isolating themselves in their room;
Engaging in petty arguments with parents



Boys and Girls Who Mature Early...

Boys

- Positive self-views
- Social popularity
- Athleticism
- But could engage in delinquent behaviors

Girls

- Negative self-views
 - Increased interaction with older peers
 - Delinquent behaviors much more likely
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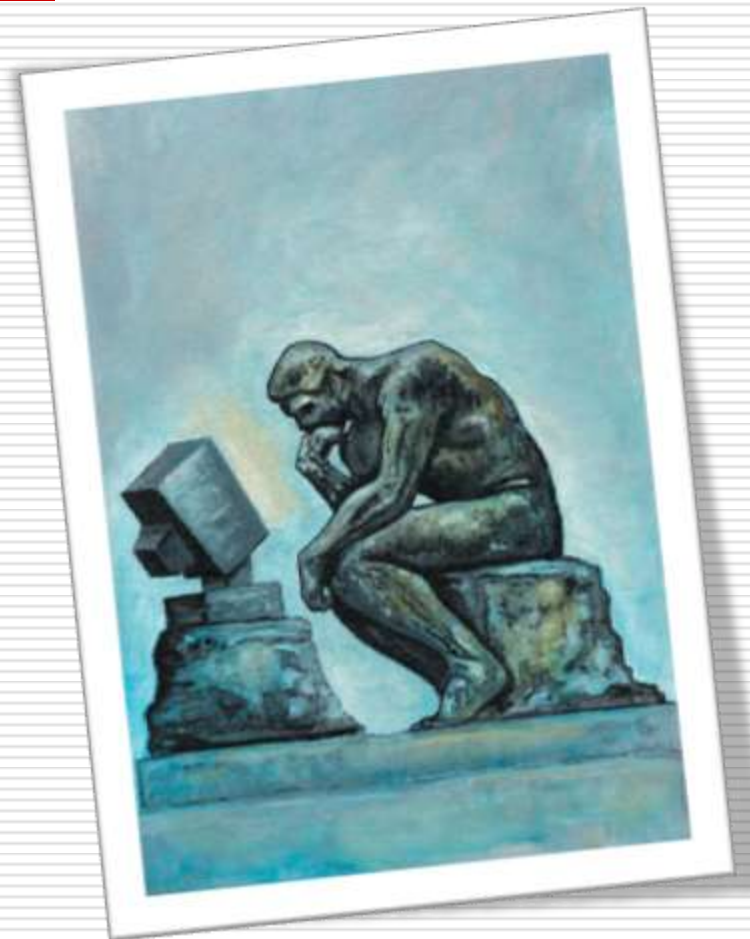
Cognitive Changes



- ❑ Increases in the capacity and complexity of thought
 - ❑ Perspective-taking ability emerges
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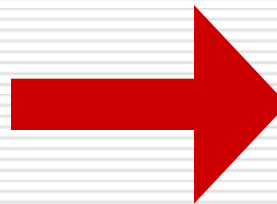
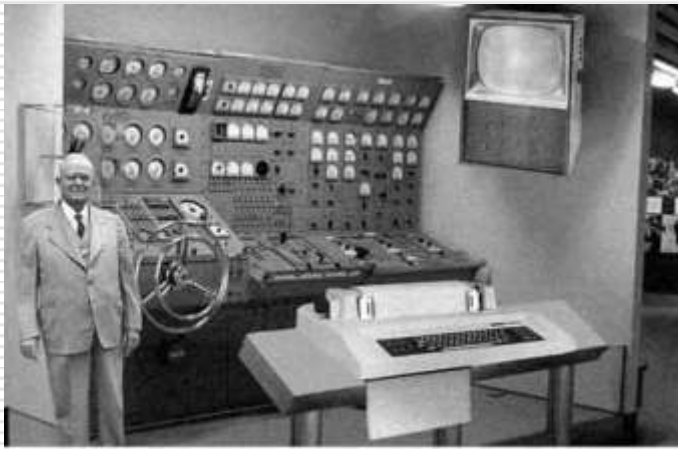
Adolescents Begin to ...

- ❑ Use Abstract Concepts
- ❑ Use Deductive (*If, then*) Reasoning
- ❑ Think About their own Thinking (*Metacognition*)
- ❑ Think More Relatively (*Shades of gray, instead of black and white*)



Cognitive Changes

- Brain development
 - Computer metaphor
 - Capacity and Efficiency Increase



Cognitive Changes

□ Paradoxical Effects of Brain Development Timing:

Early Adolescence

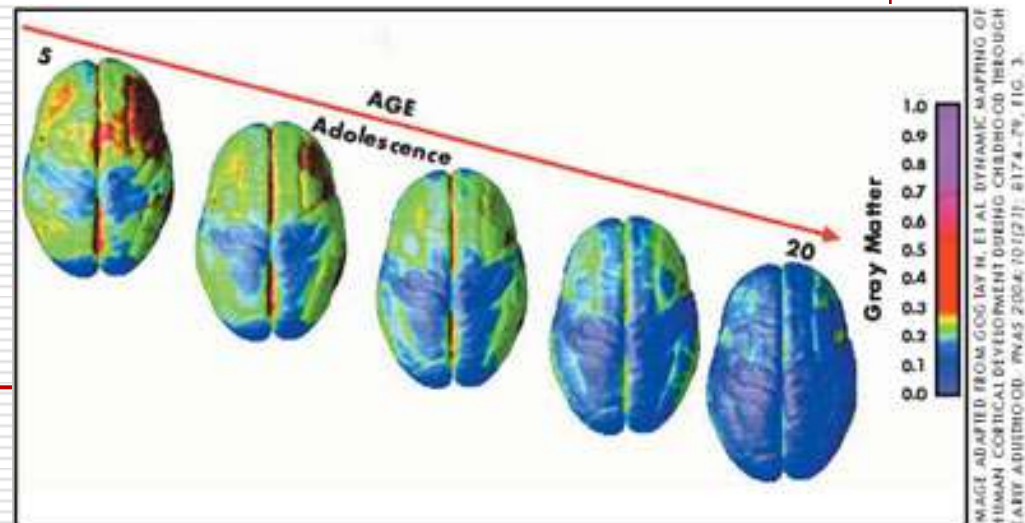
Limbic System

- Fuels Motivation to Seek Novelty, Reward, & Diverse Sensations

Later Adolescence

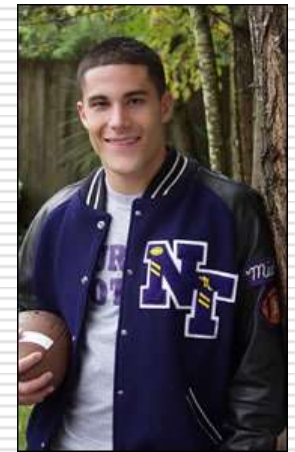
Pre-Frontal Cortex

- Fosters Planning & Thinking Through Consequences



Social-Cognitive Changes

- ❑ Time spent thinking about interpersonal relationships increases
- ❑ Teens try out new social identities, challenge social norms and beliefs



Social-Cognitive Changes

- Adolescents begin to understand complex, abstract societal relationships
 - Social Conventions:
 - Religion
 - Politics
 - Economy
 - Decisions to engage in risky behaviors are connected more to personal costs than societal costs
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Adolescents Think & Make Decisions Differently than Adults

- “Everybody will notice!”
 - *Imaginary Audience*
 - “It’s all about me!”
 - *Egocentric Thinking*
 - “It won’t happen to me!”
 - *Personal Fable*
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Insights from Behavior-Decision Theory...

- Ability to Plan & Consider Consequences
 - Adults & adolescents are similar
 - Impact of Social Costs
 - Adolescents weight ***muchmore heavily*** than adults
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What Were They THINKING?!?

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- Why did Jimmy make bad decisions?
 - Why didn't he anticipate getting in trouble?
Inability to project far into the future; Personal Fable
 - Why didn't he turn the "friends of friends" away?
Enormous social pressures
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The Take Home Message

How can you put this information to use?



Suggestions for Putting this Information to Use

Code of Criminal Procedure

Chapter 45: Justice and Municipal Courts

- Art. 45.0215: Plea by Minor and Appearance of Parent
 - Take advantage of the FAMILY being in court
- Art. 45.050: Failure to Pay Fine; Contempt; Juveniles
 - (c)(2)(B) - Removing driving privileges is a big SOCIAL consequence
- Art. 45.051: Suspension of Sentence and Deferral of Final Disposition
 - (b) Judge may require defendant to:
 - (4) submit to diagnostic testing for alcohol or drugs
 - (5) submit to psychosocial assessment
 - (10) comply with any other reasonable condition
 - Make logical connections between the offense and condition and keep PROTECTIVE FACTORS in mind

Suggestions for Putting this Information to Use

Code of Criminal Procedure

Chapter 45: Justice and Municipal Courts

- Art. 45.052: Dismissal of Misdemeanor Charge on Completion of Teen Court Program
 - Take advantage of the power of SOCIAL influence (not-so-IMAGINARY AUDIENCE)
- Art. 45.054 & 057: Failure to Attend School Proceedings & Offenses Committed by Juveniles
 - Allows you to order several types of activities that fall under PROTECTIVE FACTORS for future success
 - Self-improvement counseling, self-esteem and leadership training, job skills training, violence avoidance training, PARENTAL involvement, and engaging in community service
- Art. 45.056: Authority to Employ Juvenile Case Managers
 - Relatively infrequently used system for compliance
 - Follow through on consequences is a PROTECTIVE FACTOR just like preventative initiatives



Suggestions for Putting this Information to Use *Praise, Reward, and Support*

- Because of many of the things mentioned today, adolescents are very responsive to praise and positive feedback
 - Reading letters of praise and support in court have been successful
- Earlier is Better
 - Community support and protective factors are much more effective if adolescents experience them early (i.e., middle school)
- Work with existing community support systems and encourage initiatives that propose additional PROTECTIVE FACTORS for adolescents

