

Case Study of an Adolescent Male

Name

Issues in Human Development
Education 566

Date

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Adolescence is like a roller coaster ride; there are all of these unexpected twists and turns, hills that are greatly anticipated, and then drop-offs that will take a person's breath away. It can be exciting and scary all at the same time. Like Adolescence, people may take the same roller coaster ride; however, each individual's experience and interpretation of the ride is different. Adolescence is a period of development marked by biological changes, new experiences, and new developmental tasks. I have interviewed and collected data to dive into the world of Luke Denton¹ and assess his developmental status compared to the expectations and norms written in the Life Span Development textbook.

Physical Development.

Luke Denton was born on December 17, 1992, in the town he has lived his entire life. He is sixteen years old, which falls under the adolescent developmental category (10-12 years to 18-21 years). He weighs 210 pounds. I accessed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website to find Luke's body mass index. It found Luke to have a BMI of 29.3, "placing the BMI-for-age at the 96th percentile for boys aged 16 years 6 months. [The website suggested] this teen may be obese and is likely to have health-related problems because of weight [...]" However, when looking at Luke obese is the last thing that would come to a person's mind, so it did not surprise me that Luke said he was not concerned with his weight in the interview.

¹ This is a fictitious name used to protect the confidentiality of the subject.

Luke is an active member of his high school's basketball, football, and track team. He enjoys working out. Luke has been awarded for his athletic achievements with awards such as: Sevier County Player of the Week and the 110% award. Luke was awarded the Sevier County Player of the Week Award for football and the 110% Award in basketball during his sophomore year of high school. The textbook *Life-span Development* reported that U.S. adolescents eat more fried foods and exercise less. "Just two-thirds of U.S. adolescents exercised at least twice a week [...]. U.S. boys and girls become less active as they reach and progress through adolescence" (Santrock, p. 366). Luke did report eating fast food about once every two days; however, he also reported exercising 4 or 5 days a week. Although Luke does make unhealthy eating choices occasionally, he is active and exercises regularly.

It is clear that Luke has developed many pubertal characteristics. In the interview I asked Luke to recall the age when the onset of maximum growth in height, more detectable voice changes, and the growth of facial hair occurred. Luke could not recall exact ages, but he reported experiencing his growth spurt and noticing a detectable change in his voice at about age 13. He also said that he began to develop facial hair around age 15. The textbook *Life-span Development* reports the mean age at the beginning of growth spurt for males is 11 and the peak rate of pubertal change occurs at 13 ½ years for boys (Santrock, p. 357). I believe that Luke is similar to the norms in the textbook when it comes to pubertal characteristics of physical development.

Language/Cognitive Development.

Luke recently completed his sophomore year in high school. When I asked Luke about school he said he felt it was boring. He said his favorite thing about school was socializing, and his least favorite was all the work. Despite his feelings about school, Luke makes good grades. Luke has excelled in academics throughout his schooling. For example, in the 5th grade Luke scored above average in every subject on the TCAP, except social studies; in which, he scored in the average percentile. In the 5th grade Luke was also selected to participate in the Duke University Talent Identification Program. Thus far in his high school career he has been awarded certificates of achievement in Honors English II and Algebra II. Since the 8th grade Luke has achieved straight A's and has a cumulative grade point average of a 4.0. Luke says he plans on going to college and could potentially see himself pursuing a career in law.

There are some signs that Luke may experience adolescent egocentrism. When he walks into the room, I noticed Luke likes to grab everyone's attention either by what he says or the loudness in his speech. I believe he also has a sense of invincibility, but he also seemed to practice safe behaviors such as: wearing his seatbelt and avoiding car rides with people under the influence. However, he did report never wearing a helmet when biking or roller-skating. I believe this is also influenced by the improvement in information processing.

According to *Life-span Issues*, Deanna Kuhn believes "the most important cognitive change in adolescence is improvement in executive functioning, which involves higher-order cognitive activities such as reasoning, making decisions,

monitoring thinking critically, and monitoring one's cognitive progress" (Santrock, p. 374). Although adolescents are capable of making competent decisions, this does not guarantee that one will make them in everyday life. When I asked Luke questions that require decision-making, his responses were mostly wise decisions. When asked if he drinks alcohol, rode in the car with someone that had been drinking alcohol, smoked tobacco or marijuana, or chewed tobacco he answered no. However, when I asked Luke if he has taken steroids he responded, "I've thought about it, but no".

Luke excels in academics. Although I do not have the norms for academic achievement, I am confident that he exceeds the norm. Luke does believe law could be a possible career option; however, he seemed open to other career ideas. Luke could increase his awareness of career options through volunteering in different fields.

Social/ Emotional Development.

Before looking at Luke's social and emotional development it is important to understand his family history. Luke was only a baby when his parent's divorced; by the age of 3 his stepfather adopted him. Luke now lives with his mom and adopted dad. Luke still sees his birth father; however, it is only once every year or two. He says he has a good relationship with his parents. He says "I can talk to them about whatever, and they trust me". He turns to his parents for advice on moral questions and values. Luke has two half-brothers that are 7 and 8 years older than he is. He says his family is very close and his brothers and sister-in-laws are very important to him. He says he can talk to his brothers about anything without having to worry

what they will think of him. Luke also says that his friends play a “huge part” in his life. He depends on his friends’ advice when it comes to dress, schoolwork, and school activities.

It is clear that Luke is developing his own identity. He has started to consider which career path he wants to follow (possibly law), he has strong religious beliefs (Christian), he has established his relationship identity (single, although it is subject to change), and his sexual identity (heterosexual). Luke also has established his cultural identity, interests, and physical identity. His interests are listening to music, being on the Internet, working out, participating in sports, and hanging out with friends.

In Luke’s search for independence he sometimes argues with his parents. He says the arguments are usually related to his curfew or going out with friends. The textbook, *Life-span Development*, says “[...] the everyday negotiations and minor disputes not only are normal but also can serve the positive developmental function of helping the adolescent make the transition from childhood dependency to adult independence” (p. 392). I believe that Luke and his parents arguments are normal and do not indicate any extreme conflicts associated with risky behaviors.

Luke has stated that his friends are an important aspect in his life. If Luke was to be associated with a crowd it would probably be the “jocks”. Luke says most of his friends are also active in sports. When I asked Luke about peer pressure, he did not seem as if it were a difficult issue. He reports that he does not drink, smoke, or do drugs. Luke says he has had romantic relationships. He reports his most recent began his sophomore year of high school and lasted for about seven months. This is

also his longest romantic relationship. The textbook, *Life-span Development*, say that “it is not until the tenth grade that half of the adolescents had a romantic relationship that lasted two months or longer. [...] Another study found that 35% of 15- to 16- year-olds [...] had dating relationships that endured for 11 months or longer” (p. 396). His peer and romantic relationships are not very different from the norms. He does report not being influenced by peer pressure, which is a hardship for many adolescents.

When asked about the problems of adolescence, Luke does not report many of these issues. He has never been in detention, been suspended, or expelled. He does not drink alcohol or do drugs. J.J. Binger found that “[...] one high school student out of four uses marijuana, and two out of three use alcohol regularly”. In this aspect Luke does not fit the norm of alcohol consumption. He has never been in trouble with the law either. Luke says he is not home alone often and he feels safe in his home. When asked how life is in general, he responded, “Great!”. When asked if he ever feels sad, tearful, bored or disconnected, he responded “bored sometimes”. I believe it is typical to feel bored and this is not anything to be concerned about. He does not have a family history of depression or suicide.

Moral/Faith Development.

Luke says spirituality is important in his life. Luke says he is active in the youth group at his church. This seems to be a normal trend; “In a national study of American freshman, in 2007, 78% said they attended a religious service frequently or occasionally during their senior year in high school.

The textbook, *Life-span Development*, cites a study that says “adolescents who are involved in religious institutions are more likely to engage in service learning than their counterparts [...]” (p. 389). Service learning is “a form of education that promotes social responsibility and service to the community” (Santrock, p. 378). Service learning is associated with positive benefits for adolescents, such as: high grades, increased goal setting, and improved self-esteem. When Luke was asked about participating in volunteer activities, he responded that he did not. However, there is a newspaper article that featured Luke leading campers in a football camp, in which he volunteered to help teach/coach.

“In a recent national random sample of more than 2,000 11- to 18-year-olds, those who were higher in religiosity were less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, use marijuana, not be truant from school, not engage in delinquent activities, and not be depressed than their low-religiosity counterparts” (Santrock, p. 390). This is true for Luke because his religion is an important aspect in his everyday life, and he reports not participating in any of the risky behaviors that the study asked about.

Recommendations for Future Development.

Luke is well built due to many hours in the gym. However, he admitted to eating fast food at least every two days. I would recommend Luke to not eat as much fast food and incorporate for fruits and vegetables in his diet rather than fried foods. I would advise Luke to only eat fast food once every two weeks, and try to eat at least two fruits or vegetables a day. With his current workout routine and a new and improved diet, Luke can become even healthier.

Luke applies himself academically and makes good grades. Luke admits he is bored with school. To make school more interesting and to challenge Luke, I would recommend his teachers use the logic of science and mathematics to encourage Luke to become a formal operational thinker. I would challenge Luke to keep a journal and write about their thoughts and ideals. This would also encourage Luke to increase his cognitive and language skills.

Luke seemed unsure of potential future careers, but he did list becoming a lawyer as a possibility. I believe Luke would be able to discover what career would be the best option if he volunteered or shadowed in different fields. I would recommend that Luke decide on three potential careers that he would be interested in, and then shadow a person that works in that field. Since Luke is busy in the school year with athletics, he could volunteer for two or three different companies over his summer break. This would allow Luke to be more confident in his career identity. I would also recommend Luke take a class in high school (if it is offered) or his freshman year in college that explores different career options. This type of class can help a student become familiar with jobs that would fit their personalities.

Luke seems to value his religion. I believe that Luke has set high standards for himself and also has personal morals that are important to him. I believe Luke could benefit by being a role model or serve as a “big brother” in an after-school or summer program. Luke would also benefit from volunteering in a variety of settings, and this may help him become more aware of his career identity.

I want to thank Luke and his family for helping me gather data to analyze adolescent development. I appreciate him allowing me to interview him and dive into his world for a few weeks! Thanks again!²

² No comments were made by Luke's parents.

Appendix A. Permission Slip

Education 566: Issues in Human Development

I, _____ ,(Parent/Legal Guardian) give permission for _____
to collect data for the purpose of writing a case study with _____ as the
focus. I understand that no real names will be used and that the identity of
_____ will not be revealed in any other way. I understand that I will be
provided with a copy of the case study and that I may comment on the findings
presented in the case study.

(Printed Name of Parent/Guardian)

(Parent/Guardian Signature)

Appendix B. Interview Questions.

Case Study Major Areas of Development.
Interviewed on July 2, 2009 at 8:45 pm

Physical/ Motor:

Are you involved with any organized sports activities? Yes. Football, Basketball, and Track. Community Center? Yes. PF and Sevierville. Religious/Church group? Yes, First Baptist Sevierville Youth

Are you concerned about your weight? No

Do you exercise? Yes

Do you make healthy choices when eating? Sometimes. How often do you eat fast food? Once every two days.

When did you experience a growth spurt? Probably around 13.

When did you start growing facial hair? About 15

When did you begin to notice a change in your voice? About 13.

School/Work

Are you going to school? Yes. What grade? 11th How do you feel about school? It's boring.

How are you doing in school? Great Grades? Yep. As and Bs Expelled/Suspended or ISS? No.

What do you like best about school? Socializing Least? Work

How often do you skip? Never.

Do you work? Yes. How many hours a week? 15-20hrs. Just for the summer.

Do you plan on attending college? Yes

What career could you see yourself doing in ten years? Law. What can you do to ensure that you do it? Go to school, college, focus on classes.

Social/ Emotional:

Tell me a little about your home life? I come home, watch , TV and sleep. My parents love me and I have a roof over my head.

Who do you live with? Mom and Dad (adopted dad)

Are you home alone often? No

Are there other adults that are important to you? Yes. Brothers and Sisters.

Tell me about your relationship with your parents? Its good. I can talk to them about whatever and they trust me. Brothers? Even better, I can talk to them about anything without worrying about it. Sisters? Same. Other family? My cousin is my best friend. Our family is really close.

Do you feel safe in your home? Yes. Neighborhood/Community? Yes.

What role do your friends play in your life? A huge part. I hang out with my friends a lot. Parents? They show me what to do in life, how to wash clothes (laughs) and other chores...

Do you and your parents argue? Sometimes. What do you typically argue about? How late I can stay out or if I can go places with my friends.

How do you spend your spare time? Listening to music, Internet, working out. What do you do for fun? Play basketball or hang out with friends.

Who do you hangout with? Brett Pippin, Jake (cousin), Dustin Hurst. What do you do when you hangout? Play video games.

Do you feel that peer pressure is an issue in your life? No, not really. If I don't want to do something then I just don't.

Do you depend more on your parents' advice or your friends' advice when it comes to questions of: dress? Friends Schoolwork? Friends Out of School Activities? Friends Moral Questions? Parents Values? Parents

How is life in general? Great. Do you ever feel sad, tearful, bored, disconnected? Bored sometimes.

Do you have a family history of suicide? No. depression? No.

Moral/Faith Development:

How important would you say religion is in your life? A big part.

Do you attend church/youth group? Yes

Do you drink alcohol? No. How much? How often? What kinds of situations?

In the last 6 months how many times have you rode in the car with someone drinking alcohol? Never.

Do you do smoke tobacco or marijuana? NO Chew tobacco? NO How much? How often? What kinds of situations?

Do you hang out with people that smoke, drink, or do drugs? No Sell drugs? No

Have you used steroids? Thought about it, but no.

Are you sexually active? No

Do you have a girlfriend? No.

Have you had a girlfriend? Yea, a few. How long? The longest one was for 7 months my sophomore year.

Do you participate in any volunteer activities? No.

Safety:

When you drive/ride, do you wear a seatbelt? Yes

What do you do if the person you're riding with is drunk or using drugs? I won't ride with them.

When you bike, skateboard, or roller-skate do you wear a helmet? No.

Do you ever carry a weapon? No. Is there a gun in your home? No. Where is it stored? N/A

Appendix C. Reflection.

This case study has allowed me to experience another person's perspective of adolescence and better understand the developmental characteristics of this period. This experience gave me the opportunity to further my knowledge of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and moral development.

Throughout this class I have learned different milestones in human development; however, this particular assignment gave me a deeper understanding of adolescence. This is particularly important because I plan to teach secondary students; students at this grade level are in their adolescent developmental period. I was able to better understand Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory. By understanding the developmental stages and the issues students may be facing in my class, I will be able to relate to students better and teach them on a level that is intriguing and understandable.

The case study gave me the understanding that all adolescents have different developmental experiences. Although I feel that I can relate to Luke in many aspects, we also have many differences in our adolescent development. I believe it is important for every teacher to realize that the students in their classroom have not had the same experiences; therefore, there will be different personalities, learning styles, and values. It is important to respect individual differences, while communicating effectively to all students.

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