

SYLLABUS & READINGS

Psych. 4521: Critical Thinking	Section 006: <i>Social Psychology of Adolescent Risk Behavior</i>
Class Time: Tues./Thurs., 3:30-4:45	Classroom: Muenzinger, E417
Instructor: Dr. Richard Jessor	Email: jessor@colorado.edu
Office: IBS 1 (1416 Broadway), 492-8148	Office Hours: After class or by appointment
Textbook: Jessor, R. (Ed.) (1998). <i>New Perspectives on Adolescent Risk Behavior</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.	

The domain of adolescent risk behavior--beyond its intrinsic interest, its personal relevance, and its societal significance--is unusually suitable as a topic for a critical thinking course. Any foray into that domain, no matter how tentative or superficial, immediately confronts the student (and the scientist) with all the basic issues of social inquiry. How can we advance knowledge and achieve understanding when the phenomena are so elusive, so emotionally-freighted, so culturally-relative, and so historically variable? This is just the kind of challenge that demands clear, analytic, logical, informed, unbiased--that is, critical--thinking.

Adolescent risk behavior constitutes a domain of unusual confluence of personal, social, developmental, and societal influences. Four major categories of risk behavior will be considered: Problem behaviors such as illicit drug use or early sexual initiation that involve transgression of legal or social norms; inadequate social role performance such as disconnecting or dropping out of school; health compromising behavior such as poor eating habits, insufficient exercise, or unprotected sexual activity; and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Depending on intensity of involvement, all of these behaviors can compromise positive adolescent development and interfere with the accomplishment of age-relevant tasks. The class will be concerned with understanding the epidemiology, the structure/organization, and the developmental course of adolescent risk behavior, and it will examine the degree to which extant social-psychological theories provide an adequate explanatory account as well as a logical basis for the design of prevention/intervention programs.

The course will begin with consideration of the major issues that any comprehensive understanding of risk behavior would necessarily entail. Some of these are listed here, but others will surely emerge from our discussions and from the particular interests and experiences of class members. A key reading or two for each issue is also listed; others may be assigned as we go along.

PART I

Prologue: An Overview of Adolescent Development.

Readings: Steinberg, L. & Morris, A.S. (2001). Adolescent development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 83-110.

1. The Concept of "Risk Behavior" in Adolescence.

Readings: Chapter 1 in Textbook.

Issues: What does risk behavior include?
What is at risk?

2. The Epidemiology of Adolescent Risk Behaviors.

Readings: Wallace, J. M., Jr., & Bachman, J. G. (1991). Explaining racial/ethnic differences in adolescent drug use: The impact of background and lifestyle. *Social Problems*, 38(3), 333-357.

Issues: What can be learned from its differential distribution and concentration by age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.?

3. The Measurement of Risk Behavior in Adolescence.

Readings: *Survey of Personal and Social Development at CU: 2004*

Issues: Veridicality of self-report.
Problems of recall and bias.
Ethical and legal issues
Informed consent; confidentiality.
Comprehensiveness of assessment

4. The Developmental Course of Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Sampson, R. J. & Laub, J. H. (1992). Crime and deviance in the life course. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 63-84.

Issues: How to explain variation in age of onset, developmental change, and desistance of risk behaviors?

5. The Structure and Organization of Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapter 4 in Textbook.

Issues: Are risk behaviors interrelated?
What are the implications of co-variation among risk behaviors?

6. The Explanation of Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Steinberg, L. Is decision making the right framework for research on adolescent risk taking? In Romer D. (Ed.) (2003) *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Petraitis, J., Flay, B. R., & Miller T. Q. (1995). Reviewing theories of adolescent substance use: Organizing pieces in the puzzle. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(1), 67-86.

Jessor, R., Turbin, M.S., Costa, F.M., Dong, Q., Zhang, H., & Wang, C. (2003). Adolescent problem behavior in China and the United States: A cross-national study of psychosocial protective factors. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13, 329-360.

Issues: Multivariate vs. single variable accounts.
Multi-level vs. single level accounts.
Is accounting for risk sufficient?
The role of protective factors.

PART II

7. Alcohol and Drug Use as Adolescent Risk Behaviors.

Readings: Chapters 3, and 6 in Textbook.

8. Sexual Activity as Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapters 8 and 9 in Textbook.

Fortenberry, J.D. Adolescent sex and the rhetoric of risk. In Romer D. (Ed.) (2003) *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

9. Depression as Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapter 10 in Textbook.

10. Inadequate Role Performance as Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapters 12 and 13 in Textbook.

11. Poor Eating, Exercise, and Safety Habits as Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapter 7 in Textbook.

Jessor, R., Turbin, M. & Costa, F. (1998). Protective factors in adolescent health behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(3), 788-800.

PART III

12. Prevention of and Intervention in Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Gorman, D. M. (1996). Do school-based social skills training programs prevent alcohol use among young people? *Addiction Research*, 4(2), 191-210.

Botvin, G. J., Baker, E., Dusenbury, L., Botvin, E. M., & Diaz, T. (1995). Long-term follow-up results of a randomized drug abuse prevention trial in a white middle-class population. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273(14), 1106-1112.

Flay, B.R. Positive youth development is necessary and possible. In Romer D. (Ed.) (2003) *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Roth, J.L. & Brooks-Gunn, J. Youth development programs and healthy development. In Romer D. (Ed.) (2003) *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Issues: Societal changes vs. individual change.
Public health measures vs. treatment.
Positive youth development: Promotion vs. prevention

13. Future Approaches to Adolescent Risk Behavior.

Readings: Chapters 14 and 15 in Textbook.

Issues: Better measurement
Earlier assessment
Encompassing biology and genetics
Person-centered research
Qualitative inquiry

Grading will be based upon:

- A mid-term exam: October 19
- A final exam
- Three or four brief, 2-page papers
- A class presentation
- Participation in class discussion
- Regular attendance

The exams will be short-answer and brief essay questions. The brief papers will show critical thinking about an issue or topic from the readings. The class presentations will come near the end of the semester, will involve cooperating in small subgroups, and will reflect your outside reading on a particular aspect or category of adolescent risk behavior.