Alienation Encyclopedia Article

Alienation

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Alienation

Withdrawal or isolation from other people, rejection of the values of one's family or society, or estrangement from one's own feelings.

Adolescents are the most frequent victims of feelings of alienation. The alienated adolescent has been a familiar cultural figure since James Dean's movies in the 1950s. The alienation often associated with the adolescent quest for identity commonly involves a distrust of adults, a rejection of their values, and a pessimistic world view. Alienated adolescents feel their lives are meaningless and that they have little control over the events that shape their lives. They often feel isolated from adults, their peer group, or even themselves. Teens may feel alienated as a result of **anxiety** over inadequate social skills or physical attractiveness. Some experts consider alienation as a normal accompaniment to the dramatic physical and intellectual changes and the emotional volatility of the teen years. They view it as a deliberate identity choice, as a teen chooses to withdraw from groups that he or she formerly identified with and reject that group's values. This is especially true in late **adolescence** and early adulthood.

Teenage alienation is viewed as pathological if it accompanies serious psychological disorders, such as **phobias** and obsessions. **Schizophrenia** often involves alienation from both oneself and others, while social alienation characterizes those with antisocial (or psychopathic) personality disorder. Often, persons with **antisocial personality disorder** did not experience normal **attachment** to a parent or caregiver in early childhood, and the normal ability to relate to and identify with others was never developed. Pathological alienation is most often seen in late adolescence.

For Further Study

Books

Adams, Gerald, T. R. Gullotta, and Raymond Montemayor, eds. *Adolescent Identity Formation.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992.

LeCompte, Margaret Diane. *Giving Up on School: Student Dropouts and Teacher Burnouts.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, 1991.