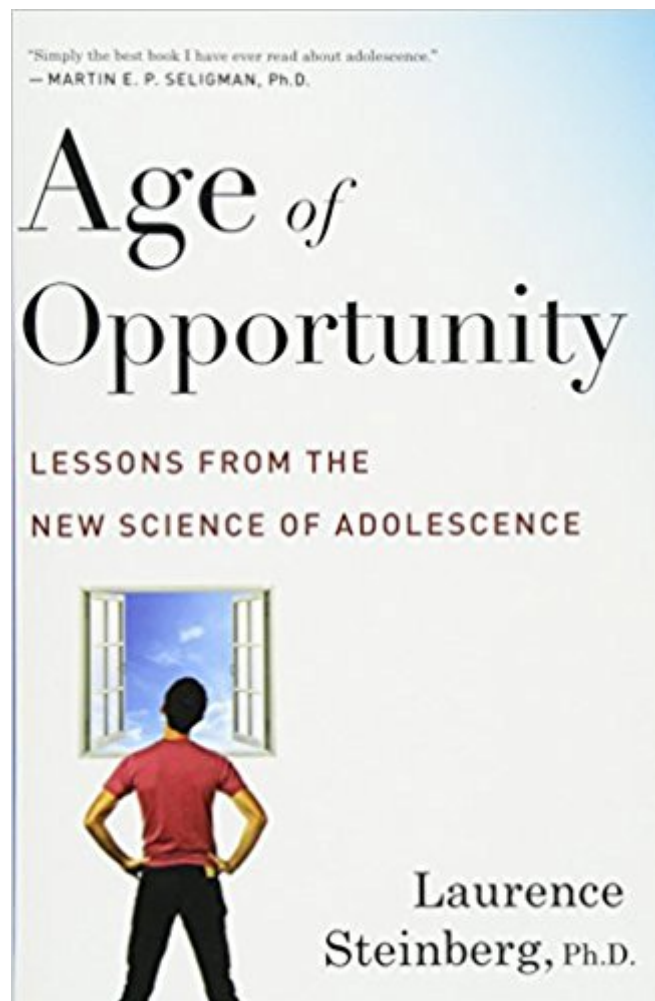




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Age Of Opportunity: Lessons From The New Science Of Adolescence



Synopsis

“Simply the best book I have ever read about adolescence. . . With gentle wisdom, Steinberg guides us through truly novel findings on what happens during adolescence and tells us how, as parents and teachers, we should change our ways.” • Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph. D., author of *The Optimistic Child* “If you need to understand adolescents • whether your own or anyone else’s • you must read this book . . . Steinberg explains why most of our presumptions about adolescence are dead wrong and reveals the truth about this exciting and unnerving stage of life.” • Jennifer Senior, author of *All Joy and No Fun* Over the past few decades, adolescence has lengthened, and this stage of life now lasts longer than ever. Recent research has shown that the adolescent brain is surprisingly malleable, making it a crucial time of life for determining a person’s future success and happiness. In *Age of Opportunity*, the world-renowned expert on adolescence Laurence Steinberg draws on this trove of fresh evidence • including his own groundbreaking research • to explain the teenage brain’s capacity for change and to offer new strategies for instilling resilience, self-control, and other beneficial traits. By showing how new discoveries about adolescence must change the way we raise, teach, and treat young people, Steinberg provides a myth-shattering guide for parents, educators, and anyone else who cares about adolescents. “A fascinating book [that] parents and teachers ought to read.” • *Atlanta Journal Constitution* “This book belongs on the shelf of every parent, teacher, youth worker, counselor, judge • heck, anyone interested in pre-teens and teenagers.” • David Walsh, Ph.D., author of *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*

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Customer Reviews

"This study will be gratefully received by many for its advice on how our increasing understanding of adolescent development can be put to practical use in helping adolescents through emotional and behavioral tumult ... Steinberg's audience is as broad as his approach and includes parents, educators, politicians, businesspeople, and health care professionals. A clear and canny look into the adolescent brain that will help influence adolescent lives for the better." [Kirkus Reviews](#) "This is a convincing and eloquent call for change." [Publishers Weekly](#) "Simply the best book I have ever read about adolescence, and I say this as both the father of seven and as a scientist who works in this field. Steinberg guides us through truly novel findings on what happens during adolescence and tells us how, as parents and teachers, we should change our ways." [Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph. D., author of Learned Optimism and The Optimistic Child](#) "As a mother of two boys and an educator, I am so grateful Laurence Steinberg has written this amazing book. He not only clearly and elegantly communicates the newest insights into understanding teenagers' brains but also shows how adults can manage ourselves when we get frustrated with teens' behavior." [Rosalind Wiseman, author of Queen Bees and Wannabes and Masterminds and Wingmen](#) "If you need to understand adolescents [whether your own or anyone else's](#) [you must read this book.](#) Steinberg explains why most of our presumptions about adolescence are dead wrong and reveals the truth about this exciting and unnerving stage of life. Written with warmth, lucidity, and passion, *Age of Opportunity* will fill parents with relief by demystifying their children. Educators and policy-makers should study it carefully." [Jennifer Senior, author of All Joy and No Fun](#) "I love this book! Steinberg has blended the latest research with his decades of expertise to give us a bold new view of the perils and promise of adolescence." [Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., Clinical Professor, UCLA School of Medicine, and author of Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain](#) "Clear, evidence-based, and solutions-oriented, *Age of Opportunity* is the roadmap you need whether you already have a teen or young adult, or are preparing for one." [Madeline Levine, Ph.D., author of The Price of Privilege and Teach Your Children Well](#) "A fascinating and important book. What every parent, teacher and counselor MUST know about the adolescent brain, its vulnerabilities, and its tremendous possibilities." [Carol](#)

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• David Walsh, Ph.D., author of *Why Do They Act That Way?* "Based on cutting-edge research and the wisdom of a leading authority in the field, this magnificent book will captivate parents, teachers, policy-makers and adolescents themselves."

• Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, Ph.D., Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, University College, London

If you need to understand adolescents whether your own or anyone else's you must read this book . . . Steinberg explains why most of our presumptions about adolescence are dead wrong and reveals the truth about this exciting and unnerving stage of life. Jennifer Senior, author of *All Joy and No Fun* Over the past few decades, adolescence has lengthened, and this stage of life now lasts longer than ever. Recent research has shown that the adolescent brain is surprisingly malleable, making it a crucial time of life for determining a person's future success and happiness. In *Age of Opportunity*, the world-renowned expert on adolescence Laurence Steinberg draws on this trove of fresh evidence including his own groundbreaking research to explain the teenage brain's capacity for change and to offer new strategies for instilling resilience, self-control, and other beneficial traits. By showing how new discoveries about adolescence must change the way we raise, teach, and treat young people, Steinberg provides a myth-shattering guide for parents, educators, and anyone else who cares about adolescents. A fascinating book [that] parents and teachers ought to read. *Atlanta Journal Constitution* This book belongs on the shelf of every parent, teacher, youth worker, counselor, judge heck, anyone interested in pre-teens and teenagers. David Walsh, Ph.D., author of *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen* "

Parents of adolescents -- stand by. Adolescence is starting earlier and lasting longer . . . but,

according to Dr. Steinberg, that is not such a bad thing, as the adolescent mind is particularly plastic -- uniquely capable of learning and developing -- and emotions and experiences are heightened during adolescences, so the things we experience in adolescence will never quite be as wonderful when we experience them as adults. This book presents an interesting mix of academic treatise / parenting. The author provides extensive data revealing just how immature the adolescent mind can be and discusses social policy vis a vis the United States' treatment of adolescents -- teenagers and drinking, driving, military service, voting, and criminal prosecution. He encourages parents to help delay onset of puberty by ensuring our children eat well, avoid obesity, avoid overexposure to light -- and then protect our children through adolescence through authoritative parenting -- a combination of warmth, firmness, and support.

Parents with adolescence need to read this and everyone who works with this age group. We do look at this age group as hard to deal with and parent are trying to survive this stage of development. Laurence Steinberg shines a light on this stage of development to reframe all that we know and what we think we know....we have been missing out on a opportunity of great importance to children who are going through this stage and the possibilities that could be if we would just gain some understanding. Great information, much needed and necessary for the next generation and generations to come!

Excellent and timely and up-to-date, this book is useful for counselors and psychologists and highly recommended by me for my graduate students. I also encourage professionals who work with adolescents, such as church pastors and teachers and YMCA youth leaders to read this book because it provides important background to the early-onset changes precipitated by puberty. For counselors and psychologists who graduated before the turn of the century and feel like they have been left behind by the 'decade of the brain', this is a very helpful resource. This is especially helpful in the sections that address changes in the onset of puberty and the duration of adolescence. Conversations among parents, educators, mental health professionals, and youth pastors must take this into account. As a psychologist, I strongly believe that we must be proactively defending children as they transition into early adolescence. At the other end of adolescence, we must help people transition into young adulthood with a full understanding of the developing brain's timeline, taking into account the important male-female differences. The author sets the stage for these discussions with excellent reasoning backed by well organized scientific data.

I read this book for a Adolescent Psychology class; I really liked the way it explains the development of the brain at this age. I also enjoyed the analogies and stories the author uses to drive his point home. Any on who is a parent, grandparent, minister, and teacher should read this book. It will open your eyes to the understanding of the teen brain. I enjoyed the read.

Essential book on the latest science on adolescent brain plasticity, proving that old notions of personality formation in early childhood are terribly wrong. Every parent, guardian or professional working with adolescents (ages 10-25) should read this book. This is the age of opportunity and the age of potential disaster for lifelong personality and psychology. The author has some hard-won and important prescriptions from parenting to public policy on how to approach adolescent development for better future adults and a better future society.

Must read for anyone who deals in the lives of children, especially adolescents. Spells out what neuroscience and years of observational research is revealing with easy to read language.

The first third of this book is well worth reading. We get a number of valuable insights into and great perspective on the biological, brain-based reasons (in easily understandable layman's terms) for the issues and problems that commonly arise in adolescence, an understanding of how adolescence has been lengthening on both ends and why that both is and isn't a problem. Adolescence, he demonstrates, is a period of great brain plasticity, much like that which is recognized in early childhood when infants through preschoolers are capable of learning and developing quite rapidly. The same capacity for growth exists in adolescence, but it is more of a double-edge sword because adolescence is a time when teens take many more risks, are less likely to be supervised and have much greater potential for encountering harm. The adolescent's brain changes almost as much as a young child's, but if that change takes place in a negative environment, negative changes can become encoded in the brain leading to life-long behavioral, cognitive and emotional problems that can, in turn, lead to school and work failure, unintended pregnancy, run-ins with the law and relationship difficulties. Steinberg explores, through a great deal of research, exactly what the differences are between children, adolescents and adults as far as cognitive and emotional functioning. Contrary to popular belief, he demonstrates that teenagers are able to reason and make judgments about as well as adults when given adequate information and time to process it, so "immaturity" is not a direct result of deficits in judgment or

understanding. He also sorts through a number of other commonly accepted "culprits" of adolescent (mis)behavior – impulsivity, self-control, peer-pressure, etc. What he seems to find is that one of the biggest factors is that adolescents are more primed than either children or adults to respond to rewards. Brain imaging demonstrates that the reward centers of adolescents' brains "light up" more in response to potential rewards than do either children's or adults' brains. Adolescents have as good ability as adults to judge risks and hazards of a situation or decision, but they are so much more responsive to the potential rewards that they are more likely to disregard the hazards to obtain the reward. This effect is especially heightened in the presence of their peers because adolescents are also very primed to the approval or judgment from their peers, and approval itself becomes a further reward. Steinberg also explores how adolescence has become longer because it both starts earlier and finishes later than it historically has. He examines current and historical trends in the age of puberty on one end and the age of certain life milestones like marriage or living independently on the other. Due to factors such as improved nutrition, obesity, chemicals found in plastics and other materials, as well as social and societal structure, puberty is occurring much earlier for both girls and boys – sometimes as early as seven or eight for girls. That trend has continued downward for decades now and Steinberg fears the trend will continue. On the other end of the scale, young adults are waiting longer to get married, set up their own households, have children and other typical markers of "adulthood". There has been a fair amount of hand-wringing about both ends of this trend. Steinberg demonstrates that such hand-wringing (and more) is warranted in connection with the earlier onset of adolescents. The changes in the brain associated with increased attention to rewards and peer reaction are taking place earlier and earlier with the onset of puberty, but the brain changes associated with executive functions like impulse control still happen around age 16 or later. The time in between Steinberg compares to driving a car with a great accelerator but bad brakes. Young adolescents during this period need strong adult supervision to help them apply external brakes until their internal braking systems come fully on-line. But because of their seeming maturity, many adolescents at this age are allowed too much freedom and may get themselves into nearly irreparable trouble. On the other end of adolescence, there has been much ink spilled about how "kids these days" are taking longer to "mature". They live with their parents longer and their parents help them more with financial, social and emotional matters. Steinberg argues that this is actually a good thing. Because these young adults are still in the adolescent stage of great brain

plasticity, they are still capable of learning and developing great capacities if they are properly supported such that they have opportunities to experience challenging and novel situations with proper guidance. Adolescents who are not properly supported and supervised may find themselves in situations, such as parenting or incarceration which are more

settled and routinized which may foreclose on more stimulating experiences such as college or travel which can help the brain continue to grow. Steinberg talks about how these changes adversely impact those who are already dealt a bad hand in life – poor/low income youth. Children of low income families are less likely to have parental supervision early in their adolescence and, hence, more likely to enter adult life patterns earlier – whether the aforementioned pregnancy or incarceration or simply having to work one or more full time jobs to earn a living. Affluent children, on the other hand, are more likely to be supported and supervised as early adolescents and as older adolescences more likely to have access to experience like college which can give them an even greater advantage over their already-disadvantaged peers. Up to this point, this book is truly valuable for its insights into brain development and the implications for raising adolescents. But as Steinberg tries to apply a lot of these insights, he goes off the rails, especially in terms of education. Steinberg buys into the current (since 1983) canard raised in the “A Nation At Risk” paper that American schools are and American students are failing. We don’t, according to Steinberg, have enough “highly-educated people” to fill jobs that required higher education (which, I’m sure is news to the hundreds of thousands if not millions of highly experienced people with bachelors’ degrees and higher who are stocking retail shelves, manning cash registers or simply trying to exist on unemployment after their jobs were “downsized”). “A Nation At Risk” has been (and even was at the time) debunked many times. The fact is that American students have never scored well on standardized tests compared to some of our foreign competition, but this relatively poor showing has had absolutely no correlation with American ingenuity, industry or any other economic indicator. Test scores are basically just a measure of how well students take tests – they measure nothing in the way of the creativity or innovation necessary to develop and sustain a thriving economy/democracy/society. For a full discussion of this issue, I highly recommend Diane Ravitch’s REIGN OF ERROR. From there Steinberg goes full-throttle Paul Tough emphasizing “grit”, self-control, discipline and perseverance. He, like Tough,

argues that such “non-cognitive” skills should be taught in schools and he (also like Tough) holds up the KIPP charter schools as a model of such teaching. I have to roll my eyes whenever people start talking about “grit”, especially in connection with low income and minority children. I just finished reading THE OTHER WES MOORE, in which the author, a very successful Rhodes Scholar, learns about a murder committed by someone who shared his same name and who grew up very close to where he did. Both the author and the other Wes Moore were on a path toward lives of crime when the author was sent to military school where he pulled himself together. I suppose some would see that as evidence that the “grit” he learned in military school was what saved him. But the other Wes Moore had his own thriving drug business before he was even a teenager. He had to keep track of an intricate web of suppliers and customers and he rose to leadership in a complicated and vicious hierarchy of foot soldiers through kingpins. Now, I’m not trying to claim that drug dealing is a noble or pro-social pursuit in line with military school or being a Rhodes Scholar, but I would say that it’s evidence that “grit” is not what the other Wes Moore lacked. Most kids who fail at school, in fact, have some pursuit which requires discipline, concentration, impulse control, perseverance and “grit”, whether sports or role playing/video games or some other hobby. “Grit”, perseverance and discipline are by-products of interest and relevance. If you really want to see “grit”, perseverance and discipline, watch a young child playing a pretend game or creating an art project or other pursuit of their choosing. Most people lack “grit” for things they perceive as boring, mundane and/or irrelevant to their lives. When education fails to lead many low income youth out of poverty, it is no wonder that so many low income youth perceive education to be boring and/or irrelevant and lose their “grit” in connection with it. Forcing students into “no excuses” drill-and-kill schools like KIPP which are strictly regimented and controlled is not likely to develop “grit”. What most likely saved the Rhodes Scholar Wes Moore isn’t so much the “grit” he developed at military school as it was the people at military school who cared enough about him to help him (and the mother who cared enough to sacrifice to send him there). For a further discussion of “grit” (and a very different view of the ubiquitous “marshmallow experiment” which purportedly demonstrates the virtue of self-control) I recommend Alfie Kohn’s THE MYTH OF THE SPOILED

CHILD (or pretty much anything else by Kohlberg) does get back on track in the last couple chapters of the book in which he talks about situations in which adolescents can and should be treated like adults and allowed to make their own decisions and situations in which they may need more support and even restriction. He talks about the distinction between "hot" cognition vs. "cold" cognition. Hot cognition is when decisions need to be made quickly, often under pressure and often influenced by peers. He gives the example of driving, which requires rapid response and which has been demonstrated that teens perform significantly less well on when in the presence of their peers. Drinking, drug use and military combat are similarly potentially dangerous situations which may require support/restriction (Steinberg points out the contradiction of allowing 17 year olds to sign up for the military but not allowing them to drink until age 21). On the other hand, he argues that a decision like whether or not to have an abortion is "cold" cognition because the girl/woman has the time to reason through the decision. Teens have been shown to handle "cold" cognition as well as adults, so Steinberg sees no reason to restrict teens' access to abortion, especially beyond the waiting periods and counseling requirements that are already in place. He also talks about the application of the science of adolescent brain development to the juvenile death penalty and juvenile criminal culpability in general (crime being generally "hot" cognition involving spur-of-the-moment decisions). Basically, Steinberg says that when they have reasonable chance to think, teens are just as capable as adults. But the problem with adolescence is often that teens simply don't think about the pull of the immediate reward and the desire to impress peers simply overrides any conscious decision making or even the reasonable possibility of such. Until teens learn to "brake" their "overactive engines", they need the support, guidance and sympathetic understanding that affluent youth have always had.

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