

## G. STANLEY HALL'S *ADOLESCENCE*: A Centennial Reappraisal Introduction

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett  
Clark University

Hamilton Cravens  
University of Iowa

This article is an overview of the special issue “G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence*: A Centennial Reappraisal.” First, a brief biography of Hall is presented. Then each of the six articles in the special issue is summarized. Three of the articles are by historians and three are by psychologists, but all six articles integrate history and psychology.

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In 1904, G. Stanley Hall published his two-volume *magnum opus* on adolescence. A sprawling work of over 1,300 pages, its title was similarly capacious: *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. The fruit of 10 years of work, it became Hall’s first (and only) major work in psychology. Nevertheless, the success of *Adolescence* justified its long incubation. It sold over 25,000 copies, an astonishing figure for a work of this length, especially at a time when relatively few Americans received even a high school education. Furthermore, it has been widely regarded ever since as inaugurating the scientific study of adolescent psychology (Tanner & Alberts, 2003).

Our goal in this special issue is to commemorate the centennial of the publication of *Adolescence* by examining it from historical and psychological perspectives. Three of the articles are by historians and three are by psychologists. Nevertheless, all six are cross-disciplinary: all three of the articles by the historians comment on the psychological issues Hall raises, and all three of the articles by the psychologists incorporate a historical context into their commentary on Hall’s psychological ideas.

In this introduction to the special issue, we begin by providing a brief biographical sketch of Hall. This is followed by summaries of each of the six articles to follow.

### A Brief Biography

Granville Stanley Hall was born in a small Massachusetts farming village in 1844 (Pruette, 1926/1970; Ross, 1972). Although his parents were farmers of

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Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Department of Psychology, Clark University; and Hamilton Cravens, Department of History, University of Iowa.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Department of Psychology, Clark University, 910 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610. E-mail: arnett@jeffreymarrett.com

modest means, the academic promise shown by young Stanley led them to make sacrifices to pay for his higher education, in the expectation that he would become a minister. He dutifully attended college and then seminary, but he never had any real interest in becoming a minister (although he played along for years so that his parents would continue to support his education). Instead, his intellectual interests led him from theology to philosophy, the field in which he held his first academic positions.

By the mid-1870s, when Hall was in his early thirties, he had become especially interested in the work of philosophers of natural science such as Herbert Spencer and G.H. Lewes, who were applying Darwin's ideas on evolution to social and psychological topics. Psychology was beginning to gain an identity as a distinct field of study with roots in philosophy, physiology, and biology, and Hall decided that this new field was where his real interests were (White, 1992). At the age of 32, he left his position in philosophy at a small Midwestern college to obtain graduate training in psychology at Harvard under William James. Two years later, in 1878, he became the first person to be awarded a doctorate in psychology in the United States.

Because psychology was so new, there were few academic positions open to Hall when he graduated, so he went to Germany for two years to obtain further training, where he studied with Wilhelm Wundt and others. Returning to the United States, he was unable to find an academic position in psychology, so he began to lecture at Harvard on pedagogy, of which he had made a "superficial study" (Hall, 1923, p. 216) during his time in Europe. American educators were hungry for pedagogical knowledge, and Hall's lectures were hugely popular. Thus, almost inadvertently, Hall found himself in the leadership of the "child study movement" that sought to ground pedagogy in the scientific study of child development and that was the forerunner of developmental and educational psychology (White, 1990). His interest in adolescence came out of his involvement in the child study movement.

However, at the time pedagogy was only a secondary interest for Hall. His main interest was in experimental psychology, which held the highest prestige in the new field of psychology. Experimental methods seemed to Hall and others to offer the promise of resolving age-old questions about epistemology and the fundamental nature of human knowledge by reducing them to their smallest elements of sensation, reflex, and motor activity. In 1884, at age 40, Hall took a position at Johns Hopkins University, the first chair in the new field of psychology in the United States (Ross, 1972). There he supervised experimental research on hypnosis, skin sensations, arm movements, and responses to sounds. Among his students were James McKeen Cattell, John Dewey, James Mark Baldwin, and Arnold Gesell, all of whom went on to make substantial contributions of their own.

While at Hopkins, Hall initiated the first psychological journal in the United States, the *American Journal of Psychology*, and tilted its content heavily toward psychology's roots in physiology rather than philosophy. After four years at Hopkins, Hall left in 1888 to become the first president of Clark University, a university devoted solely to graduate study. This position allowed Hall to promote strongly the status of psychology at the new university, and for many years Clark produced more Ph.D.'s in psychology than any other university. Despite his duties

as president of Clark, Hall found time to organize the American Psychological Association in 1892 and serve as its first president (Evans, Sexton, & Cadwalader, 1992).

From this pinnacle of status and influence in the field of psychology, Hall's standing declined steadily during the early 1890s. The prestige of Clark University faded as its mercurial founder, Jonas Clark, began to withdraw his financial support, and the majority of the faculty were persuaded to jump ship for the new University of Chicago, also established with a graduate mission. Hall's status within psychology began to fade as well, as his quarrels with William James and others over the proper direction of psychology gave Hall a growing reputation as untrustworthy, irascible, and unreliable. He also suffered a personal tragedy during this period, when his wife and eight-year-old daughter were killed in a bizarre accident.

With his ambitions of leadership in psychology diminished, Hall turned back to child study in the mid-1890s (White, 1990). This turn also fit the change in his intellectual interests. By this time Hall had become disillusioned with experimental methods as the royal road to understanding human development. Instead, he embraced a new perspective that grounded psychology in evolution. It was widely held among adherents of evolutionary theory that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," meaning that the biological development of each individual reenacts the evolutionary development of the human species. Hall and others applied this idea to psychology: the psychological development of each person was viewed as reflecting the evolutionary history of humanity (Tanner & Alberts, 2003).

Hall and his contemporaries knew of Darwin but not Mendel; they knew Darwin's theory of evolution, but they knew nothing about genes. Consequently, it was possible for them to believe that memories and acquired characteristics could be inherited. Evolution, then, could be seen as the accumulation of memories and acquired characteristics over time, and the development of the individual could be seen as a reenactment of the history of the species. This view, known as Lamarckism after one of its earliest proponents, became the heart of Hall's view of psychology. It infused all his writings on child study from the 1890s onward, and it was the basis of his views when he wrote *Adolescence*.

Hall conducted some questionnaire research as part of his child study work, but his main role was as representative of the movement and an advocate of applying its findings to school reform. He advocated a substantial amount of exercise, free play, and oral instruction in nature study and language during the early years of schooling, believing that these had been the central activities during the evolutionary "childhood" of the human race. However, in the early 1900s, Hall's status in the child study movement gradually declined, as it had earlier in psychology. He advocated views that many educators found objectionable, such as his approval of corporal punishment, his opposition to the coeducational high school, and his criticisms of the low intellectual quality of texts and teachers. Nevertheless, Hall's leadership in the child study movement contributed to a more research-based educational psychology.

The publication and success of *Adolescence* did much to restore Hall to a position of prominence within psychology. For the remainder of his career, he played an important role in the field. Most notably, he invited Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and other psychoanalysts to Clark University in 1909. This was the first

visit to the United States by prominent psychoanalysts, and it aroused great interest in psychoanalytic ideas in the United States (see Hale, 1971; Rosenzweig, 1994). In the years following, Hall became increasingly skeptical of the psychoanalytic emphasis on sexual symbolism, but he remained interested in psychoanalytic ideas. Hall retired from the presidency of Clark University in 1920, at the age of 76, and died in 1924.

### The Special Issue: Diverse Perspectives on Hall

In order to underscore the cross-disciplinary character of the special issue, we have alternated historians and psychologists in the order of the papers. In the first paper, Hamilton Cravens has taken a focused approach to *Adolescence*, using his knowledge as an American historian and historian of scientific ideas and developments to ask the question, to what extent was Hall's masterpiece a true period piece, a document of its time, but perhaps not of some other era? As the readers will see, this is not an easy question to answer, for a book, like any other historical artifact, is something like an onion. It has multiple layers, each of which is of significance, sometimes of overlapping meaning. Hence care must be taken in peeling away each layer. There are, for example, the political, the social, the economic, the emotional, and other social layers; but there are also ones relating to the worlds of scholarship and ideas, of social customs and conventions, among many others. We shall say no more than this as introduction, so as not spoil the reader's fun in reading the essay.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett's paper provides an overview of the entire two-volume work from the perspective of contemporary psychology. Arnett focuses on some of the most striking similarities and differences between Hall's views and the views of psychologists today. With respect to similarities, the areas Arnett examines are the prevalence of depressed mood in adolescence, adolescence as a time when crime rates peak, adolescence as a time of high sensation-seeking, susceptibility to media influences in adolescence, characteristics of peer relations in adolescence, and biological development during puberty. Perhaps the biggest surprise here is that Hall and his contemporaries knew so much about adolescent brain development, including that connections among brain cells accelerate at puberty, which has been touted in recent years as an exciting "new" finding.

With respect to differences, Arnett focuses on three areas: Hall's grounding of his understanding of adolescent development in the Lamarckian theory of evolution; his views of sexual development in adolescence, especially masturbation; and his claim that religious conversion in adolescence is normative and universal. Hall's Lamarckism—the theory that evolution takes place through the inheritance of memories and acquired characteristics—pervades *Adolescence*, and it is this view more than anything else that makes Hall's perspective on adolescence seem musty, since the discovery of genetics in the early 20th century relegated Lamarckism to the status of historical curiosity. Hall's views of adolescent sexuality often seem bizarre, from a modern perspective. Although he claimed to view adolescents' sexuality as a normal expression of their biological development, like his contemporaries he viewed masturbation as a "scourge of the human race" responsible for maladies from optical cramps to stunted growth, and advocated a combination of suppression and diversion to control all sexual urges.

Arnett ends by locating Hall's perspective on adolescence in the Lamarckian and Victorian worldview of his times, and underscores that all scientific perspectives—including ours today—are built on paradigms that include a variety of assumptions that may look quite reasonable in one era but quite preposterous in another.

David Leary has taken a different angle of vision. He has drawn a deep and satisfying portrait of Stanley Hall the scholar. For the uninitiated it is a stunning, even daunting portrait of this brilliant man, fluent in several languages, reading several books in different languages every day, and dictating the text of *Adolescence* without much revision. Those of us who today struggle with alien tongues and work at writing books may well be speechless at Hall's working methods. This obviously provides a new meaning to that currently fashionable term, "multitasking." Yet Leary's argument is no mere admiring picture of a Herculean scholar, a Theodore Roosevelt of turn-of-the-century psychology. For, as Leary ably shows, there was both more and less to what kind of psychology Hall was attempting to construct than posterity has been willing to grant. Again, without robbing the reader of the pleasures of Leary's essay, which is most revealing of a style of scholarship and intellectual life that has been largely lost since the 19th century, it can be safely stated that we are not going to see the likes of the scholars of the type that Stanley Hall was again, in our lifetimes. Yet, Leary also uncovers the ways in which Hall addressed the new century, and its scholarly sensibilities, which he did so much to promote, after his fashion, even though he could not truly make himself over into the new type of academic scientist—he could only herald the future, not become a part of it. And here we may have some clues as to the continuing resonance of Stanley Hall to his professional and disciplinary descendants.

James Youniss provides a perspective on Hall's *Adolescence* in the context of Hall's personality, his relations with his colleagues, and the cultural and historical setting of his era. Youniss uses commentaries from Hall's contemporaries to show that Hall was a prickly character. He was viewed by his colleagues with a mixture of astonishment and contempt. The astonishment was due to the range of his knowledge and ambition, the contempt to his tendency for overstatement when it came to his own accomplishments. But even his admirers lost faith in Hall in the two decades following the publication of *Adolescence*. As Youniss insightfully observes, Hall was a man of the 19th century, in his attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and language. In the course of the first two decades of the 20th century, as the field of psychology developed in exciting new directions, Hall remained essentially a man of the 19th century, and his ideas and frameworks of understanding seemed increasingly passé.

Youniss demonstrates this with two examples. First, Hall's claim of the universality of religious conversion and its basis in sexuality is framed by Youniss as in line with other 19th century attempts to ground religion in a secular and scientific base. Second, Hall's ranking of "races" according to their supposed progress along an evolutionary continuum comparable to individual human development—with some in childhood, some in adolescence, and some adult—represented a crude form of evolutionary theory that was embraced by Hall (and many of his colleagues) but was increasingly being rejected by others.

For William Graebner, what is most fascinating is Hall's enormous erudition and intelligence placed in service of a late nineteenth century social ideal, sublimation. Graebner begins with a problem: why was Hall so opposed to coeducation for adolescents at a time in which such a view was becoming old fashioned? After all, in the early 1900s, coeducation had long been an established practice in American schools at all levels, from grammar schools to colleges and universities. As Graebner argues, many of Hall's ideas on sex came from his own youth experiences; to put it mildly, Hall was no libertine! He may not have even kissed a woman until he was in his middle twenties. His parents were stereotypically masculine and feminine personality types; the lines of gender were tautly drawn in his family, and perhaps this carried over into Hall's own value system. So, without giving away Graebner's story, for it is a delectable one indeed to read, we can say that Hall's notions about sex and gender were linked, for better or for worse, to the highest possible social aspirations. As readers will see, Hall's attitudes, the product of his personal experience, but also of years of study, were reflected in that massive tome, *Adolescence*.

Finally, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Anna Johnson examine Hall's ideas especially in the historical context of his contributions to the Child Study Movement, the Parent Education Movement, and the Child Welfare Movement. Although Hall played a prominent role in each of these movements at the time, Brooks-Gunn and Johnson conclude that his "scientific legacy is almost nonexistent." Nevertheless, they see his legacy as important in other ways. His interdisciplinary knowledge, so evident in *Adolescence*, was an approach he brought to these movements as well, and it still holds great appeal today. Also, his promotion of Child Study as a science laid the groundwork for the field of developmental psychology, even though Hall's own research in that field was soon left behind by other scholars.

### Concluding Remarks

In sum, each of the papers in this special issue combine historical and psychological perspectives to provide insights on Hall's *Adolescence*. The historical perspectives assist in understanding how Hall came to develop his ideas about adolescence as he did. Many of his ideas that seem unusual or strange to us now, such as his Lamarkism, or his views of sexuality and gender, were in fact common among his contemporaries, part of the intellectual *zeitgeist*. But they were also filtered through Hall's distinctive personality and remarkable intellect, for better and for worse. The psychological perspectives contribute to an awareness of just how much the field of psychology has changed in the space of a century, as well as informing us that many of the psychological ideas and concepts we regard as new today were in fact already well-known to Hall and his colleagues. In combination, the historical and psychological perspectives serve to remind us of the historical context of our own psychological ideas today. That context is always hard to see in the present, so perhaps it will be left to the historians and psychologists a century from now to explain how and why we think about adolescence today as we do.

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