

Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development

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Richard Jessor

The Origins and Development of Problem Behavior Theory

The Collected Works of Richard Jessor

 Springer

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*For
Kim and Tom
Merce and Howie
and
Jane*

Preface

This is the first of three volumes bringing together key publications—journal articles and book chapters—that have marked the development of Problem Behavior Theory from its early framing to the version of the theory that is applied in current research. The selections are those from a larger corpus of work that have advanced understanding of adolescence and adolescent health and development. Making them available in this way is, in part, a response to the numerous inquiries and requests that continue to arrive from researchers across the globe.

But my hopes for the volumes extend beyond the greater access they provide to what we have written over the nearly six decades of the theory's implementation. Perhaps most salient is my hope that this volume and the two that follow will serve to exemplify the role that *psychosocial theory* can play in providing coherence and cumulativeness and generality to social inquiry, the selections having been guided by the concepts and the logic of Problem Behavior Theory. My hope also is that the works collected in the volumes can make clear the advantage of transcending disciplinary boundaries, particularly those that enclose the disciplines of psychology and sociology, in order to encompass *both person and context* in efforts to understand young people's lives. And finally, the selections constitute, together, a body of replicated, evidence-based knowledge about a major social problem—adolescent risk behavior; my hope is that they can help inform social policy and practice in ways that reduce such behavior and enhance opportunities for positive youth development.

The primary aim of the selections in this first volume is to convey a sense of the dynamic evolution of a conceptual framework, Problem Behavior Theory, as it expanded its concerns from those it was initially designed to address. As successive research projects yielded their findings, they impelled us to modify the theory's structure and to extend its reach; this is the way science is supposed to work. The grasp that the earlier selections in the volume can provide about the origins of the theory should enable a deeper understanding of the current formulation of Problem Behavior Theory and of the breadth of its applications.

Volume II, *Problem Behavior Theory and Adolescent Health*, brings together key, theory-guided publications that, over the years, have examined the large variety of behaviors that can compromise adolescent and young adult health. The concept

of “health” in that volume is broader than just physical health, i.e., morbidity and mortality. Rather, it engages all those behaviors that put an adolescent at risk and that can interfere with successful development into young adulthood. Scholars concerned with particular health-compromising behaviors, whether tobacco smoking or risky driving or early, unprotected sex or unhealthy diet or sedentariness, will find selections in that volume relevant to their interests. And in Volume III, *Problem Behavior Theory and the Social Context*, the selections are those that have shown the explanatory gain derived from engaging the social environment or the immediate context of action in research on adolescence and young adulthood. In addition, the third volume includes selections that articulate the philosophy of science perspective and the methodological posture that have threaded their way through all of the body of work presented in all three volumes.

In a scholarly journey over this long period of time, there has been the accumulation of a range of debts, both intellectual and interpersonal, that have helped to determine the direction of the journey and the contours it has traced. It is a distinct pleasure to acknowledge them here. First, the home base for my research since the late 1950s has been the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. Whether as one of the founders of the institute, as director of the institute for over two decades, or as founder of two of its research programs, my life has been endlessly enriched by interactions with its dedicated scholars and students intent on contributing to society’s well-being. Ozzie G. Simmons, the institute’s first full-time director in the early 1960s; Gilbert F. White, the institute director I succeeded in 1980; and Jane A. Menken, the institute director who succeeded me in 2001 — all three have earned my appreciation for shaping the institute into the benign, supportive, and productive institution it has been. I am grateful to have had such a friendly and fertile environment in which to pursue my own line of scholarly inquiry.

Throughout my career, I have had exceedingly good fortune in collaborations with colleagues and students whose ideas informed my own and whose work is apparent in the selections in these volumes. Foremost among them is my first wife, Dr. Lee Jessor, who was in at the very beginning and whose contributions helped lay the foundation for what was to become Problem Behavior Theory. Among the many other collaborators, especially in the later years, Drs. John E. Donovan and Frances M. Costa, both my former students, and Mark S. Turbin deserve special tribute for their commitment to our research program, their ideas, and their hard work.

Appreciation also goes to the foundations and federal agencies that provided the funds that enabled us to undertake the complex, often time-extended research projects that undergird the selections in these volumes; special acknowledgment goes to the William T. Grant Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and to the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Publishing this corpus of work required a cohort of enablers over the decades. Special mention and much appreciation go to Marilyn Sena, Debbie Ash, Mary Axe, Steve Graham, Rajshree Shrestha, and now Nancy Thorwardson and Lindy Shultz, the latter two helping to bring these volumes into being.

Finally, it would be difficult to count all the ways in which my wife, Jane Menken, my companion in scholarship and adventure these past several decades, has influenced what I have sought to accomplish. That influence has been a gift that I continue to cherish.

Boulder, CO, USA

Richard Jessor, PhD, ScD

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About the Author

Richard Jessor, PhD, ScD is a distinguished professor of behavioral science and professor of psychology, emeritus at the University of Colorado Boulder where he has spent his entire academic career. One of the founders of the university's Institute of Behavioral Science in 1959, he served as its director from 1980 to 2001. He was the founding director of the institute's Research Program on Problem Behavior and, later, its Research Program on Health and Society. From 1987 to 1997, he also directed the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Adolescent Development Among Youth in High-Risk Settings. He is the author or editor of ten books and has published over 135 articles and book chapters. In 2003, he was designated as a "Highly Cited Researcher" in the Social Science General category by the Institute for Scientific Information.

Educated at the College of the City of New York and Yale University, where he received his B.A. degree in psychology in 1946, Jessor received an M.A. from Columbia University in 1947 and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1951 from Ohio State University, where he was a student of Julian B. Rotter. He has been a consultant to various federal agencies and private foundations as well as the World Health Organization, Health and Welfare Canada, and UNICEF. He has served on several National Research Council panels and on the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. He was an invited fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in 1995–1996, and he received the Outstanding Achievement in Adolescent Medicine Award in 2005 from the Society for Adolescent Medicine. Jessor is, after 65 years, the longest-serving active faculty member at the University of Colorado. In May 2015, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, by the Regents of the University of Colorado.