

Daniel Bell

Developmental Interview & Report for Adolescent

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INTRODUCTION

My subject for this interview is a 17-year-old, African-American male adolescent. Socio-economically, he is an upper-middle class citizen, which the interview conveys. He lives in the District of Columbia, an urban environment.

I have known this subject for about a year now. He is one of my advisees (homeroom students) at Chelsea School, where I work, and I also have him in a couple of classes that I teach. Generally, he is a good kid, though often incredibly hyperactive, unfocused, and sometimes behaviorally inappropriate. Needless to say, I am approaching this interview and report from a biased point-of-view since I know and like this gentleman. However, I will try my best to remain objective and analytical for this report.

Since I do know this adolescent and am familiar with his background, history, and his development up to this point of his life, I feel that there are several important points that must be mentioned that did not make it into the interview for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: technical difficulties, comfort level, and hearsay.

First of all, it is imperative to note that my subject is attending an institution (Chelsea School: www.chelseaschool.edu) for students with learning disabilities, and has been educated in a previous special education school prior to Chelsea School. As the interview shows, my subject's learning disability revolves mainly around his ADHD (or ADD as he puts it), hyperactivity, and inattention. I can attest to the fact that, unlike many LD students, my subject is at a developmentally appropriate level in terms of his literacy skills. The fact still remains, though, that he is currently being educated at a special education facility, which must be taken into account.

Next, in terms of my subject's family history, it is heavily speculated by my school's administration (though yet to be officially substantiated) that my subject's father is homosexual and the man to whom my subject refers to in his interview as his "uncle" may quite possibly be his father's partner. Also, it should be noted that the woman to whom my subject refers to as his "stepmother" or his "father's girlfriend" may quite possibly be simply a close family friend who my subject calls his "father's girlfriend" in public to hide his possible embarrassment of his father's supposed homosexuality. As stated above, this is speculative information passed down to me from my higher-ups, but I feel that it should be noted due to its social/emotional relevancy.

Lastly, physically speaking, aside from my subjects more recent physical ailments, which he mentions in the interview, it should be noted that his medical records note a possible "exposure" to AIDS. What this means specifically, is unclear, but whether or not my subject actually has the full-blown virus, he is extremely thin and when he is "out sick" from school, it is usually prolonged (longer than a week). The possibility also remains that the collapse of his lung may be related to this issue (though, as the interview shows, the official reason for this is somewhat suspect). The interview also reveals that my subject's mother recently passed away (for unspecified reasons), which brings up the possibility that she was unfortunately inflicted with this virus, which may explain my subject's "exposure" upon birth. Again, this is unsubstantiated information, though undeniably noteworthy.

INTERVIEW (Transcript):

Physical

Daniel Bell: Do you play any sports?

Subject: Yes.

DB: Which ones?

S: Football and basketball.

DB: In general, do you like to spend time outside?

S: Yes, sometimes.

DB: Doing what?

S: Um, playing basketball, walking around with friends.

DB: Do you work out in general, or do you just play sports to keep in shape?

S: I just play sports to keep in shape.

DB: Do you drive a car?

S: Yes.

DB: Do you drive it often, like to school, to work, and those kind of things?

S: Not anymore.

DB: Why not?

S: Yeah, um, no, because my license got suspended.

DB: Do you go to the doctor regularly?

S: Yes.

DB: Have you had any medical problems recently?

S: Um, collapsed lung; my lung collapsed and I had to get surgery.

DB: Do you know why it collapsed?

S: No, they said it was common in tall, skinny people.

DB: Do you take any medications currently?

S: Yes, Ritalin.

DB: For what?

S: My ADD.

DB: Do you have any other lasting, like, chronic or terminal medical issues, or is it just the collapsed lung?

S: I have asthma.

DB: Does having asthma affect, um, playing sports or being physical in any way?

S: No, because I take my asthma medication, like, as needed and I carry it around.

DB: Is it an inhaler or, uh, an ingestible pill?

S: It's an inhaler.

Cognitive

DB: How would you say that you do in school, in general? Well, average, poorly?

S: Average.

DB: Why?

S: Because, like, somedays, like, I'll, like, work a lot, and somedays, like, I slack a lot.

DB: What are your favorite subjects – or subject?

S: Um, Music class and TV class.

DB: Do you tend to stay on top of your schoolwork or tend to get behind if you miss stuff?

S: I tend to get behind, but then I procrastinate and try and get everything done at the last minute.

DB: So then, do you feel that you get overwhelmed if you get too far behind and it has to be done quickly – do you get overwhelmed?

S: Yes, but I eventually get everything that I needed to get done – usually gets done.

DB: When you have a big assignment or a big project to do, um – it could be in school or at home (just big projects in general) – how do you usually approach it? Do you like to break it down into steps – like you know you have to do: “Okay, I have to start here, then that’ll get me here, then this’ll help me finish,” or do you just, kind of, start doing whatever you need to do? Do you think it through or do you just kind of go at it until it’s done?

S: Well, I basically just like do everything in order or like collect all the information that I need, and then I put it in the project or whatever, big subject that I’m doing.

DB: So then do you – would you say you feel pretty organized in general?

S: Yes.

DB: Oh, do you like to look back the past and things you’ve done, mistakes you’ve made – and good things you’ve done – and feel good about that or feel bad about that, or – and help you make decisions in the future? Or do you just feel, um, like you’re living one day at a time, you know, “whatever happens,” you’re just going to kind of go with it?

S: Well, basically, like, the way I think, like, whatever happens gonna happen and the stuff that’s already happened, I really can’t fix it.

DB: But do you – sometimes if you’re in a situation that you were in before and you had made a mistake in that situation before, do you remember that mistake and – usually – and, um, try to make a different decision next time, or do you, um, sometimes make the same mistake twice?

S: I usually look back at the first time and try to change the mistake, but sometimes, like, when I try to change it, it might be bad again.

DB: Have you put any thought into your future? Like what you’re going to do right after high school – and then even further from there?

S: Yes.

DB: And what are you thinking about doing with yourself?

S: Well, I was looking at going to college for culinary school and then I was looking to become a chef and, later on, open my own restaurant.

DB: Do you like to cook right now?

S: Yes.

DB: Do you cook for your family?

S: Yes.

DB: Do they like it?

S: Yes, they do like it.

DB: They give you good feedback?

S: Yeah, they eat it all.

DB: Do you cook like, big, complicated meals – exotic meals and things – or do you stick to more, like, American food, like what do you like experimenting, or what do you do?

S: Well, I basically – I like working with, like, pastas and, like, Italian foods and stuff. So I usually make that, but, like, I don't try to get too complicated.

Social/Emotional

DB: Um, and are you interested in the future – getting married and having kids and that kind of stuff or have you not really thought about it yet?

S: Yes.

DB: Yes what?

S: I'm interested in, like, the future: getting married and having kids.

DB: Do you have a job?

S: Uh, yes, I currently do.

DB: And where is that job?

S: Best Buy, in Virginia.

DB: Do you like working there?

S: Sometimes.

DB: Why do you say that?

S: Because like, some of the customers, like, they nag a lot and they tend to ask, like, questions that, like, they ask the price of something and it's, like, right on the side of the box, or, like, it's right there in front of them. And then they'll ask me to, like, go get something and I go get it and they decide: "Oh, never mind, I don't want it."

DB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

S: Yes I have two brothers.

DB: Older, younger?

S: They're older.

DB: Um, are they still living at home with you, or are they out?

S: No, they've moved out. But they come by the house a lot.

DB: Do you guys get along?

S: Yes.

DB: Would you say that you have, um, a good number of friends and do you like being in big groups of people or do you prefer being more by yourself?

S: I have, like, a lot of friends, and, like, I like being with more people than by myself.

DB: Are you usually the center of attention or are you just part of the group?

S: I'm mostly the center of attention, but sometimes I'm part of the group.

DB: Do you have a girlfriend?

S: Yes.

DB: Or more than one?

S: Yes.

DB: More than one?

S: Yes.

DB: I won't tell 'em.

S: [Laughs]

DB: Um, do you go out with them much; do you go on dates and things like that?

S: Sometimes. I haven't been on one for a while.

DB: Uh, what kind of things do you like to do with your girlfriend(s)?

S: [Laughs]. Movies... Hang out....

DB: Do you ever cook for them?

S: I have once, but not, like, all of them.

DB: Not at the same time? [Laughs]. Have you been intimate with a girl before?

S: Yes.

DB: Oh, uh, okay, uh, what do your parents do?

S: Well, my dad, he's a surgical technician at Children's Hospital. And then, my dad's girlfriend – I call her my stepmother – um, she is a real estate agent and she sells cars.

DB: Your uncle, Mr. Thomas – he's your uncle? Does he live in your house, too?

S: Yes.

DB: Okay. What does he do?

S: He works at Strayer University.

DB: Does your dad's girlfriend live in the house too?

S: No, she lives in Bethesda in the, like, house – she's trying to sell it 'cause she does real estate, so she's living in that house.

DB: Where's your biological mother?

S: She died last year, like, it's almost a year, coming up.

DB: So would you say that your, um, your parents are very busy or do you see each other a lot?

S: Well, I basically see 'em not as much as I could, but, like, I see 'em a lot, like, in the afternoon and on the weekends. But usually during the day he's at work.

DB: Um, and you said your dad works long hours, right? So you don't see him very much?

S: Yeah, like at like, in the afternoon, like usually when I'm getting home, he's usually asleep because he just got off of work and then he has to go back at eleven o'clock, and till, like, I think six or seven o'clock in the morning the next day. And he has to do that two days in a row. So I don't see him on those days.

DB: So you said that you like to cook, do you ever cook for your family, and do you guys usually eat together, or not?

S: Yes, but like usually when I cook, I don't eat right away. But they usually eat it and I eat it later.

DB: So do you guys, do you usually eat together as a family, or not?

S: No, we, um, usually eat separate. He eats when he wants to and I eat when I'm ready.

DB: Do you feel that your parents trust you enough to let you live your own life or are they worried and strict and, you know, restraining?

S: Well, like, when I got out and hang with my friends, or something, like, he doesn't, like, check up on me a lot but, like, if he hasn't heard from me for a while or, like, it gets late at night he'll call to check to see where I'm at, or like, to let me know that he's just checking up on me and what time to be in the house, or something.

DB: So they generally trust you then, let you do your own thing?

S: Yeah.

CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

I will conduct this portion of the report in the three areas of development that the interview covered, the first being Physical.

Physical – This is a complicated area for my subject, especially with the lack of specific and substantiated physical information. In terms of Berk’s (2007) Developmental Milestones for Adolescence, my subject appears mostly on track. His voice has definitely deepened (as evidenced by the audio interview), his motor performance is improving dramatically being that he plays (and is quite good at, as I have witnessed) various team sports, and he drives a car. Also, although this was covered in the social/emotional portion of the interview, my subject has had sexual intercourse, which Berk notes is often part of adolescent development. Lastly, although also noted later in the interview, my subject has a passion for cooking, which leads me to believe he eats at least some fresh foods that he prepares. I would recommend that, in terms of these milestones, my subject remain physically active and continue to cook meals instead of eating pre-made meals, which are often not as healthy.

Despite my subject’s development adhering to Berk’s (2007) Milestones, it cannot be ignored that my subject also has some suspect physical issues in his life, which could affect his physical development. Since the status of his possible “exposure” to AIDS is unclear, I can only recommend that he continually seek the appropriate medical care. In terms of his asthma, which doesn’t appear to affect his physical activities to a great degree, I suggest he continue using his inhaler and immediately let his doctor know if anything changes in this area. He should also continue to take his medication for his

ADHD because, when he does not, his development is noticeably stunted in that he often has difficulty in performing some basic classroom tasks like taking notes or sitting quietly. Lastly, in terms of his lung collapse, which obviously had an effect on his development as he missed almost a month of school and got very behind with his schoolwork, I recommend that he keep his weight and physical overexertion in check and most definitely keep his doctor up to date with his progress in this area because if this syndrome is indeed common with “tall, skinny people,” my subject is a prime candidate for it. And yet, if his suspected “exposure” to AIDS has anything to do with this lack of body fat, I recommend that his doctor look for any links between these physical ailments and take whatever measures possible to make sure that they do not affect my subject’s other areas of development.

Cognitive – According to Piaget’s theory on the *formal operational stage*, adolescents should develop a capacity for abstract, systematic, scientific thinking, where they do not need concrete things as objects of thought (Berk, 2007). Berk also tells us that, in this stage, adolescents perform *hypothetico-deductive reasoning*, where, to solve a problem, they hypothesize in regards of how to solve it, then they deduce logical inferences to confirm what works in the real world. Berk then tells of *propositional thought*, where adolescents evaluate the logic of verbal statements without having to refer to real-life situations to grasp these statements. Lastly Berk speaks of *scientific reasoning*, which is when adolescents coordinate theory with evidence. At the heart of this, as Berk states, is *metacognitive understanding*, which is the ability to think or reflect on one’s own thought processes.

In terms of my subject's interview and how it relates to the theory-based Developmental Milestones, I believe that my subject is at an adequate, though not necessarily highly developed level. For instance, in terms of his *propositional thought*, the very nature of my questions, which were more on the abstract side for this portion of the interview where I asked about hypothetical and abstract projects and the future, my subject was able to grasp these concepts and answer concretely. In terms of his *hypothetico-deductive reasoning* and *scientific reasoning*, from his interview, my subject appeared to be mostly on track in this milestone, especially when I asked about his problem solving approaches because he did state that he attacks a problem or a project in step-by-step manner where he collects the information that he needs then solves his problem or completes his project. However, I stated that I think he is only at an adequate level with this Milestone because, objectively speaking, I know him better than he lets on. I know he is *capable* of doing these things much of the time, however, especially due to his ADHD, I have found that he has a very hard time utilizing his scientific reasoning at an age-appropriate level. He freely admits in his interview that he becomes easily overwhelmed and gets easily behind with his schoolwork, and I would argue that strong scientific reasoning skills are an apparent cure to these issues. I recommend that my subject receive strong remediation with his scientific reasoning skills and stay in his special education school throughout the remainder of his grade school education because this is where he'll receive the best remediation and focus on these skills.

Finally, when asked about his *metacognitive skills*, my subject responded as suspected, which leads me to deduce that, as with his *scientific reasoning* skills, he is at an adequate level with this Milestone, but not where he could and possibly should be. For

example, when asked about thinking about past mistakes and if he approaches similar situations with a lesson learned, my subject stated that he does think over his mistakes, but admits that he often gets the same results. And again, as I've known my subject for a while now, I can give a bit deeper of an insight: there are instances when he is very clearly metacognitive about why he did something or said something, but more often than not, he does and says things that he has absolutely no explanation for and when I ask what got him to the point of saying or doing what he did, he gives me a blank look as if pondering, but to no avail. As for my recommendations regarding this Milestone, I suggest that my subject receive much remediation for his metacognitive skills, and, again, continue this process at his school, which does focus on these skills. I feel strongly that his inconsistent metacognitive skills are a result of his ADHD, where he impulsively and compulsively acts and speaks without absolutely any thought process to even reflect on. This is currently something that, unfortunately, only medicine and strong remediation can solve.

Social/Emotional – In terms of some of the more easily dealt with Milestones that Berk (2007) discusses, my subject is much more on track here than cognitively. In his interview, he freely admits to not only having a girlfriend, he has more than one. Whether or not this is necessarily a healthy way to conduct oneself is for another report (though I do recommend that he stick with only one girlfriend at a time for many reasons, not the least of which being that he could find himself in serious mental and physical harm should any of his girlfriends find out about the others!). Continuing, from the interview and from my knowledge of him, my subject has increasingly less issues with peer

pressure and finding an identity; he speaks of feeling comfortable as part of a group or at the center of attention. Also, my subject tells of his positive relationship not just with his father, but with his “uncle,” with his father’s “girlfriend,” and with his older brothers.

Piaget’s theory on morality, which influenced and was expanded on by Kohlberg, says that at the *autonomous morality stage*, adolescents realize that intentions, not simply outcomes, should serve as the basis for the judgment of behavior and that it is the manner in which an adolescent reasons about a moral dilemma that determines moral maturity (Berk, 2007). Even though this theory has a social context, it harkens back to my subject’s cognitive reasoning skills, which, as previously discussed, he is inconsistent with. However, he appears to be stronger in his reasoning area. For example, as he discusses in our interview, he holds down a sales job, which shows that he has at least acceptable social skills, though he lacks respect for his customers. And yet, despite this, he still has his job and does not outwardly disrespect his customers, which shows that morally he can reason at a socially acceptable level and that he understands that he must do this to keep his job. Also, though earlier in the interview, my subject mentions that his license had been suspended and though he does not specify why (knowing him, though, makes me guess he was speeding or otherwise driving dangerously), he has obviously accepted that his actions while driving were morally unacceptable because he appears at peace with the consequences. More than working on his own moral skills, I would recommend that he avoid the company of other, more adversely moral adolescents because my subject is, as stated earlier, a good kid who means well and can do well when doing something alone, but he has a tendency to leave his *heteronomous morals* and his *autonomous morals* behind when in the company of said “bad” kids.

Berk (2007) also discusses the Milestone that deals with Erikson's Identity versus Role Confusion theory, which deals with successful outcomes of earlier developmental stages that pave the way to a healthy identity because the adolescent has learned to trust and have a strong autonomy. From the interview and from knowing my subject, I think this is his strongest Milestone. As he stated in his interview, my subject is comfortable with himself and likes to be the center of attention. I am also aware that he is comfortable with wearing a variety of fashions and that he listens to a variety of music. Even though he admits to not having regular family meals or meeting times, which often help develop a sense of trust, he likes to cook for his family regardless and also does not feel held back or restrained by his family. He discusses in the interview that his family allows him to go out on his own and that they trust him to come back when expected, even with his license suspension and reputation for sometimes following the influence of other, more negatively adjusted adolescents. This has evidently created trust within my subject and leaves him with a strong sense of initiative to explore himself and the world for himself. I see my subject in between two of Erikson's *identity statuses: identity achievement* and *identity moratorium* in that he does have many commitments to certain values and goals (like his career path and hopes of marriage), but is also still in a state of identity exploration in some areas, as evidenced by his several girlfriends. I would recommend that he continue on this path, but not overstep his bounds of trust because breaking his family and/or friend's trust could possibly create a road block in his identity exploration and, in turn, could create a detriment to his social and emotional development.

REFLECTION

First of all, I enjoyed this project with its real-world nature. It is one thing to read about developmental theories and it is definitely something else completely to explore those theories in real life and see how they play out. This was also very helpful for me because it helped me better understand one of my students whom I like very much as a person and a student, though whom I also have a very hard time with because of many of the developmental aspects previously described. This project helped me gain a better understanding of where this student is coming from and what has led him to his current state of development.

However, I felt inexperienced and a bit overwhelmed with the weight of each developmental category and accompanying theory to consider while attempting to formulate questions for and then interview my subject. I realized after conducting the interview, that I was lacking some vital questions, especially in terms of the social/emotional development area. I feel that my questioning in this area was weakest, especially in terms of discovering morality and identity issues.

I also realized that many of my questions were not specific enough or were not relevant enough to the milestones and the theories I was trying to discover information about. I see now that I may have actually put myself in a more difficult spot by choosing this subject in thinking that I'd have an easier time since I know him and his history because I then relied more heavily on my preconceived knowledge and speculations about my subject instead of meeting him fresh and deducing my conclusions only from the interview.

Lastly, I see now that I should have allotted myself more time to actually conduct the interview; the only time I left myself was sandwich in between the end of my work day at school and after school staff meetings, which I was then late for. Bad idea! This time management issue also affected my means of fixing technical difficulties, which, of course, reared its ugly head and I ended up losing an important section of the social/emotional section of my interview.

Needless to say, I learned a lot by conducting this project.

REFERENCES

Berk, L. E. (2007). *Development through the lifespan*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.