

Problem Behavior Acquisition during Adolescence and Early Adulthood in Kenneth Lonergan's *This Is Our Youth*

Eman Youssef Ali Abou Bakr*

eman90_foa@yahoo.com

Abstract

The journey from adolescence to full adulthood is full of challenging experiences and multi-dimensional hardships. During such a critical stage of life where the young have seemingly given up childhood's interests, activities, and senses of fulfillment as they are no longer children, they sometimes struggle with depression, loneliness, disappointment, loss, social rejection, parental maltreatment, peers' bullying, stress, failure, loss of passion, and meaninglessness. They; consequently, fall victims of problem behavior syndrome. Therefore, they acquire many negative and risky behaviors as coping mechanisms with such painful experiences which they undergo on different extremes. Such behaviors include consumption of alcoholics, smoking, drug abuse, aggressive behaviors, and sexual practices, turning the path to full adulthood a burdening one. So, this paper is dedicated to closely studying Kenneth Lonergan's drama *This Is Our Youth* (1993) in the light of problem behavior theory to scrutinize the problem behaviors that adolescents and young adults get unfortunately engaged in before they turn full adults and highlight their root causes. Additionally, it endeavors to show how the play is a call for parents, teachers, and caregivers to grant attention to adolescents and young adults within their circles while they are faced with new possibilities and alternatives and help them experiment with positive roles and behaviors that will in turn positively impact their next life stages.

Keywords: Adolescence – Problem Behavior - Early Adulthood – Challenges – Drug Abuse - Maltreatment - Risky Behaviors - Youth

* Lecturer in English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of English, Suez Canal University

Adolescents are those whom their societies do no longer perceive as children, nor do they give them "the full status, roles, and functions of adulthood" (Chawla 10). Such a stage is often considered a difficult and crucial one of life and a "period of great risk to healthy development" (Takanishi 86). On the other hand, young adults are the ones who stand one step beyond the stage of full adulthood with its rights and responsibilities. Socially, these age stages witness independence from parents, "an increasing importance of the peer group" (Smith 1), and the ability to have offspring. As social groups, adolescents and young adults have a set of specific needs, feelings, ambitions, fears, problems, or; one can say, a specific identity that makes these stages of life different from childhood and old age. They have abundance of energy, passion, and zeal that make them constitute a necessary component of their nations' advancement. Hence, they are a major human resource that must be cared about most:

... the international community has invested considerable effort in coming to grips with the many problems that young people face, as well as in attempting to ensure that the vast potential for development that young people so clearly have is effectively harnessed (Chawla 12).

In a world full of social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological crises, adolescents' and young adults' life and existence are challenging. They witness social, cognitive, and emotional transformations. They unwillingly stand in face of countless complexities and concerns that they may have been carrying since their

childhood. Their path toward full adulthood is inevitably replete with multidimensional hardships and stresses which they strive to cope with. The evolution of adolescents' and young adults' literature in the late 1960s has allowed the life circumstances of these vulnerable population groups to be closely addressed so that young readers can have "an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages" (Cart, *ala.org*). Therefore, by receiving vivid portraits of high relevance to their real lives and the lives of their peers, young people stop feeling alone and get reassured that they are not aliens, others, or outcasts.

Kenneth Lonergan (1963-) is one of the American dramatists who has decided to dedicate his highly-acclaimed drama *This Is Our Youth* (1993) to spotlighting the problems, challenges, needs, feelings, and hopes of young people. It addresses some timeless issues of adolescence and early adulthood (May) during the Reagan Era. This youth-centered play acts as a stimulus for this population segment to read and share the issues of their counterparts and to see their own lives during such a period of pressures and tension outside their own personal borders.

This Is Our Youth takes place at the Upper West Side one-room apartment in 1982. It mainly revolves around two friends: Dennis and Warren. Dennis is 22 years old and works as a part-time drug dealer: "I've been dealing drugs for five years" (Act. 2, 65). Warren; on the other hand, is 19 years old. He has stolen 15.000 \$ from his father and was kicked out of the parental house as a result. Both young men are dropouts. They are both engaged in planning to return the cash to Warren's unpleasant father who is a famous lingerie manufacturer.

During the course of the play, Dennis and Warren are involved in many risk-taking behaviors which are common among adolescents and young adults particularly smoking marijuana, using cocaine, drinking alcohol, and having sex, and they suffer from their consequent psychological disorders. Then Jessica Goldman, a 19-year-old woman, appears, and with whom Warren yearns to have an emotional and physical relationship.

The aim of this research is particularly to track the symptoms of problem behavior syndrome that the young show in response to their traumatic and distressful experiences as indicated in Kenneth Lonergan's *This Is Our Youth* (1993). The paper discusses in detail the negative adaptive reactions of the play's central characters Warren and Dennis through the lenses of Richard Jessor's problem behavior theory (PBT), and displays how they; in return, affect their lives and prevent them from transitioning to full adulthood successfully. Furthermore, it shows how the play is a wake-up call for parents, caregivers, and teachers to understand, help, and support adolescents and young adults during such critical stages.

In fact, there is a variety of factors that influence the possibility of gaining particular behavioral patterns during adolescence and young adulthood. They are risk factors and protective factors. Problem behavior theory as a psychosocial framework particularly describes the risk factors that lead adolescents and young adults to adopt problem behaviors involving risky attitudes to cope with stress, depression, and anxiety; to escape pressure and negative feelings; to gain peers' respect and acceptance; and to show independence from their families.

According to Jessor, such problem behaviors can be defined as a group of dysfunctional behaviors that bring about short-term relief but have negative physical and psychological outcomes on the long run. They are common during adolescence and early adulthood, "consisting of storm and stress" (Kuther 3), in all cultures, including drug abuse, alcoholism, heavy smoking, unsafe sexual behaviors that lead to unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases ("Mental Health", *acog.org*), delinquency, eating disorders, excessive use of social media platforms, reckless driving, violence perpetration, and truancy:

Risk-taking behavior is that endangers the personal safety of those that carry it out and, in some cases, the safety of others. This type of behavior is enacted in order to provoke excitement and strong sensations and is extremely common in adolescents.... In this ... process of growth and maturation, adolescents often find themselves acting out behavior that can put their physical, psychological, and social well-being at risk (Cairano et. al. 99).

According to problem behavior theory, such risk factors that promote problem behaviors stem mainly from one's personality system and environment system:

Problem Behavior Theory hypothesis [is]: Variation in the personality system and variation in the ... environment system should each account for variation in problem behavior (Jessor 24).

Personality system includes motivational structure, personal belief structure, and personal control structure. First, motivational structure is based on one's values and expectations about his/her academic, professional, and social achievement and success. For instance, failure to achieve a goal, poor academic performance, quitting a school or a college, or inability to have healthy relations are considered risk factors that can cause negative behavioral outcomes. Second, personal belief structure is related to feelings of alienation, detachment, low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, depression, meaninglessness, and vulnerability. According to PBT, falling a victim to these negative sensations runs parallel to adopting negative, inappropriate behaviors. Third, personal control structure serves as a control mechanism that prevents an individual from involvement in problematic behaviors. Disruption of this mechanism means tolerance of risk-taking. In other words, as postulated by PBT, if one has no sound personal control structure, he/she is prone to deviant behaviors which are not approved by the society. Hence, the three structures fundamentally contribute to problem behavior tendencies among adolescents and young adults:

... fewer risk factors in the personality system cause the fewer problem behaviors. When individuals ... isolate themselves from society, when life starts to become meaningless, and/or when they have low self-esteem, the possibility of problem behavior rises (Karaman 146).

As for the environment system, it "consists of proximal and distal social influence factors" (Zamboanga et. al. 254). It is related to life setting; parenting models; relations with family members, friends, and

teachers; social activities; and social acceptance and appreciation. According to Jessor's PBT, adolescents and young adults who have positive parenting styles, appropriate social support circles, healthy relations with friends, safe relations with teachers and authority figures, harmony between parents and friends, effective social participations, and no harsh social criticism or rejection never tend to try problem behaviors. Instead, they are expected to stick to conventional behavioral patterns that respect the traditional standards and values of a society. So, the young's decision to adopt problem behaviors, also known as risky behaviors, relies mainly upon the risk factors they experience either on the personal extreme, or the environmental one, or both of them; and this is the core of PBT:

... as the risk factors in the environment system increase, problem behaviors increase This finding suggests that the immediate surroundings of an adolescent influence problem behavior (Karaman 147).

The main characters in *This Is Our Youth* Dennis and Warren experience a variety of both personal and environmental risk factors which make their journey to full adulthood challenging, stressful, and full of drama. Consequently, they exhibit increasing tendency to problem behaviors through risk-taking. The key risk factor granted a space throughout the play is parents' inappropriate attitudes towards their adolescents since they were children. This risk factor belongs to the environmental system according to PBT. In particular, Warren has a tempestuous relationship with his father and has undergone

unbearable parental abuse since he was a child. The way Warren's father treats him is apparently devoid of any love, respect, and compassion that are innately typical of father-son relationship that impacts how we perceive ourselves and others, our relationships with people around, our decisions, values, and goals in life (Franzoso, *elizabethfranzoso.com*). Although he is physically present, he is an emotionally distant, toxic father whose parental styles are entirely damaging. For example, since the onset of the play, readers/audience come to know how much Warren's father is a hostile one who never conforms to his key role as his son's first caregiver and supporter. As Warren depressively tells Dennis, the tough father has mercilessly forced him to leave his house although he knows his son has no other place to live in, especially with the absence of his mother, with no big reason; just smoking heavily:

WARREN. Nothing. I got stoned and he comes home and he's like 'This apartment smells like pot all the time.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, 'cause I'm always smoking it.' So then he's like, 'No, actually, I want you out of this house.' Then he throws a few bills on the floor and is like, 'There's some cash, now pack up your shit and get out And I was like, 'Whatever'. ... I packed up my stuff and left (Act. 1, 9).

More than once, during his conversations with Warren that are merely violent verbal fights, the father tells his son that he hates him: "...Do whatever you want... I hate you too"(Act. 2, 58). In Warren's eyes, as it turns clear throughout the play, his father is only successful as a

businessman not a father or a caregiver. His top interest in life is money, and so the life, feelings, needs, and challenges of Warren and his sister or how they are doing go beyond his attention. He; in other words, appears as a self-absorbed and self-focused father: "he's totally by himself" (Act. 2, 67). He disregards his son and daughter's individuality and perceives them only as extensions of himself. He lacks empathy for his children's pains and complexities in life. This is why, their physical, mental, and emotional needs are unmet. This is actually "inappropriate for the child's growth, development, and welfare" (Adams, *psychologytoday.com*) and leads, in turn, to detrimental anxieties, negative thoughts, and dangerous behaviors.

Experiencing a family breakup, according to Jessor's theory, is another risk factor related to the environmental system. It motivates adolescents and young adults to gain negative adaptation skills: "mislead life is blamed to separated parents" (Joyce et. al, 113). Warren and his sister are adolescents who have witnessed a family breakup experience. Their parents are divorced, and each one of them is involved in a life of his/her own with no care about their children. Both parents have failed to provide them with a healthy life and to lessen the mental influences of divorce on them. Therefore, Warren and his sister are caused to be deprived of the parental love, care, guidance, and constant supervision. They stand for those adolescents who live without many of the essential needs they expect from their parents. They face life without the powerful bond with parents upon which their "ability to sustain satisfying or committed relationships, find gratification in ... work life, be effective parent, speak up and assert [him/herself]"

(Franzoso, *elizabethfranzoso.com*) mainly depends. The two siblings live entirely on their own and have evidently failed to manage their lives. Since the beginning till the end of the play, Warren in particular stands alone in face of many troubles with no one to help and support and with nowhere to turn to:

WARREN. Nobody's home. Everyone's parents are home.
I'm not allowed in their houses. Come on. I don't want to be wandering around the streets ... Come on...(Act 1, 12).

As suggested by problem behavior theory, loss of a dear family member or a friend particularly to death is one of the environmental risk factors that increase the rates of risk-taking and result in adopting problem behaviors. Such a heartbreaking experience does unfortunately turn adolescence and early adulthood much harder and more stressful and intensify depressive symptoms (Zhang et. al., 2). Unless it is successfully healed, it is expected to negatively impact the following age stages. In particular, Warren is swept by strong feelings of loss due to his elder sister's premature death as she was murdered by her boyfriend. He grieves the loss of his only sibling with whom he is deeply connected. He is now deprived of the one who is often there in all his life's ups and downs, and with whom he used to have a long-term relationship. The sister's death causes Warren to have no lifetime friend, supporter, and even protector. He is forced to live without his only source of love and affection especially with the absence of his parents. This is why, as it is indicated more than once throughout the

play, the bereaved brother is often haunted with their memories together. He feels nostalgia for their favorite pastimes. He constantly thinks and talks about her as he depressingly tells his father: "I think about her all the time ... I just see her in my imagination" (Act. 2, 58). He creates a photo memorial of her to make up for her everlasting absence:

DENNIS. Well why do you have like her childhood pictures up all over your room, and like articles about her murder in your ... drawer, like ten years after the fact? You're gonna let that ... dominate your life? You gotta like, get on with it (Act. 1, 25).

Dennis advises Warren to move forward in his life and to overcome such a traumatizing experience. He is evidently unable to recognize the severity of these feelings that Warren is fighting to survive. In fact, others usually ignore the surviving sibling's suffering. All attention, understanding, support, and words of solace and comfort are showered upon the dead sibling's parents, children, and his/her spouse. So, the adolescent or young adult survivor is left to mourn the death of his/her sibling alone with no one to hold him/her up in face of such bereavement. So, they "are often referred to as the 'forgotten mourners'" (The Compassionate Friends, *compassionatefriends.org*). Hence, Lonergan's play grabs readers/audience's attention to the silent suffering of those young victims of loss who are consequently in a bad need of care and support to ease their healing process and regain hope in life afterwards.

For Richard Jessor, unhealthy relationships with peers and friends are prevalent environmental risk factors to which problem behaviors can be attributed. As indicated in *This Is Our Youth*, Dennis and Warren's friendship is the one with many red flags. Dennis is a selfish peer who has an inflated ego along with strong feelings of arrogance and entitlement. He feels that he is the role model of his peers who perceive him as "the big everything" (Act. 2, 52) in Warren's words. He considers himself a superior person for whose company his friends should be grateful. Dennis thinks he has more value than all of them so that they all imitate him and are very much impressed by his personality as he says "I'm providing you with precious memories of your youth" and "I'm like the basis of half your personality" (Act 1, 19). He cares less about Warren's needs, feelings, and thoughts and is instead always involved in conflicts with him. Since they first meet, Dennis never stops humiliating Warren, criticizing his attitudes, and showering him with scornful comments: "I mean you are stupid, man, you are incredibly stupid Nobody can stand to have you around because you're such an annoying loud-mouthed little creep" (Act. 1, 12-13). More than once Dennis slabs Warren in the face and "rains [him] with open-handed blows down on [his] head and body" (Act.1, 18). Therefore, one can say that the two friends have low-quality communication. Communication channels are somehow blocked. They both do not succeed to establish a sort of real communication to compensate themselves for their disrupted communication with their parents and the outside world at large. Warren; as a consequence, is so depressed as he is a victim of his peer's violence besides the parental violence he is already suffering from. It fills him with much agony and

adds to his suffering that his friend is also so tough to him: "why are you always like constantly insulting me and like teasing me and like telling me how incompetent I am" (Act. 2, 65). The adolescent and soon-to-be young adult feels frustrated and lost because the very serious time he is passing through has been responded to with unconcern, negligence, and much worse with aggression and toughness.

Dropping-out is a personality system-related risk factor that both Dennis and Warren get involved in though they are aware of its harmful consequences on the long run. In a general sense, adolescents and young adults quit school or college to avoid such stressful situations as learning problems, poor academic performance, or peer pressure particularly with their struggle against depression and anxiety that mark this age stage. Some dropout decisions are mainly economic to help low-income families and afford life needs especially in cases of early parenting (Dupéré et. al, *sacd.onlinelibrary*). Also, belonging to broken families, "where parents are separated due to death, divorce, remarriage, or unavoidable situations" (Devi 75), as reported by some studies, make young people fail to focus on study or seek higher education (Shameer, *momjunction.com*).

In *This Is Our Youth*, Warren is a high-school dropout who admits that he has rarely attended school. He has apparently lost his interest in academics and has no passion for distinctive educational statuses.

JESSICA. But—you're not planning on going to school at all? Didn't you go to school somewhere or something?

WARREN. Um, briefly.

JESSICA. So ...?

WARREN. I ... It just wasn't happening (Act. 1, 31).

His personal traumas seem to be the primary causes of giving up education. Such tragic experiences as the premature death of his only sister, his parents' divorce and their consequent negligence, his father's aggression, and peers' bullying contribute to his mental instability and psychological breakdown which leave him devoid of any desire and penchant to develop educational performance and achieve academic progress that will later entirely imprint his life and career. This failure in study and academia enhances the feelings of emptiness Warren struggles with since the beginning of the play. He and Dennis are staying together at Dennis' apartment, and they have nothing meaningful to do to fill them up. They have no beneficial activities to construct their self-confidence, identity, and purpose in life. They spend hours with nothing new taking place to interrupt this oppressive dullness and familiarity. This unfortunately does strongly relate to Warren's negative self-image, insufficient self-satisfaction, and low self-esteem that will later motivate him to try a raft of misbehaviors.

Thence, Warren, as an adolescent, appears to be stuck in the gloominess of depression resulting from the many negative experiences he does have since his "unhappy" (Act. 1, 42) childhood that in turn can suspend any attempts of hope development. Actually, PBT "include[s] depression among the risk factors in the personality system" (Karaman 147), and so it directly related to risk-taking and problem behaviors. Warren evidently has a low spirit. He is swept by strong

waves of sadness, anxiety, stress, as well as alarming low self-esteem that are common psychiatrist symptoms during this stage (Piacentini and Christopher 55). He has no hope of an easygoing life with family and friends. He does not even think or talk about the future as if he is certain that his life will keep the same till the end. This is what comes clear through his conversation with Jessica when the latter tries to avert his negative thoughts of himself and life at large and focus his attention on positive ones that one day everything will be different, and things will turn much better, but he is painfully in doubt:

WARREN. I'm not very fashion-oriented.

JESSICA. Yeah, but, you know, you will be someday.

WARREN. I doubt it.

JESSICA. Yeah ... Your whole personality will be different ... What you're like now has nothing to do with what you're gonna be like. Like right now you're all like this rich little pot-smoking burnout rebel, but ten years from now you're gonna be like a plastic surgeon reminiscing about how wild you used to be.

WARREN. I don't want to make any rash predictions at this point ...

JESSICA. ... OK, whatever, but you'll definitely be completely different, and the way you act, and all your most passionately held beliefs are all gonna be completely different (Act. 1, 31-33).

As Warren "has no meaning-making map to guide him into a different way of life" (Walsh 7), his girlfriend clearly tries to reconnect him to good things in life and encourage him to look forward to what is to come in his future. She helps him rebuild his lost confidence and faith in himself, enhance his self-esteem, regain his motivations and desires to work and wait patiently for positive outcomes, and so reinforce his hopes in life. So, Jessica provides readers/audience with a coping strategy to successfully handle their adolescents' and young adults' similar depression attack. She teaches her recipients that parents must be super supportive and willingly spend time, effort, and money to help their adolescent offspring cultivate their passion and find their purpose in life especially during this age stage because "the key time for purpose in the 18-23 age range" (Kielley, *today.com*) to be able to defy all depression-related negative sensations. Unless parents and caregivers are supportive and understanding, young people are expected to fall victims of severe mental setbacks. In short, one of the play's crucial messages is that social support circles must keep alert particularly when an adolescent or a young adult starts to adopt the attitudes of detachment, inefficiency, giving up, to wonder why he/she should keep trying, or to manifest signs of hopelessness (Pickhardt, "Parenting an Adolescent", *psychologytoday.com*) as Warren has done.

In response to all these personality-system and environment-system risk factors that Warren in particular has undergone throughout the play, he exhibits a high tendency to try risk-taking problem behaviors especially with the disruption of his personal control system that causes

him not to find his behaviors wrong. For him, such dysfunctional behaviors can help him "observe the event as a spectator to experience no, or only limited, pain or distress and to be protected from the full impact of what has happened" (Van Der Kolk et. al. 192). They help him relieve his intense feelings of depression, sadness, fatigue, loneliness, hopelessness, irritability, and emptiness resulting from what he has been through during such a changeover stage of life full of troubles and multi-dimensional transformations. In other words, they facilitate managing the overwhelming and emotionally distressful experiences he is passing through.

When the two friends Dennis and Warren first meet on stage after Warren arrives to Dennis' one-room apartment at midnight, they get involved in smoking joints of marijuana that Warren has brought with him. Likewise, in reference to the threatening smoking trends among teenagers and young adults, Warren's girlfriend, Jessica, is manifested as a heavy smoker. A few minutes after she steps into Dennis' room to spend some time with Warren, she directly takes out her cigarettes and lighter and asks Warren if there is any problem to smoke there. Actually, cigarette smoking during such a stage of life in particular is reported to cause severe health problems especially respiratory ones that leave lungs with long-lasting effects. The more desperate fact is that young people, according to the play, are aware of these smoking-related illnesses that result in severe health tragedies later on:

WARREN. So are you like a really big cigarette smoker?

JESSICA. I guess so.

WARREN. How many cigarettes would you say you smoke in the average day?

JESSICA. I don't know. Like a pack and a half a day If you smoke pot all the time it's much worse on your lungs ...

WARREN. I guess my lungs are pretty severely damaged

JESSICA. I'm sure they are (Act. 1, 29-30).

Both Dennis and Warren are also heavy drug abusers. Their central activity throughout the play is taking cocaine and heroin. It is the only time they successfully share:

DENNIS. All right. Should we get heroin?

WARREN. Let's do speedballs.

DENNIS. Shut up. Do you even know what a speedball is?
No.

WARREN. Yeah I know ... It's like half heroine, half cocaine (Act 1, 24-25).

Doing so, they, one can say, try to escape their unwanted negative thoughts, somewhat lift their mood, cope with stress triggers, overcome worry, and feel better. They think that this is how they can self-medicate though the reality is totally different as risky behaviors can intensify the signs of mental restlessness in the long term.

Engaging in pre-mature sexual relationships is one of the problem behaviors that “can put the life of an individual in danger and can be harmful to his or her health” (Diclemente et. al. 2). It is widely observed in adolescents and young adults’ societies, and so it is adopted by Lonergan’s central character as a means of defending

himself against his all-traumatic surroundings and escaping the consequent tearing feelings. Jessica appears in this drama as the sexual partner of Warren with whom he yearns to have a physical intercourse. Resorting to early sexual practices is perceived by Warren as a compensation for the absent social and emotional relief and as a means to shun his aching feelings of loneliness, negligence, and rejection. Likewise, his dead 19-year-old sister was involved in a toxic sexual relation with a man who is much older than her. She has left her family house and lived with him. Unfortunately, the boyfriend has practiced the top form of physical abuse against the girl and mercilessly killed her:

JESSICA. What did your sister die of?

WARREN. Um, she was murdered

JESSICA. So, what happened? That's so horrible.

WARREN. Um, nothing. She was living with this guy named Julian. And my parents were freaked out that she was living with this guy because she was only nineteen, and he was much older (Act. 1, 39).

Therefore, parents, even if they are divorced, should talk to their adolescents about what unhealthy, premature, and abusive relations are; and how they look like. They must be alert to any signs of having a toxic friend or partner or getting involved in an early sexual relationship in their adolescents' life and help them protect themselves from such a kind of relations.

Violence perpetration is another problem behavior Kenneth Lonergan is concerned with in the play under scrutiny. This is because adolescents and young adults have increased risks for perpetrating or being victims of violence (World Health Organization, *who.int*). It is perceived as a primary cause of more "injury and death in children, teenagers, and young adults than infectious disease, cancer, or birth defects" (Healthwise Staff, *uomhealth.org*). Throughout *This Is Our Youth*, Dennis is a perpetrator of violence, and Warren is unfortunately his victim. His language is offensive and coarse, and his talks are infiltrated with physical, non-verbal violence against his peer: "You are like hell bent for destruction You are so stupid" (Act. 2, 46). Through his violent acts, Dennis seemingly attempts to release his stored up negative feelings resulting from such risk factors as parents' inattention, social instability, lack of communication, failure, and other challenging experiences he encounters on the brink of full adulthood. Violent attitudes may also be expected to be his means to make up for the overwhelming weakness and fragility during this age stage. On the other hand, being a victim of violent acts and words is considered a stimulus of severe emotional anxieties. It can add a lot to young people's already-existing psychological traumas and enhance their negative thoughts of themselves and others during this period as it is noticeably clear with Warren.

So, in the light of problem behavior theory, *This Is Our Youth* evidently posits that the probability of problem behavior exhibition increases when risk factors increase. Family break-up; parents' rejection and negligence; death of a sibling; unhealthy friendships,

dropping-out and failure to achieve a high educational status; in addition to acute depression, loneliness, anxiety, and emptiness that both Dennis and Warren experience can be considered risk factors in Richard Jessor's terms. They are socially, emotionally, or psychologically adverse incidents that threaten their wellbeing and negatively affect the quality of their life. Actually, these risk factors lead them; in return, to show high rates of risk-taking desires that result in sweeping problem behavior tendencies. To be more evident, in order for Dennis and Warren to defend themselves against whatever risk factors they are caused to experience at both levels of personality and environment, they both willingly gain negative adaptation attitudes. They retreat to self-made worlds, where, according to PBT, drugs, smoking, premature sexual relations, and violence, which are classified as problem behaviors, are alone able to suspend the intrusion of all the negative, distressful feelings resulting from the agonizing experiences they do have during the episodes of adolescence and early adulthood. They think that this is how they can effectively shut down any pain triggers.

Therefore, through approaching the lives of both main characters particularly Warren, *This Is Our Youth* suggests that there is a close relationship between problem behavior syndrome, and risk-taking in general, and dissociation which is a common defense mechanism in the world of psychological trauma. It is used by victims of trauma to take themselves out of the frame of a traumatic existence. Both young men have tried such a set of misbehaviors mainly to dissociate themselves from the heartbreaking events that have overwhelmed their lives. In

other words, they are their means to numb their feelings and somewhat keep themselves out of the reach of the consequent mental and psychological exhaustion. So, problem behaviors can be considered dissociation strategies that turn seemingly prevalent in the adolescents' and young adults' communities.

This Is Our Youth is a message-laden play. Its main concern is the adolescents' and young adults' complex and challenging path to their full adulthood. This drama shows us how the young's transition to the stage of independence and maturity is actually an emotionally exhausting one that has nothing to do with any theoretical positive or even ideal expectations. It is a stage of life overwhelmed by constant upsetting and resetting of one's ideas, beliefs, feelings, activities, self-image, interests, relations, plans, and ambitions. The heroes, Dennis and Warren, stand for generations of American adolescents and young adults who stand in face of a sea of troubles, sorrows, and drastic changes on the physical, mental, social, and psychological extremes. They speak on behalf of millions whose journey to full growth is a hard and stressful one.

Kenneth Lonergan's top aim is to help his readers/audience especially parents and caregivers have an access to what the young are going through before they turn full-grown adults. Also, he provides those who have a direct contact with young people with some guidelines to be able to cope with them during such a crucial stage and make it much easier. His key advice is to lead healthy, loving, and balanced relationships with young people in order for these special times in their life to be trouble-free. On the other hand, the play is

intended to help the young themselves understand what they come to experience after they quit childhood, handle the resulting changes successfully, and avoid any consequent risk-taking and problem behavior approaches that are expected to seriously affect their life and development afterwards.

In summary, the present study is intended to apply problem behavior theory on *This Is Our Youth* which is a well-acclaimed work of drama to highlight the close relationship between risk factors and problem behavior acquisition as reflected in theatre. It shows how the personality and environment characteristics determine whether the young resort to problem behaviors or productive behaviors that have strong ties with societal norms, values, and traditions. Its primary objective is to give voice to what the young are caused to go through especially with the negligence and indifference practiced against them not only by their societies but unfortunately by their families as well. It attempts to give some attention to those fresh buds who are supposed to be the most hopeful, optimistic, enthusiastic, and energetic; have countless aspirations for their future; and be extremely full of passion. However, the reality is depressively different as they stand amidst complex challenges and grieves that are larger than their ability to cope with.

References

Adams, Christine B. L. "The Effects of Self-Centered Parenting on Children." *psychologytoday.com*. 13 May. 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-automatic/202205/the-effects-self-centered-parenting-children>.

Accessed Feb 6, 2023.

Cart, Michael. "The Value of Young Adult Literature." *ala.org*. Jan. 2008. <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit>.

Accessed Oct 7, 2021.

Chawla, Sandeep. *The Situation of Youth in the 1980s and Prospects and Challenges for the Year 2000*. New York: United Nations. 1986.

Ciairano, Silvia, Elena Cattelino, and Silvia Bonino. *Adolescents and Risk: Behaviors, Functions and Protective Factors*. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media. 2006.

Diclemente, R., Hansen, W., and Ponton, L. *Adolescents at risk: A Generation in Jeopardy*. In R. DiClemente, W. Hansen, & L. Ponton (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Health Risk Behavior* (pp. 1–4). New York: Plenum. 1996.

Devi, Runumi. "Social Development of Young Children Belonging to Broken Families." *IJHSS*, vol. I, no. III, November 2014, pp. 75-86.

Dupéré, Veronique, Eric Dion, Tama Leventhal, Isabelle Archambault, Robert Crosnoe, and Michel Janosz. "High School Dropout in Proximal Context: The Triggering Role of Stressful Life Events." *Child Development*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2017, pp. 107-122. <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdev.12792>.

Accessed Feb 2, 2022.

Franzoso, Elizabeth. "Types of Damaging Fathers and How They Influence Who We Are?" *elizabethfranzoso.com*. No date. <https://elisabetafranzoso.com/articles/types-of-damaging-fathers-how-they-influence-who-we-are>. Accessed Feb 5, 2023.

Healthwise Staff. "Violent Behavior in Children and Teens." *uomhealth.org*. Feb 9, 2022. <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/tv6556>. Accessed Jan 15, 2023.

Jessor, Richard. *The Origins and Development of Problem Behavior Theory*. Switzerland: Springer. 2016.

Joyce, Mary, Rouel Joseph, and Mary Gayrose. "Behavioral Problems and Coping Strategies of Selected Adolescents Belonging to a Broken Family." *CAM Research Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, September 2014, pp. 112-135.

Karaman, G. N. "Predicting the Problem Behavior in Adolescents." *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, no. 52, 2013, pp. 137-154.

Kielley, Esta. "How to Help My Young Adult Find Their Purpose." *today.com*. Feb 1, 2020. <https://www.today.com/parenting-guides/how-help-my-young-adult-find-their-purpose-t179010>. Accessed Oct 1, 2021.

Kuther, Tara L. *Adolescents At-Risk: A Literature Review of Problems, Attitudes, and Interventions*. New York: Fordham University. 1995.

Lonergan, Kenneth. *This Is Our youth*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, INC. 1999.

May, Todd. *Kenneth Lonergan: Filmmaker and Philosopher*. UK: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2020.

Piacentini, John C and Christopher A. Flessner. *Clinical Handbook of Psychological Disorders in Children and Adolescents: A Step-by-Step Treatment Manual*. New York: Guilford Publications. 2019.

Pickhardt, Carl E. "Parenting an Adolescent and the Power of Hope." *psychologytoday.com*. Dec 30, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201912/parenting-adolescent-and-the-power-hope>. Accessed Nov 2, 2022.

Shameer, Mitha. "8 Reasons Why Teenagers Quit School." *momjunction.com*. Apr 9, 2022. https://www.momjunction.com/articles/why-teenagers-quit-school_00342706/ Accessed July 26, 2022.

Smith, Peter K. *Adolescence: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP Oxford. 2016.

Takanishi, R. "The Opportunities of Adolescence- Research, Inventions and Policy: Introduction to the Special Issue". *American Psychologist*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1993, pp. 85-87.

The Compassionate Friends. "Adults Grieving the Death of a Sibling." *compassionatefriends.org*. 2016. <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/adults-grieving-death-sibling/> Accessed Feb 20, 2021.

Walsh, Mary Caswell. *Imagination and Adolescent Trauma: The Role of Imagination in Neurophysiological, Psychological, and Spiritual Healing*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 2020.

World Health Organization. "Child Maltreatment." *who.int*. Sep. 19, 2022. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>. Accessed Jan 2, 2023.

Van Der Kolk, Bessel A.; Alexander C. McFarlane; and Lars Weisaeth. *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. NY: Guilford Press, 2012.

Zamboanga, Byron L.; Carlo, Gustavo; and Raffaelli, Marcela. "Problem Behavior Theory: An Examination of the Behavior Structure System in Latino and non-Latino College Students." *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 253-262.

Zhang, Qiongwen, Yangu Pan, Lei Zhang, and Hang Lu. "Parent-Adolescent Communication and Early Adolescent Depressive Symptoms: The Roles of Gender and Adolescents' Age." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, May 2021, pp. 1-12.

اكتساب السلوك المُشكل أثناء المراهقة وبداية البلوغ في "هذا هو شبابنا"

لكينيث لونرجان

ملخص

يُعد الانتقال من مرحلة المراهقة إلى إتمام البلوغ رحلة مليئة بالتحديات و العديد من التجارب الوعرة على مختلف الأصعدة. خلال تلك المرحلة الحرجة من الحياة والتي يتخلى فيها الشباب عن إهتمامات ومشاعر وأنشطة الطفولة، يبدأ البعض منهم صراعاً مع الوحدة وخيبة الأمل والفقد والرفض الاجتماعي وسوء معاملة الوالدين وتتمرلزلاء والضغط والفشل وفقدان الشغف وإنعدام المعنى مما يترتب عليه الوقوع ضحايا لمتلازمة السلوك المُشكل واللجوء للكثير من السلوكيات السلبية والمحفوفة بالمخاطر كآليات للتعامل مع مثل هذه التجارب المؤلمة التي يمرون بها في نواحٍ مختلفة. وتتضمن تلك السلوكيات شرب الكحوليات، والتدخين، وتعاطي المخدرات، والسلوكيات العدوانية، والممارسات الجنسية والتي تجعل السبيل لإكمال الرشد سبيلاً شاقاً. و لذلك، يهدف هذا البحث لتقديم دراسة دقيقة لمسرحية الكاتبة كينيث لونرجان *This Is Our Youth* "هذا هو شبابنا" في ضوء نظرية السلوك المُشكل وذلك لإستعراض السلوكيات المُشكلة التي يمارسها الشباب بكل أسف وهم على أعتاب مرحلة النضج الكامل. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، يسعى البحث إلى توضيح كيف يقوم العمل المسرحي قيد الدراسة بدعوة الآباء والمعلمين ومقدمي الرعاية للإهتمام بالمراهقين والشباب داخل دوائرهم أثناء مواجهتهم لإحتمالات مختلفة وبدائل جديدة وتشجيعهم على تجربة أدوار وسلوكيات إيجابية والتي بدورها ستؤثر بشكل إيجابي على المراحل المقبلة من حياتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المراهقة - السلوك المُشكل - بداية البلوغ - التحديات - تعاطي المخدرات - سوء المعاملة - السلوكيات الخطيرة- الشباب