

Adolescence is a time when the social world expands, a time of increasing engagement beyond the family sphere to the school, the peer group, and the workplace. These contexts may present experiences that differ greatly in their tone and content, either contributing to or hindering satisfaction and a positive sense of self. This book examines how the constellation of stressors and rewards in various life domains influences adolescent adjustment. The theoretical framework is Simmons arena of comfort: a context for individuals to relax and to rejuvenate, so that potentially stressful changes and experiences in another arena can be endured or mastered. The concept of the arena of comfort highlights the adolescents active role in the developmental process, as young people seek out and alternate between contexts that provide challenge and those that provide solace. By providing social support, a comfort arena strengthens the young person so that challenges in other life spheres can be dealt with. This book uses data from 1,000 adolescents to address key questions derived from the arena of comfort thesis: In which arenas of their lives do adolescents typically find comfort? Does the experience of comfort differ by gender, socioeconomic level, and other dimensions of social background? Do sources of comfort change as the adolescent moves through high school? Do adolescents typically find comfort in just one or two or in several arenas? Where are they most likely to experience this positive, comfortable state? Are adolescents who find comfort in a greater number of arenas better off, in terms of their mental health and achievement, than those who are comfortable in fewer contexts? Are some arenas more consequential for adolescent adjustment than others? Can an arena of comfort in one setting, in fact, buffer the effects of stressful experiences in another context? The results of this research indicate that making adolescents contexts more supportive and comfortable will be reflected in improved mental health and achievement. This book will be of interest to all practitioners and researchers concerned with the mental health of adolescents.

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