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“I am Pamela, her own self!”:  
Moral and Psychosocial Development in  
Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*

Angelina Dulong

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

“I am Pamela, her own self!”:  
Moral and Psychosocial Development in  
Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*

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This paper examines Samuel Richardson’s 1740 novel *Pamela* through two modern models of adolescent development: moral development (Kohlberg and Turiel) and psychosocial development (Erikson, Marcia, and Luyckx et al.). It argues that the novel’s eponymous heroine is a complex character who moves beyond the simple stereotypes, being neither a perfect model of feminine virtue nor a coquette on the prowl for a wealthy catch. By examining the developmental arcs Pamela experiences in the novel, it is possible to read her as a typical teenage girl who achieves virtue through errors and growth rather than a static character whose virtue (or simulacrum of it) maintains a flatline.

Keywords: adolescent development, moral development, psychosocial development, Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, virtue, psychological realism

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
“I am Pamela, her own self!”: Moral and Psychosocial Development in Samuel Richardson’s <i>Pamela</i> .....	1
Moral Development in Adolescence.....	4
Moral Development in <i>Pamela</i> .....	9
Psychosocial Development in Adolescence.....	18
Psychosocial Development in <i>Pamela</i> .....	22
Conclusions.....	29
Works Cited .....	32
Works Consulted.....	34

“I am Pamela, her own self!”: Moral and Psychosocial Development in

Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*

First published on November 6, 1740, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded* went through eight authorized editions by 1761 and received praise from pulpits by some readers while being lambasted by other, more skeptical audiences (Sale 13). Richardson himself packaged and repackaged his novel for differing tastes, as did various booksellers and illustrators. In their 2005 study *Pamela in the Marketplace*, Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor summarize, “Having sold *Pamela* once as piety, and arguably once again as pornography, [Richardson] then gave a third identity to the novel by repackaging it as pedagogy” (37). The stark contrast between a book marketed as moral guidance on one printing and pornography on another—whether its author made such marketing decisions or not—may have stimulated the well-documented avalanche of responses. Some commentators lavished unreserved praise on Richardson’s paradigm of female virtue in the figure of Pamela. As Brian Corman observes, “Eighteenth-century critics who placed a premium on the moral function of literature valued Richardson. His friend Samuel Johnson’s praise of him for having ‘taught the passions to move at the command of virtue’ succinctly captures their position” (64). Obviously, however, such positive reception did not characterize all responses.

Other early commentators expressed contempt for a heroine they deemed more mercenary than moral and wanted to expose Pamela (the character) as a fraud, an impulse that spurred the release of many anti-Pamela works such as Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*, which depicts the heroine’s “virtue” as a hypocritical tool for ensnaring a rich husband. Mihaela Cuela sums up the case made by these detractors using these descriptors of Pamela: “deceitful,” “fake,”

“ostentatious,” and “false” (74). In sum, many early readings of the novel, whether enthusiastic or incredulous, focused on its heroine’s moral status.

Modern critics have reframed questions about Pamela’s contested virtue and her reliability as a narrator by concentrating on sociopolitical issues such as gender and class. Toni Bowers offers one exemplary sociopolitical interpretation, arguing that the *Pamela* debate “epitomized the workings of ideological dissent not only across partisan divides but also within tory sensibility, which...became disturbingly visible in *Pamela* and in the controversy that surrounded it” (248). Bowers’ work casts *Pamela* as a meditation on the political position of the Tories in the years leading up to the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion: supposed to submit to a new political master, the Hanoverian dynasty, but unable to submit due to feudal and religious loyalty to the divinely appointed yet currently dispossessed Stuart line. In a different vein, Corrinne Harol connects the novel’s questions of character reliability to the ambiguity of eighteenth-century scientific development, which struggled to contain and quantify all the phenomena of the human body and yet could not create a reliable system for ascertaining virginity (131-34). Most recently, Diana Rosenberger draws a correlation between the problems Pamela (the character) faced establishing authenticity with her readers and the similar problems victims of the #MeToo movement face today (18).

In short, much of the debate about Richardson’s novel centers on the motivations that underlie Pamela’s actions and Richardson’s representation of those motivations: she is either sincere and authentic or hypocritical and manipulative. What is so fascinating about this debate is that both arguments, to varying degrees, hinge on the extent to which Pamela’s character conforms to patterns of behavior consistent with eighteenth-century adult social life. Or, as Ian Watt influentially explained of the eighteenth-century novel generally and *Pamela* specifically,

Richardson's efforts to authenticate a fictional story and character—*Pamela*'s "formal realism"—largely created the interpretive impasse that has vexed critics since the novel's first publication. "The concept of realistic particularity in literature," Watt explains, "is itself [dependent on] two such aspects [that] suggest themselves as of especial importance in the novel—characterization and presentation of background" (17). Because Richardson successfully employs the formal aspects of characterization and background presentation identified by Watt, many of the debates about the significance of Richardson's novel have centered on whether the eponymous character is trustworthy or hypocritical rather than on whether she seems adequately realistic. I agree with the underlying realism created by the characterization of Pamela and would like to move beyond that observation to the understudied aspect of *psychological* realism, a subject that can only be considered if the novel presents as realistic in the first place. I propose that Richardson created in Pamela a character that cannot be reduced to an either/or dichotomy (sincere and virtuous OR cunning and manipulative)—this because of her complex and nuanced character that changes over the course of the novel, developing in alignment with what modern psychology outlines as normal adolescent moral and psychosocial development.

Such an undertaking raises the question of Richardson's knowledge of what we call adolescent development before it became codified as an object of scientific study. Of course, while a concentrated study of adolescence as a developmental stage did not exist in the eighteenth century, the concept of adolescence did. A group of seventeenth-century French philosophers known as "the *Beaux Esprits*" used the term in their discussion of "Which Age is most desirable?" Their conclusions crossed the channel to London in 1665, so the term *adolescence* was certainly in circulation by Richardson's time (Havers et al. 52). Furthermore, the French philosophers' definition found its way into Nathan Bailey's 1724 dictionary, which



defines adolescence as “the Flower of Youth; the State from Fourteen to Twenty-five or Thirty in Men, and from Twelve to Twenty-one in Women” (31). While eighteenth-century thinkers did not consciously study adolescence the way modern social scientists do, Richardson and alert contemporaries likely accepted that adolescence represented a unique stage of human life and development. Moreover, Richardson grew up with four sisters and raised four daughters (Eaves and Kimpel 6, 49-50). He also maintained friendships with many women: Eaves and Kimpel explain that “Richardson’s female friends were almost all young girls or married women” (1). All of these connections gave him ample opportunity to observe the differences between teenage girls and mature women—differences he depicted in the character of Pamela long before such differences were common conversation.

Modern social science gives us a vocabulary to discuss Pamela’s character development and mark the ways Richardson captured the complexities of a protagonist critics have oversimplified since the novel’s first publication. Two branches of adolescent development offer particularly rich and compelling insights into the changes in thinking and reasoning that adolescents employ: moral development and psychosocial development. This paper will divide into two main sections, each containing an explanation of an adolescent development theory followed by a close reading of *Pamela* to examine how the theory plays out in the novel.

### **Moral Development in Adolescence**

The first important modern theorist to present an explanation of how moral reasoning develops was Lawrence Kohlberg in 1958. He believed moral development advanced by concrete stages that mapped onto Jean Piaget’s cognitive development stages (first enunciated in 1936), and he thought these stages must be followed sequentially. Kohlberg’s paradigm dominated moral adolescent development research throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However,

his own longitudinal studies from 1987 did not bear his theory out; rather, it seemed adolescents typically made some progress towards becoming strong moral reasoners, then regressed in later adolescence for unknown reasons (Smetana and Turiel 249-51). Elliot Turiel, a student of Kohlberg's, proposed "social domain theory" as an outgrowth and answer to some of the inconsistencies in Kohlberg's work. Social domain theory claims the real work of adolescence is not learning to judge morally but rather learning how to decide which situations require moral judgment in the first place. Judith Smetana and Elliot Turiel explain, "morality regulate[s] the social interactions and social relationships of individuals within societies and is defined as individuals' prescriptive moral understanding of how people ought to behave toward each other. Prescriptive judgments are based on concepts of welfare (harm), justice, and rights" (254). Morality then constitutes one domain of judgment, but it does not operate in complete independence from the other domains.

My analysis of *Pamela* depends upon an understanding of the three domains, so let me flesh out basic definitions. Questions of morality center on a concern for justice and human rights. Morality thus regulates human actions by inspiring humans to consider other humans in the context of justice. Children want everything to be equal; everyone needs the same number of crayons. Adolescents begin to think more of others and want things to be equitable. If someone has special needs, adolescents accept an unequal distribution of resources in order to allow equity for all group members. A student on crutches leaving a classroom early in order to have sufficient time to travel to the next class is acceptable because equitable means every student has sufficient time to make it to the next class, not that the amount of time is equal (Smetana and Turiel 255). Adults can take this thinking a step further and accept unequitable distribution of

resources in order to attain social justice: their taxes allow for programs to help the poor that do not directly benefit the taxpayers but make society a better place overall.

The second domain focuses on social conventions. Social conventions tend to be arbitrary in that they do not necessarily stem from universal human rights or theories of justice but differ depending on historical situation and location. For example, eating cake to celebrate a wedding clearly constitutes a social convention, not a moral issue. If a culture would rather eat fried bananas, all well and good. While social conventions matter because they allow societies to operate smoothly (hence our propensity for queuing when we see a line of people in a new location), they are not morality-based, and therefore not adhering to such a convention is more a matter of good or poor manners than of righteousness or sin.

Finally, personal choices, defined as decisions that “pertain only to the actor and are therefore considered to be outside the realm of conventional regulation and moral concern,” act as a third domain to complicate questions about behavior (Smetana and Turiel 254). Personal choices theoretically affect only the individual and therefore should not be regulated by any outside agency. Choices on how to dress may fall under this aegis, but in certain cultures, dress and appearance are strictly regulated by social convention or even morality. Perhaps a better modern example would be the relationship between people and cars. Some people see a car as an extension of their personality, while others see a car merely as a means of transportation. The color or model of the car matters to some and does not matter to others. Those who care deeply about cars possess no more morality or social savvy than those who do not care; it is merely a matter of personal choice.

While some questions fall clearly into a given social domain, others pose more complicated negotiations between domains which can result in dilemmas about what constitutes

correct or “right” behavior. Consider the question of sexual relationships. Most societies develop rules governing sexual relationships, but those rules stem from a combination of morals, social conventions, and personal choices. Some societies disallow all sexual activity outside of marriage because such liaisons are considered morally wrong; others restrict such activities because of the potential they have to create additional economic burdens to the society, as in the case of the two-children-only rule in China. If the question of sexual relations is looked at strictly as a moral question, the moral code (often religious) would specify which relationships are acceptable and the morally correct decision would be to follow the code. From a social convention perspective, sex that led to unwanted babies could create a social burden that might be onerous for a society. However, in this case protected sex outside of marriage might be an acceptable choice since it does not lead to that additional burden, but even so such relationships would still be subject to personal choice.

In the eighteenth century, the interplay between morals and social conventions complicated what constituted appropriate sexual relationships. Aristocrats believed in maintaining pure bloodlines to produce heirs; however, men indulging in numerous liaisons with lower-class women might still be socially acceptable because any offspring would be considered illegitimate and thus pose no threat to the regular succession of titles and property. Corrinne Harol explains, “[U]nder a theory of patrilinear legitimacy, ...virginity contributes to the consolidation of property and the strengthening of nuclear family ties because it guarantees the legitimacy of male progeny and thereby promotes the linear descent of one man’s genetic and real property” (2). This explanation clarifies the male position and also indicates the female position: female sexuality must be controlled by firm adherence to principles of virginity and

fidelity because only then can men trust the children born to a woman are truly theirs and entitled to inherit their property.

Harol further explains, “virginity becomes, in the eighteenth century, a way to transmit both moral and material ‘worth,’ and, as such, a form of heritable female property...a convenient vehicle for bourgeois ideology, which rests on the idea that immaterial merit produces material value” (11). The female position is further complicated by class distinctions. Upper-class women draw value from maintaining virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage for patrilinear rather than (or in addition to) moral reasons; lower-class women can create a value or form of “heritable property” by being chaste. Lower-class women might also be subject to any upper-class male’s attention and appetite for non-patrilinear sexual relations, which could create a different form of heritable property in terms of money, jewels, or other property gifted to the woman as part of the relationship. Both of these scenarios for a lower-class woman lie in the realm of social convention since each scenario focuses on the property (virtuous or monetary) a woman can pass on to her children as a result of her choices without considering the morality aspect of virginity in and of itself.

A non-aristocratic eighteenth-century woman—or at least a mature woman who understands the social conventions surrounding her—will therefore recognize that the question of sexual relationships is not a simple black-and-white morality issue but rather a complicated system of ascribing worth to women with both moral and socioeconomic considerations in play. Such a complicated situation is difficult to explain to an inexperienced younger woman or teenager, and an inexperienced younger woman would likely oversimplify the situation one way or another. An adolescent thinker might attempt to fit decisions into a single domain rather than

examining how a decision might overlap domains, and thus oversimplify complex questions about appropriate behavior.

Figuring out how to navigate social domains is the dominant work of moral development in adolescence (Smetana and Turiel 254-55). As a rule of thumb, adolescents tend to gravitate towards one sphere as more important than others and privilege that sphere in decision-making, as Pamela does in her consideration of sexual relationships early in the novel. The difference between an adolescent thinker and a mature adult thinker comes in the ability to comprehend a situation may not fit neatly into just one of the three social domain boxes. The ability to see shades of nuance and overlap between domains and make decisions that respect the demands of each domain while identifying which domain most applies to a given situation is the hallmark of successful growth into adulthood.

### **Moral Development in *Pamela***

What Richardson depicts in *Pamela* is movement from an adolescent way of handling moral dilemmas to a more adult one. The dilemma at the heart of *Pamela* deals with the question of extramarital sexual relations that we have been discussing. Mr. B wants to have sex with Pamela; Pamela refuses. Mr. B approaches the situation from a mostly conventional outlook. For his class, sexual liaisons with servants are not universally considered a sin nor in some circles even a serious breach of social convention, though seducing a woman of his own class would be unacceptable. In his first physical encounter with Pamela, he tells her, “I will make a gentlewoman of you, if you are obliging” and follows it up by putting his arm around her and kissing her (55). “Make a gentlewoman” could mean marriage as marriage would definitely raise Pamela’s social standing, but from Mr. B’s continued actions, he clearly means gentlewoman as in a kept mistress. In his mind, paying to keep Pamela in comfort would definitely make her a

gentlewoman in the sense she would not have to work for a living, and such payment constitutes a fair remuneration for the relationship and compensates Pamela for the loss of her virginity more generously than the ordinary practice of paying wages to servants. This line of reasoning casts Mr. B's opinion of sexual relations in the domain of social convention rather than morality: he gets what he pays for, Pamela gets paid, everyone wins. Social convention here subsumes personal choice since in this situation both participants have agreed to the exchange.

Mr. B is not the only person of his social class to view sexual relationships in terms of social convention supported by personal choice. Within the context of the novel, it seems nearly his entire social class views sexuality in terms of currency. Lady Davers tells Pamela, "keep [your]self to [your]self...[You are] a very pretty wench, and...every body g[ives you] a very good character and love[s] you...take care to keep the fellows at a distance...*that* [you] might do, and be more valued for it" (47). Lady Davers indicates plainly that she views sexual relationships in terms of social currency and economic exchange—sexual purity increases a woman's value for men, so she exhorts Pamela to use sexual purity to her advantage. Additionally, the ladies from the village who come to tea with Mr. B—Mrs. Arthur, Mrs. Brooks, Miss Towers, and a countess—admire Pamela's beauty extensively and tell her she is "born to undo, or to be undone!" (86). They too see beauty as social capital and repeatedly wish they were as beautiful as Pamela (85-6). Their view seems to focus on using personal choice about which relationship to engage in with men within the bounds of acceptable social convention to the best economic advantage possible, regardless of class. These women seem to see morality as a piece of their economic currency rather than a deeply held conviction. They illustrate the entanglement between domains that can, and often do, confuse an adolescent.

Early readers such as Fielding suggested in not-so-subtle ways that Pamela, too, monetizes her virtue or buys in to the conflation of domains. One of the inconsistencies critics easily spotted was Pamela's tendency to offer contradictory reasons for rejecting Mr. B. Because her reasons sometimes mismatch her actions, her motives seem suspect. Fielding saw her inconsistency as reason to accuse Pamela of being disingenuous, of holding out for the best possible deal in her manipulation of Mr. B, as Shamela does with Mr. Booby (Fielding 18, 24-25, 28, 34). Yet while Fielding's interpretation argues for one possible reading of Pamela's actions, social domain theory suggests another equally compelling one: Pamela's inconsistencies in behavior stem from her inability to see the overlap between social domains and the complex circumstances surrounding her choice to engage in or refuse a sexual relationship with her master.

One problem Pamela faces is her acceptance (or not) of Mr. B's authority. After all, he is the master of the house and therefore has a claim to obedience, an authority he claims in multiple instances by his demands on Pamela. She rejects his advances for moral reasons; however, her rejections and attempts to navigate various social domains do not always succeed because of complicating domain overlaps. Master-servant social conventions ought to be considered, as well as personal issues such as Pamela's need for food and shelter, both tied to her employment. Because the situation with Mr. B is not a moral dilemma clearly divorced from all other domains, Pamela sends mixed messages about herself; her adolescent thinking makes her see each situation as separate from the others.

First, Pamela refuses to accept payment beyond her ordinary wages for having sexual relations with Mr. B. Any time Mr. B offers her additional money for her virtue, she rejects it. When she is leaving Mr. B's house to return home, he tries to persuade her to stay a week longer,



saying, “I will now give you this purse, in which are fifty guineas, which I will allow your father yearly” (118). The offer of an annuity might seem like a blessing to a lower-class woman, but Pamela rejects it outright. She tells Mr. B to keep his money; she wants none of it, nor would her father accept such terms.<sup>1</sup> However, this rejection is not as simple as it first seems. Pamela rejects the yearly payment (and the hint of economic exchange carried with it), but a mere four pages later, she says, “That he has this moment sent me five guineas by Mrs. Jervis, as a present for my pocket: so I shall be very rich; for as *she* brought them, I thought I might take them” (121). Pamela sees no overlap in the two situations: the first instance features improper payment for sexual favors; the second instance features a parting gift from the household as represented by Mrs. Jervis.

One way to interpret Pamela’s acceptance of the smaller monetary gift is as a flirtation—a little acceptance to encourage Mr. B’s pursuit of her. However, another and more plausible interpretation is that Pamela’s adolescent mindset divorces the two payments from each other completely and sees one as wages of sin (morality domain) and one as bonus wages for service (social convention domain), even though both payments ultimately come from Mr. B. I would argue that her naiveté in this moment, her inability to see any possible connection between two different forms of monetary gifts from Mr. B, is crucial to Richardson’s design. The point her mismatching attitudes towards remuneration makes is that Pamela is a *teenager*, not that she is a coquette or a temporizer.

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<sup>1</sup>The official rape law of the eighteenth century handed down from Edward I’s Statutes of Westminster identifies the victim of rape not as the woman but as her father (Bowers 13). In this sense, Mr. B’s making an offer to Pamela’s father rather than to her reinforces his focus on a social convention domain. He repeats this gesture when he gives her the written proposals, which include a property in Kent which “your father shall be immediately put into possession of it in trust for you and yours” (Richardson 228). Mr. B’s continued focus on remuneration to her father indicates a thought process focused on social conventions as outlined by legal statutes rather than a morality-based focus.

Another example of Pamela's inability to see the overlapping relationship between events has to do with clothes. The book opens with Mr. B giving her rich clothes on two occasions, which she accepts with grateful tears (49-51). Later, she returns the clothing, but not to Mr. B; she gives it to the housekeeper, Mrs. Jervis (110-11). Her behavior seems confusing because if the clothing was a gift, she should return it to the giver according to social conventions if she does not wish to keep it, but Pamela does not do that. A closer examination of her thinking seems warranted here.

When Mr. B initially gives her the clothes, she thinks he is merely being kind. She says as much in her letters to her parents (45). However, once she realizes the clothes are part of Mr. B's campaign to seduce her, she rejects them because, as scholar Natalie Roxburgh puts it, "It is important that she stays out of debt or obligation to him because by accepting any gifts she might end up owing to him what he desires: to become his mistress" (412). Her rejection raises the problem of returning the clothes. Logically, returning them to Mr. B sends the message that she refuses his advances, but doing so would place her in the situation of being alone with Mr. B which she has been assiduously avoiding. Another option occurs to Pamela, however. Instead of returning the clothing to Mr. B directly, she can return it to Mrs. Jervis, who technically oversees monetary exchanges for the household, especially those dealing with goods such as linens. Pamela explains to Mrs. Jervis in detail why she cannot accept the clothes, but she does not make this explanation to Mr. B (110-11).

Choosing such an indirect route to conflict resolution is what one would expect a nervous teenager to do, and it demonstrates a lack of maturity on Pamela's part. If her refusal indicates a rejection of Mr. B's advances, it should arguably be presented to Mr. B, not to anyone else. Pamela's choice to interact with Mrs. Jervis resolves the issue of returning the clothes but does

not resolve the issue of rejecting Mr. B—a rejection, it must be noted, that Mr. B habitually ignores. Pamela assumes another encounter with Mr. B will not improve the situation (and she may in fact be correct), but because she does not resolve the monetary aspect of the relationship in person, her actions are open to misinterpretation, especially when considering the entire sequence of events. First, she accepts the clothing, then she rejects it; she flatly refuses the offer of an annuity, then accepts the five-guinea payment. What is Mr. B to think of her yes-and-no behavior? Some critics, as Robert Donovan explains, read these mixed messages as flirtations and manipulations, “charg[ing] that Pamela is either a shameless and hypocritical schemer (Fielding), or a sententious prig (the orthodox view) or both (Krutch)...[Pamela’s surrender to Mr. B] is seen as the triumph of acquisitiveness” (378). While some readers, as well as Mr. B, read Pamela’s actions as flirtatious, these actions can more accurately be read as Pamela’s botched efforts to navigate various domains in a manner typical of adolescent development as delineated in social domain theory.

As Pamela continues to mature, her ability to recognize that more than one domain affects a decision seems to improve. After her kidnapping and incarceration at Mr. B’s second estate, Mr. B finally decides to allow her to leave. Her imprisonment has lasted over a month, and her stubborn refusals at last cause Mr. B to lose his patience and throw her out. The next morning, Mrs. Jewkes directs Pamela out of the house via the library. Mrs. Jewkes leaves Pamela waiting outside the library door while she goes in. She asks Mr. B if he wants to say anything to Pamela, and he replies, “let her go, perverse and foolish as she is; but she *deserves* to go away virtuous, and she *shall*” (280). Pamela, excited at gaining the moral high ground, “opened the door before I knew what I did and I said, falling on my knees at the door, with my hands folded and lifted up, ‘May God bless your honour! May God Almighty bless your honour, for this

instance of your goodness! I will pray for you as long as I live, and so shall my father and mother!’” (280) Pamela then leaves the house in Mr. B’s carriage.

The carriage stops for the night at an inn, and in this location, Pamela receives a letter from Mr. B. The letter contains no apology for his behavior; rather, he states he refused to see her before she left because she continually bewitches him, and since his “fond folly” (attraction to Pamela) will “cost [him] so dear, [he is] resolved to get the better of it” (282).<sup>2</sup>He then requests something almost outrageous: he asks Pamela to “pay a twelve-month’s compliment, though but in *mere* compliment, to [his] ashes” (283). His basic argument lies in the fact that since he considered Pamela to be his, she should consider herself to be his as well and observe a full period of mourning for the demise of their relationship before entering into any new romantic relationships. Any reader of sense would see this as further manipulation—who observes a year of mourning on being released from captivity?—but Pamela reacts quite differently. She writes,

[B]ut I found, to my grief, before, that my heart was too partial in his favour; but *now*, to find him capable of so much openness, so much affection, nay and of so much *honour* too, I am quite over-come...I know not *how* it came, nor *when* it began; but it has crept, crept like a thief, upon me; and before I knew what was the matter, it looked *like* love.

(283)

He asks her to grieve a year, and she likes him *more* now? Yes, her reaction to the first letter might exasperate readers, but it also seems convincingly juvenile.

The next night, at another inn, Pamela receives a second letter from Mr. B. He begins, “I find it in vain, my Pamela, to struggle against my affection for you” (285). He proclaims his

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<sup>2</sup>A Jane Austen aficionado will notice striking overlaps between the language Mr. B and Pamela use throughout this particular “letters at inns” exchange and the language Mr. Darcy uses in *Pride and Prejudice* when speaking to Elizabeth. Some lines seem almost verbatim.

astonishment that she might be brought to love him, then tells her he has fallen ill and begs her to return because he cannot live without her. He asks her forgiveness for his “repeated attempts” and assures her “all must and shall end happily” (286). This letter presents an interesting dilemma for Pamela: should she return to care for her sick master (with whom she is more than half in love), or should she continue her journey home to her parents, avoiding any more “attempts” on her virtue? Both choices can be justified morally. Socially, she can choose either option and receive society’s commendation. Does this particular dilemma boil down to a question of personal choice?

While Pamela is unlikely to win prizes for excellent logic, she spends the next three pages examining the different aspects of the choice from each of the different domains: she considers personal feelings, past actions, and future dangers (287-89). After her deliberation, she makes the dubious choice to return to Mr. B, but in a much more considered way than she has hitherto behaved. Her decisions before this time consider only one scenario in a moral domain: Mr. B is the perpetrator; she is the victim; and the two of them are battling for her virtue. Yet in this instance, Pamela strives to consider more than a single aspect or feeling. She tries to balance the social conventions about proper behavior in times of illness, the moral obligations to care for the sick, and her personal obligation to Mr. B. She finally concludes that if Mr. B has changed enough to feel remorse for his actions, and if this has caused his illness, it is her moral obligation to forgive him and care for him until he regains his health. While Pamela’s thinking still tends towards keeping everything in the moral domain, her added complexity of thought shows a slowly developing maturity. Pamela may still be foolish and gullible for returning; thinking about situations from multiple angles does not automatically provide sound judgment. The point lies in the growth demonstrated by her mental processes rather than in the outcome. Richardson

seems to be promoting the possibility of growth or change in adolescent mentality both through Pamela's increasingly nuanced decision-making and her willingness to grant Mr. B the same grace, believing that he too might be capable of change.

Pamela's maturity continues to develop after her marriage to Mr. B and becomes more apparent later in the narrative when she faces a trying new situation: her personal introduction to Mr. B's illegitimate daughter. Mr. B takes Pamela to visit a country house where young boarding-school ladies sometimes come as a reward for good behavior (495). One of the young ladies, Miss Goodwin, is a particular favorite with Mr. B, and he confesses to Pamela that his partiality springs from his true relationship to Miss Goodwin—he is her biological father, though the relationship has been kept secret and the young lady knows him only as an uncle. He says to Pamela, “[C]an you allow me to love this little innocent?” (496) Such a request places another weighty decision squarely on Pamela's shoulders.

The question of illegitimate children in eighteenth-century English society is by no means simple. Lisa Zunshine explains, “The common wisdom about what illegitimacy really entailed inevitably transcended the purely legal meaning of the word” (502). She explains that legally, a bastard child could inherit nothing, but in practice, many parents would will property to their illegitimate children, making these children subjects of “both compassion and fear.” The fear comes from an illegitimate child's “capacity to disrupt the smooth transfer of property and to poison the emotional well-being of the legal family” (Zunshine 502-3). A new wife, with the future of her own legitimate progeny to consider, would likely shun a connection that might later lead to disruption in her family. But Pamela thinks differently. Reasoning with a moral focus on rights and justice, she recognizes the child is not to blame for the circumstances of her birth. Pamela too calls her “the little innocent” and asks the girl to “Join with me, my pretty love, to

beg your uncle to let you come and live with your new aunt: indeed, my precious, I will love you dearly” (497). Pamela invites her new acquaintance to come live in her home and be under her care.

In terms of social convention, all Pamela needed to do was be polite to the child and leave—that would have gratified Mr. B’s wish for Pamela’s permission to “love the child.” But Pamela reasons differently. She accepts the girl as a person as well as responsibility for the girl’s continued care, reasoning that this child deserves, as an individual, to grow up in a home with her father. This type of reasoning is somewhat atypical of eighteenth-century societal norms and therefore cannot be based purely on a social convention orientation. Instead, Pamela’s reasoning must be focused on a moral orientation and an ethical commitment to protect individual rights, much as she described in her speech on the domestic life she pictured for herself on her carriage-ride with Mr. B. Pamela here demonstrates the kind of complex moral reasoning a mature, empathetic adult is capable of rather than the self-centered, adolescent thinking that characterized her earlier self. Her psychological growth enriches the realist label Ian Watt famously gave to Samuel Richardson’s writing, and it contributes to the message Richardson wanted her to embody: a teenage girl can make mistakes and yet develop into a complex, moral woman. His novel focuses on the rewards of virtue, not perfection, and virtue is depicted as a quality that can be obtained despite mistakes and social gaffes, a quality that may be linked to virginity but radiates beyond it into a desirable moral character.

### **Psychosocial Development in Adolescence**

While moral development constitutes one strand of character, psychosocial development is another strand that highlights the area of identity construction, which is likewise evident in Richardson’s novel. In 1956 Erik Erikson laid the groundwork for this field of study with his

theory of psychosocial development, a theory that overlaps moral development theory in subtle ways. Erikson's paper focuses on the psychosocial development of identity, which he defines as "an individual's link with the unique values, fostered by a unique history, of his [*sic*] people...It is this identity of something in the individual's core with an essential aspect of the group's inner coherence which is under consideration here" (57). For Erikson, an identity cannot develop in a vacuum because identity forms in no small part due to influence by an individual's membership in specific groups, such as family, culture, or religion, as well as an individual's desire to join specific groups. Identity thus develops in the context of an individual interacting with society, which involves social components such as choices about who to be and how to act, choices with a strong moral flavor.

Erikson's identity-building theory revolves around the concept of crisis. At each stage of development, an individual faces a crisis and can overcome that crisis in a healthy or unhealthy way, which will in turn influence how future crises are met (Erikson 74-76, 95-97). Erikson identifies adolescence as a "stage of overt identity *crisis*" (Erikson 69), which has made adolescence as a stage of particular interest to social scientists.

In 1966 James Marcia proposed an expansion of Erikson's adolescent stage that identified four statuses labelling how an adolescent met the crisis of identity (551-2). These four statuses—identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement—all depend on the relationship between exploration and commitment, which I will illustrate using a college student. First, a college student who jumps from major to major without ever really committing to one and then drops out after a few years typifies identity diffusion, a state characterized by no serious exploration and no commitment. Next, a college student who blindly accepts the major her parents or culture insist she takes on without learning about any other



options illustrates identity foreclosure, defined by noexploration but high commitment. Third, a college student who waits to declare a major until his or her junior year, but then really commits and graduates on a five-year plan typifies moratorium, a status with strong exploration and a delayed commitment. Finally, a college student who takes generals for a year, volunteers in areas of interest, and then commits firmly to a major with the confidence that the major is the right one for him or her demonstrates identity achievement, characterized by adequate exploration and strong commitment. Marcia argues that generally speaking, those in the identity achievement group best master the identity crisis of adolescence.

The main criticism of Marcia and by extension Erikson is that taxonomical theories allow too little flexibility—they operate on the assumption you can examine someone’s behavior and label it correctly. To use Erikson’s theory, you identify which conflict is active based on age and then determine if the subject deals with the conflict successfully or unsuccessfully. With Marcia’s theory, you examine an adolescent’s behavior and select an identity category for the adolescent. Both seem an oversimplification of a complex developmental stage and do not allow for change and growth within the developmental period.

To address this criticism, in 2006 Koen Luyckx et. al proposed a model that instead applies four structural dimensions or criteria—commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in depth, and exploration in breadth—to determine where a youth is currently but also to explore correlating factors influencing youth development. Luyckx et al.’s four-dimensional identity model asks sharper questions and correlates factors such as family context, adjustment, depressive symptoms, and substance use with the four criteria (“Unpacking” 361). As a model describing adolescent identity, this integrative model allows for flexibility and

variation in discussing adolescent behavior rather than a single label applied to an entire adolescent period.

Let me illustrate this model using a fictitious teenager named Sally. Sally enters a store and buys a hat. This is commitment making—when you buy a hat, you commit money to the purchase, and your ownership is now established. However, once Sally gets home from shopping, she tries on the hat repeatedly in front of a mirror. She is trying to decide if she really does like the hat. This behavior is about identification with the commitment. Sally already committed to the hat when she spent money on it, but she may be uncertain how deeply committed to the hat she really is. If she decides the hat is “her,” as in it fits the image she wants to portray, she may strengthen that commitment and start wearing the hat frequently, but if she decides the hat is all wrong, she may even choose to take the hat back to the store. This point—that commitment making is not the same as identification with commitment—is a key difference that allows Luyckx et al.’s model greater adaptability.

The other two criteria for this model, exploration in depth and exploration in breadth, relate very much to which side of commitment an adolescent is currently feeling. If Sally really likes the hat, she might start exploring which outfits best match it. The model calls this exploration in depth: looking at all the ways to make the hat essential to everyday living. If Sally decides to take the hat back, she may engage in exploration in breadth, which may mean trying on dozens of other hats to try and find the right one.

One implication of this model is that in adolescence, discovering identity is a recursive process. Luyckx et al. explain that exploration “cannot be treated as a unitary construct” because exploration “precedes Commitment Making” and also follows after commitment making through the process of “reflecting on [commitments] and talking about them with others” (“Unpacking”

373). Such discussion leads to evaluation, and “[i]f the commitment is found to be unsatisfactory...the process possibly cycles back to...broad exploration of other possible commitments” (Luyckx et al. “Unpacking” 373). This implies the level of identification with a commitment will vary from person to person, and some of the inconsistency typical of adolescence is not an issue of hypocrisy but rather of adolescents searching for the right identity. This is a recursive process rather than an event, and even committed adolescents will continue probing and exploring to make sure their identity choice really is the best they can make. Luyckx et al. added this recursion as a fifth dimension in 2008 (“Capturing” 58). Thus, many of the little hypocrisies and inconsistencies in adolescence are not the same as the deliberate ones of mature adulthood; there is a different process at play in adolescence that necessitates some inconsistency.

### **Psychosocial Development in *Pamela***

The psychological change and development in *Pamela* can be explored from a different angle by the Luyckx et al. model. Pamela begins her identity development with exploration in breadth and she explores the options available to her to an extent beyond that of most of her contemporaries. She leaves home to be a maid; this is a fairly typical choice for a poor young woman, as it is one of the few ways to ensure a livelihood. But as Lady B’s maid, Pamela explores opportunities beyond that of the average servant. She states, “[M]y lady’s goodness had put me to write and cast accompts, and made me a little expert at my needle, and otherwise qualified me above my degree” (43). Her list of accomplishments includes reading and writing, basic mathematics and accounting, needlework, and other unnamed skills. This list demonstrates a willingness to explore new opportunities when they arise; her mistress wanted her to try things, and she did. Her exploration clarified that her preferred occupational identity would be lady’s

maid. In Letter VII, Pamela shares her excitement over Mrs. Jervis' interpretation that the gifts of clothing from Mr. B are evidence "he would fit me in dress for a waiting-maid's place on Lady Davers's own person" (51). Her ideal life plan early in the novel consists entirely of finding a good job and defining herself by it.

When Pamela realizes Mr. B does not intend to send her to his sister, she feels the door has closed on being a lady's maid so she decides to explore additional career options. She goes down to the kitchen, and when the maid Rachel's back is turned, she "tried...if I could not scour a pewter plate she had begun. I see I could do it by degrees; it only blistered my hand in two places" (109). She decides scrubbing dishes is not her favorite work activity, and she then plans to make her living as a seamstress (109). These various career plans demonstrate Pamela's recognition of the need for a work-based identity, and she actively searches for an occupation that is a good fit for her. Interestingly, Pamela's exploration focuses on economic identities yet she deliberately does not explore courtship or marriage. This exclusion reinforces the idea that for Pamela marriage is not primarily an economic transaction (or at least not a viable option in her current situation).

After exploring a wide variety of options as Pamela did, an adolescent generally makes a commitment, however tentative. One interesting aspect of commitment making is that a commitment about identity needs to be chosen by the individual and not by others imposing their will. Pamela demonstrates a stubborn refusal to let anyone else dictate her identity or her beliefs. This stubbornness first appears in her early letters to her parents. Like most adolescents, Pamela does not always get along perfectly with her parents; she resents any doubts about her ability to handle her autonomy. Psychologist Susan Branje explains, "Teenagers strive for autonomy and less parental control more rapidly than they develop self-regulation [...]. Since many parents

wish for a stronger balance in their teenagers of autonomy and self-regulation, parents and their teenage children feel less connected and experience more conflicts” (172). While Pamela loves and respects her parents, as shown through her dutiful letter writing, she also comes into conflict with them over her behavior and her perception of their trust—a conflict that demonstrates her desire to choose her own identity.

When Pamela writes her first letter home, she praises Mr. B extensively and mentions several gifts he has given her, commenting, “[I] was all in confusion, at his goodness. Indeed, he was once thought to be wildish; but he is now the best of gentlemen, I think!” (44-45) Responding to a kind gesture with gushing praise accentuates Pamela’s youth and lack of experience. Her father, being older and wiser, cautions her to be careful in her relationship with Mr. B; he warns that often kindness is a honey-trap for young maidens (45-46). Pamela, in typical youthful fashion, downplays her father’s concerns. She reassures her father that Mr. B is a good man with nothing to gain by “ruining such a poor young creature” (47). Then she bristles a little at her father’s warning: “But that which gives me most trouble is, that you seem to mistrust the honesty of your child” (47). This thought process—responding to a warning as an attack on her ability to manage her own affairs—exemplifies the parent-child conflicts typical of adolescence. Pamela completely misses the point of the warning because she is offended by how the warning was given and in particular by the overtones of doubt about her ability to choose well without guidance.

However, in responding to her parents and promising to be cautious in her dealings with Mr. B instead of being silently sullen, Pamela demonstrates intelligence. She listens to her parents, even when she is offended, and she grudgingly agrees to be wary; she does not discount their advice and force herself into an identity merely as an act of rebellion. This interaction with

her parents shows her desire to explore her options and come to her own conclusions rather than obey blindly or rebel blindly, an essential aspect of achieving an autonomous identity and one many adolescents struggle to accomplish. Pamela's struggle with her parents emphasizes her authentic teenage character, and her success in maintaining a relationship with them while retaining control of her choices demonstrates the correlation between a positive family context (especially a good relationship between parents and adolescents) and commitment making that Luyckx et al. noted in their work (361, 373-74).

Pamela's parents may have a right to dictate to Pamela through their relationship of care, but Mr. B also tries to force an identity on Pamela. He decides the role for her is mistress: he makes this clear to her through his repeated anger at her refusals and his actual written propositions. Mr. B, like Pamela's parents, holds a role of importance in her life. He is her master/employer, but beyond that she is attracted to him personally. She discusses her inability to hate him, even when he has been hurtful towards her repeatedly (280). And Mr. B is very hurtful. Pamela discusses at length his "cruel reproaches"—he calls her a litany of things, including "mean-spirited," "ungrateful," "low," and "forward" (204). Each of these epithets hurts Pamela deeply, as seen through her reactions to each: "*Mean-spirited!* He says not true when he calls me *mean-spirited*. *Forward* he shall not find me. *Ungrateful!* I should abhor myself if I were capable of *ingratitude*. *Low!* What a poor reproach is that from a gentleman! But if I am *low*, I am *honest*; so am in this better than those who are high and dishonest" (204). All of the exclamation points emphasize Pamela's distress at Mr. B's name-calling; his poor opinion wounds her, as she wants to be thought well of. Still, his bullying does not sway her to conceding to his point of view. On the last epithet Pamela shifts from hurt to indignation—she focuses on how honesty is

more important than high estate, an attitude she has been taught, as her father reminds her in Letter II, but also one she has developed herself.

Rejecting Mr. B's identity for her is in many ways more difficult than rejecting her parents' identity for her because she is attracted to Mr. B, and he holds a position of authority over her that is tied to economic prosperity. It would be so easy to accept his dictates and reap the economic benefits he lays out: 500 guineas, a property worth 250 pounds per annum, unspecified benefits for her relations, rich clothing, and jewelry consisting of rings, earrings, and necklaces with diamonds (227-29). These economic incentives amount to so much wealth that many adolescents would take them without another thought, but Pamela demurs. She chooses "honest poverty" over all such favors (229). In this instance of great temptation, Pamela proves she chooses her own path and will not accept another, even when a man she feels attraction to tries to foist it upon her. Referring her behavior back to Luyckx et al.'s model, Pamela explores in breadth, commits to an identity, and because her identification with the commitment is strong due in part to her positive family context, she sticks to that identity even in times of crisis.

Perhaps the most telling scene in which Pamela demonstrates her identification with a commitment—her increasingly firm Christian identity—is the scene by the pond where she contemplates suicide. After deciding she cannot abide her prison any longer, Pamela decides to escape. However, she bungles her escape attempt by falling off a wall and hitting herself on the head with a brick on her way down. Disoriented and possibly concussed, she sits by the pond and melodramatically contemplates drowning herself. She imagines the after-effects and says, "Then, thought I, will he, perhaps, shed a few tears over the corpse of his persecuted servant" (212). Initially her thoughts are of Mr. B, as he is the persecutor and person who forced her to the extreme of attempting to climb a wall in the middle of the night, and she egocentrically assumes

her actions will determine his future feelings as any typical teenager would. However, Mr. B does not remain the focus of her decision-making for long.

After contemplating drowning herself and the expected effects on others, Pamela thinks again: “If, despairing of deliverance, I destroy myself, do I not in effect, question the power of the Almighty to deliver me? [...] quit with speed these perilous banks, and fly from these dashing waters, that seem in their meaning murmurs, this still night, to reproach thy rashness!” (213-14). Pamela references “the Almighty,” which demonstrates a conscious effort to think about what God would want her to do. Her decision switches her focus from what Mr. B would think to what God would think, and in this moment, she fully commits to an identity that focuses on how God would want her to behave. What makes her decision so interesting and so indicative of her strong commitment is not that she chooses a religious identity but that, in doing so, she aligns her own free will with the identity her parents would have chosen for her.

The important but subtle difference between a forced commitment and a chosen commitment plays out in this scene by the pond, and while Pamela’s choice coincided with what her parents desired, her personally chosen commitment set the stage for her ability to overcome the initial emotional response and make a reasoned choice true to her identity commitment. Her identity has staying power in times of depression and crisis of hope. Richardson seems to have noticed, centuries before it was accepted theory, that choosing identity instead of merely accepting identity gives an adolescent more power to become an adult who can navigate difficult situations with confidence, as demonstrated in my previous discussion of Pamela’s actions upon meeting Mr. B’s daughter. Richardson’s alignment with adolescent development psychology illustrates a keen insight into understanding how people function and develop. To be sure, Richardson did not have a psychology manual to spell these patterns out for him. Nonetheless,



Pamela's character suggests he did notice these patterns, perhaps in his own family and acquaintances, and he tried to replicate them in his writing. Pamela's psychology does not make her atypical, uncommon, or too perfect to be real; on the contrary, it demonstrates an understanding on Richardson's part of the processes happening in a young girl's developing mind.

Pamela's adolescent identity experiences continue to shape her identity into adulthood. Because her commitment to her identity served her well through all the trials she has hitherto faced, she clings to her commitment and allows it to continue influencing her decisions. In the carriage ride with Mr. B, he lays out how much society would reject her and define her as an outsider, claiming this as his main hesitation to offering her marriage. Pamela answers by describing what she would do as his wife, independent of society, in a rather long monologue. Her list includes family management, keeping the accounts, ministering to the poor, assisting the housekeeper in making sweets and medicines, riding about in the chariot, spending time with Mr. B, playing music, reading, scribbling, but most importantly, performing "my duty to God, and my prayers for you and myself, will always employ some good portion of my time" (299-300). Pamela depicts a very busy, domestic woman concerned with her own home and the livings of those people who fall under her care, a picture which in many ways encapsulates a painfully conventional form of eighteenth-century womanhood.

But this role is one Pamela chooses for herself. She wants to be a good Christian woman whose life revolves around home and family—not the role typically played by women of her soon-to-be realized social class. She focuses on all the work and care she needs to accomplish as a member of the upper class, and then choose pastimes to "fill up some intervals, if I should have any," clearly implying she intends to keep herself so busy that leisure is not a commonplace. Her

focus is beyond the genteel identity Mr. B is still focused on, the identity society would construct for her. Instead, Pamela focuses on how to craft a life of intimacy with the man she loves and an adult role she can fully enjoy. Mr. B, in love with her or the idea of the domesticity she paints for him, declares, “I love you with a purer flame than ever I knew in my whole life!” (301) While he is definitely attracted to her physical person, he also feels more than a little attraction to her self-confidence, a product of Pamela’s strong commitment to the identities she has chosen for herself—a self-confidence he seems both to respect and envy, as demonstrated by both his backing down when he could have raped her and been done with the affair and his commitment to marriage only after her maturity complicates his attraction beyond the mere physical. Confidence comes from commitment, and Pamela’s early exploration and commitment pave the way for her happily ever after.

### **Conclusions**

The implications of applying modern adolescent psychology to *Pamela* are threefold. First, by exploring adolescent psychology and the developmental arcs Pamela experiences, we can move beyond and supplement Ian Watt’s focus on formal realism with a psychological realism that includes age-appropriate struggle and development. Richardson does not depict an archetypal “everywoman” but an ordinary teenager muddling through the trials of growing up, who can be read as a role model not because she is perfect but because of her ability to grow into adulthood. On the title page of *Pamela*, Richardson declares his novel is “Published in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of the youth of both sexes” (27). As we look at Pamela’s character and her development over the course of the novel, we see that she actually does what Richardson want her (and his readers) to do—“cultivate principles of virtue and religion.” The word *cultivate* has the connotation of someone carefully tending something

that is still growing. During the eighteenth century, the word *cultivate* referred both to agricultural growth and tending as well as refining or improving a mind or character (“cultivate”). Richardson’s statement indicates that he believes both in growth and improvement—patterns he depicted in Pamela’s development. He believed his readers can follow Pamela’s example because such growth is an ordinary part of development.

A second implication of reading *Pamela* with adolescent psychology in mind is a deeper exploration of the question of virtue. Initially, Mr. B is attracted to Pamela’s physical appearance, but as she develops over the course of the novel, his attraction shifts to her self-confidence. It is not until after her maturity shows through her self-confidence in the carriage ride that he fully commits to changing course and marrying her. She has transformed from a weepy girl to self-possessed woman who can face down social conventions and she inspires Mr. B to do the same. She is a woman who can help him sort out his own relationship with society’s conventions and his personal beliefs, a true companion rather than a sexualized mistress. The attraction and relationship is not the reward of virtue but rather the reward of virtuous persistence in the difficult procedure of growing up and becoming a self-assured adult—an identity that owes some part to morality but also owes parts to social savvy and intelligent self-knowledge, a more complex construct than the simplistic “good girl” identity so often ascribed to Pamela.

The final implication is that in recognizing Pamela as a complex adolescent, I am pushing back gently against traditional anti-Pamelist positions—especially shopworn claims that Pamela is nothing but a hypocrite. Some critics have read Pamela’s character as Mr. B initially did, interpreting her naïve choices as manipulations and signs of fickleness rather than as part of a growth process. Their arguments miss the opportunity to recognize that people make mistakes, grow, change, and become different people over time. The ability to change and the courage to

do so are the real virtue, a virtue that must always be rewarded by respect from the intelligent onlooker. Richardson's *Pamela* aims to provide deep personal satisfaction in knowing the past may define who you were, but the present defines who you are.

Richardson keyed into the importance of adolescent psychology long before the vocabulary to talk about it existed, and he did so in a way that connects to a complex array of readers. His protagonist, being a teenager herself, invites teenage readers to follow her on her journey to adulthood in the bildungsroman tradition—perhaps helping to create that tradition. Yet she also invites adult readers to laugh at her follies or be annoyed by her behavior and, in discussing those follies and foibles with their own teenagers, begin on common ground in the perpetual battle for intergenerational communication. While some might argue this novel lost its relevancy long ago, the advent of adolescent psychology can revitalize the critical conversation and propel it forward into the twenty-first century since the arguments at the novel's center reflect the dilemmas modern people face: Who am I and who do I want to become?

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