

# Adolescent Risk-Taking

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What's the dumbest/riskiest thing you've ever done?

Maybe a time when your vision was impaired by having a few too many drinks

Or...



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When you drove after having more than just a few?

Or...



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Maybe when you were in trouble with the law...



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### Forms of 'Risky' Behaviors

- Reckless Driving
- Sex without contraception
- Illegal Drug Use
- Delinquency and Crime

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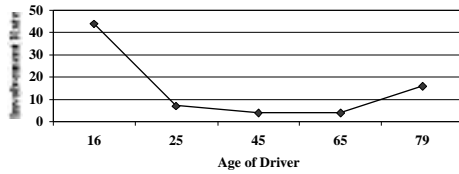
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### Reckless Driving

All Crash Involvement per million miles  
(Williams, 1990)



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**Reckless Driving -  
Adolescents...**

- More likely to drive after drinking - causing 33% of all fatal crashes
- Drive faster and closer to vehicles in front of them
- Drive more at night and are four times more likely to be killed while driving at night
- Use safety belts only 35% of the time - tripling risk of injury

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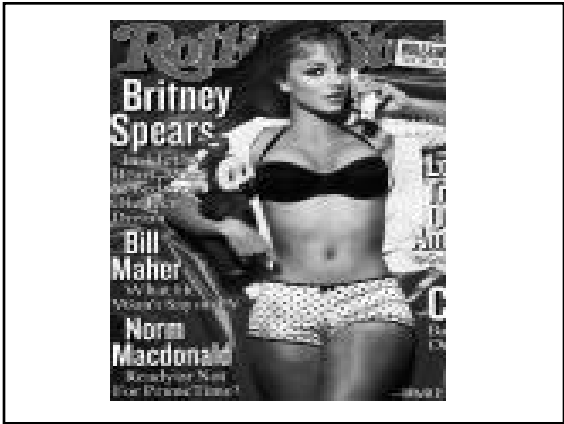
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Are we surprised?

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**Sex without contraception  
(Arnett, 1992)**

- Over one million unmarried girls aged 15-19 become pregnant each year
- Only one-third of sexually active girls aged 15-19 use contraceptives consistently
- Both adolescent boys and girls run tremendous risk of contracting STD (AIDS!)
- 1 in 4 sexually active adolescents contract an STD

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**Illegal Drug Use**

- Run risk of addiction or fatal overdose
- Adolescents have highest rate of use of every kind of illegal drug
- Drug usage increases throughout early to mid adolescence and declines sharply after early 20's

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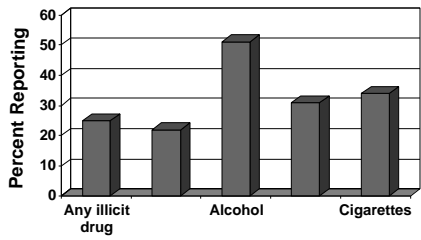
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"Class of 1996" data:  
Drug Use in Past 30 days



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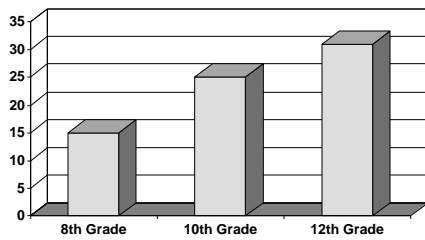
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Data: 1997  
Percent Reported Having Been Drunk in  
Past 2 weeks



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## Delinquency and Crime

- Arrests for offenses such as vandalism and larceny theft are far more common for adolescents than for adults
- One-third to over three-quarters of adolescents have engaged in minor theft and vandalism
- Prevalence rates are especially high in early adolescence

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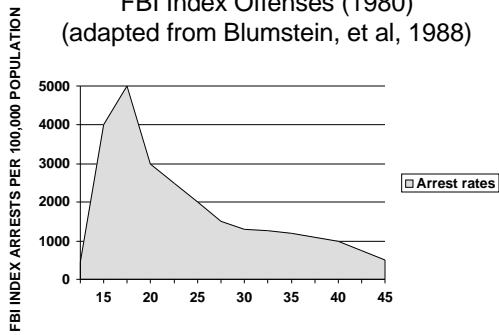
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FBI Index Offenses (1980)  
(adapted from Blumstein, et al, 1988)



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## Factors Promoting Risky Behaviors

- Sensation seeking
- Adolescent Egocentrism (Elkind)
- Imaginary Audience
- Personal Fable



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### Quadrel et al. (1993)

- Asked adults, their teenaged children, and other teens to rate estimated risk
- Both groups of adolescents were less likely to rate themselves as invulnerable
- Results contradict idea that adolescents view themselves as invulnerable

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### Jessor (1992)

- Critical of sensation-seeking hypothesis
- Argues that few adolescents continue smoking for the thrill of risking cancer
- Key concern is to make adolescents aware of risks associated with behaviors they engage in

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### Social Influences



- Peer Pressure
- Deviant peers leads to deviant behavior
- Deviant adolescents seek each other out
- Strengthens personal fable

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**Is Risky Adolescent Behavior  
Universal?**

- Narrow vs. Broad Socialization (Arnett, 1992)
- Two features determining presence of antisocial behavior:
  - \*boys spending most of their time with adult men (working) vs. peer groups (playing)
  - \*competitive/noncompetitive peer groups

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