

ADOLESCENT SCHEMA DEVELOPMENT AND RISK AVOIDANCE

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Objectives

- Understand variable-centric vs person-centric approaches to understanding behavior
- Explain how global evaluations, developing schema, and the availability of information impact youth decision-making and behavior
- Explore implications for providers and serving youth

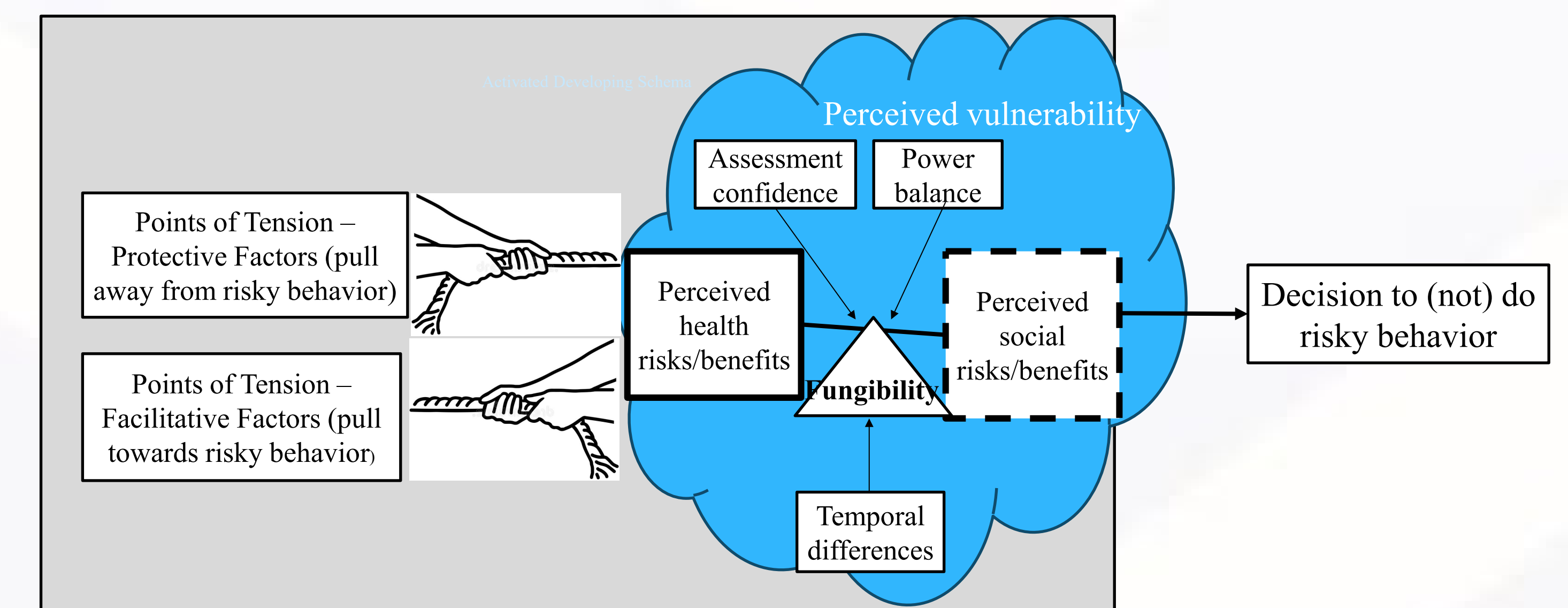
Risk from a Person-Centered View

- Adolescents are heterogenous
- They experience risks at different times in different settings
- Health threats compete with other threats, such as social – but all related to the same behavior
- Risk factors operate differently in different settings, so risk assessment varies
- Thus, how individuals assess risk varies

Risk Schema Construction

- Schemas are multifaceted cognitive structures that organize and retain knowledge
- Risk/benefits are fungible is an assessment of the degree to which one risk/benefit can be traded/substituted for another
- A mismatch between perceived vulnerability and objective risk is most likely to occur when temporal differences between benefits and consequences are most significant
- When a mismatch occurs, adolescents rely on their emotions more than cognitions due to incomplete brain development

Activated Developing Schema



Adolescents evaluate and trade risks and benefits within their individual schema through fungibility (weighted trade-off) analysis, which is influenced by temporal differences for what is being traded.

Health risks are relatively fixed (hence the solid outline) while social risks/benefits are variable depending on the setting (hence the dashed outline).

Perceptions of vulnerability fog or muddle this assessment (hence the gray box).

Points of tension, created by new information that is either protective or facilitative, result in re-evaluations that pull the adolescent away from or push them toward risky behaviors.

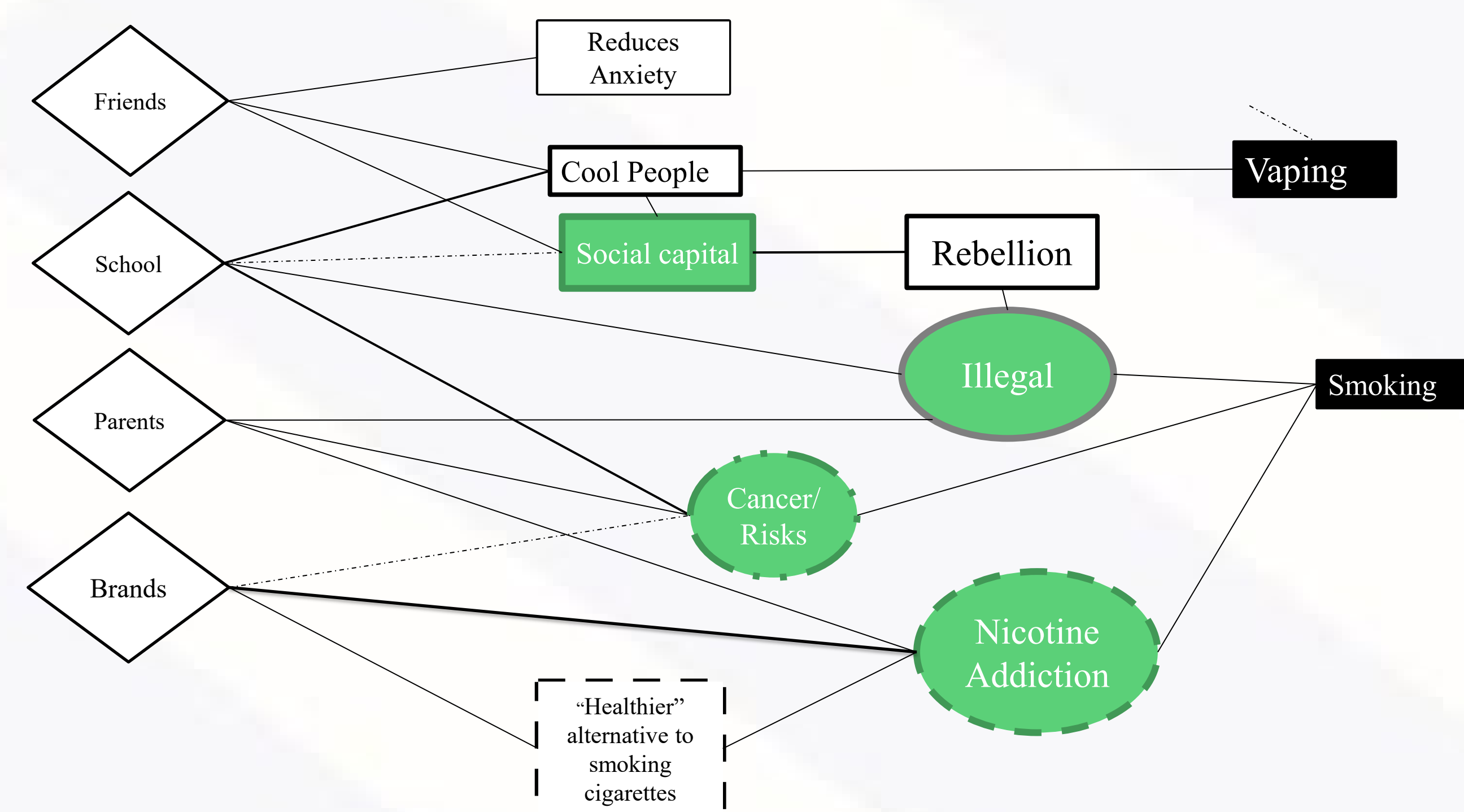
Implications for Programs

- Understand the variety of messages reaching adolescents
- Recognize the risks that matter and the fungibility of risks/benefits
- Provide safe spaces for adolescents to take risks that can improve their ability to assess risk
- Facts alone are not enough – creating points of tension or tipping points can change fungibility assessment



Do I trade off the social benefits now for a healthier future?

A Sample Schema



Diamonds are settings//sources, rectangles are benefits, circles are risks, green is unclear, black is behavior, solid outline is known, dotted outline is unclear or less known.

Literature Cited

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