

# YOUNG ADULT DEVELOPMENT

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

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# OVERVIEW

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- Developmental changes
- Brain changes
- Influences on development

# THEORISTS & RESEARCHERS

Michael Basseches • Marcia Baxter Magolda •  
Mary Belenky et al. • Benjamin S. Bloom et al. •  
Uri Bronfenbrenner • Arthur Chickering •  
Michael Commons • Erik Erikson • Kurt Fischer •  
James Fowler • Carol Gilligan •  
Howe & Strauss “Millenials” • Robert Kegan •  
Kitchener & King • Lawrence Kohlberg •  
Daniel Levinson • Jane Loevinger • William Perry •  
Jean Piaget • George Valliant • Leo Vgotsky

# BETWEEN ADOLESCENCE & MATURE ADULTHOOD

- YOUNG ADULTHOOD
- EMERGING ADULTHOOD [Jeffery Arnett](#)
- FRONTIER OF ADULTHOOD [MacArthur Research, Network](#)
- THE NOVICE PHASE [Daniel Levinson](#)

# MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL SHIFTS

- ADOLESCENCE Early & middle teens
- YOUNG ADULTHOOD Late teens & early twenties
- LATER ADULTHOOD Mid twenties & after

# ADOLESCENCE

## EARLY & MIDDLE TEENS

- Abstract thinking
- Increased intensity of emotion
- Increased sensation-seeking
- Sensitivity to alcohol & drugs
- Changes in sleep cycle



# LIMITATIONS

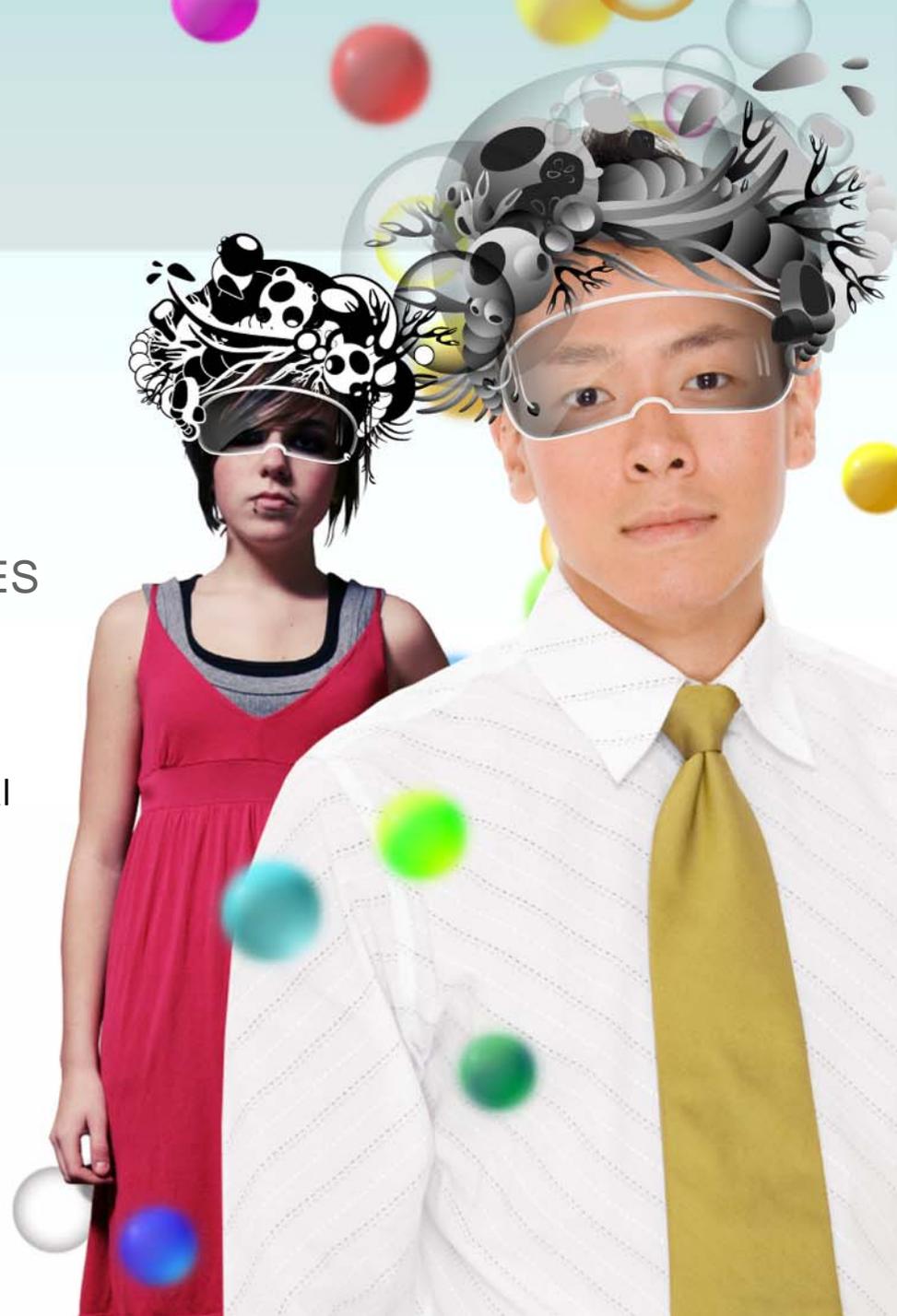
- Right & wrong thinking
- “Instrumental” focus
- Emotional regulation



# YOUNG ADULTHOOD

## LATE TEENS & EARLY TWENTIES

- Greater complexity of thinking
- Critical thinking
- More integration of cognitive & emotional
- Relationships based on shared values, mutuality
- Respect for diversity
- Modified risk-taking
- Decisions based on future consequences & impact on others



# LIMITATIONS CONTINUED

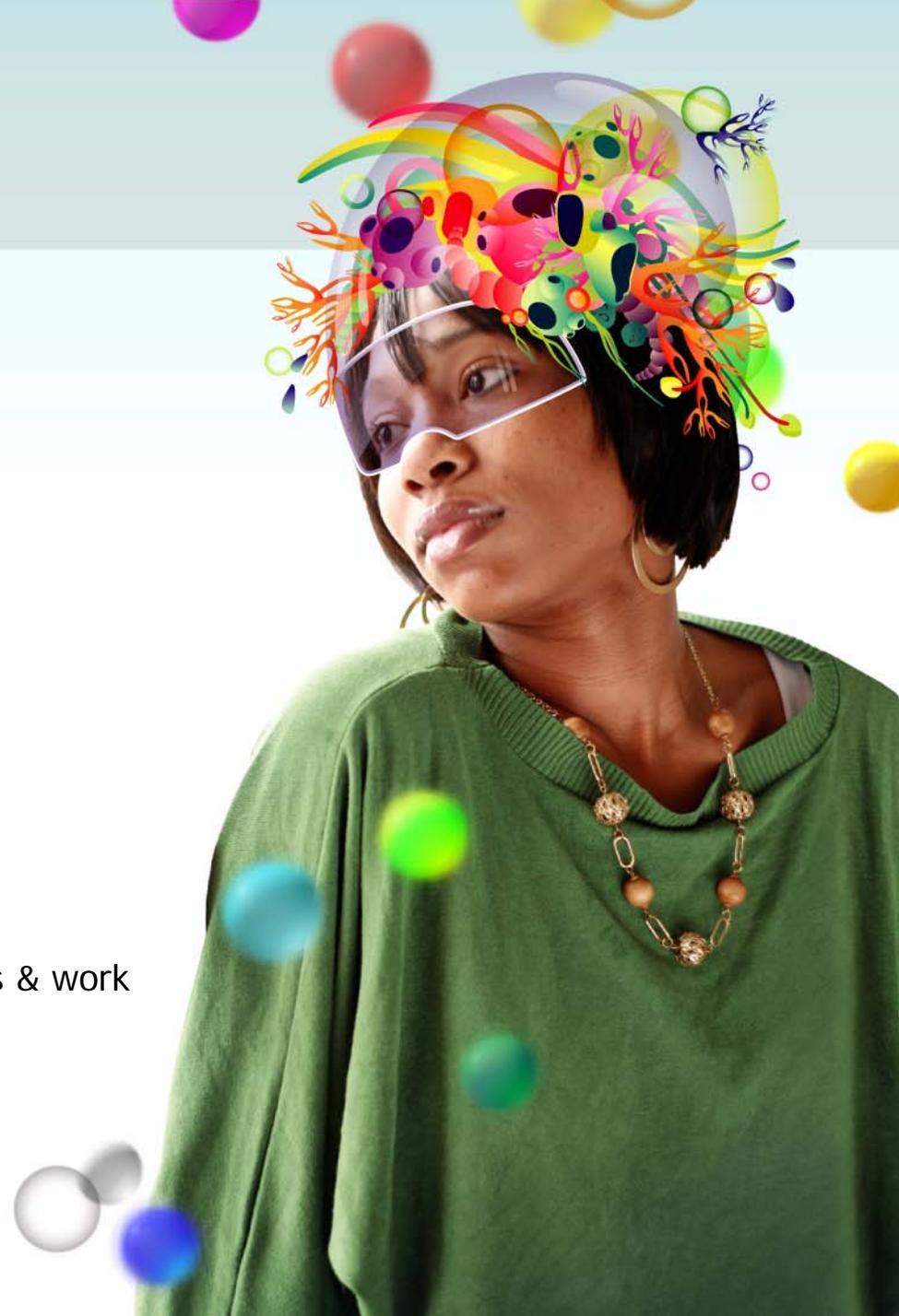
- Abstract principles
- Following vs. shaping rules & roles
- External vs. internal basis for decisions



# LATER ADULTHOOD

## MID TWENTIES & AFTER

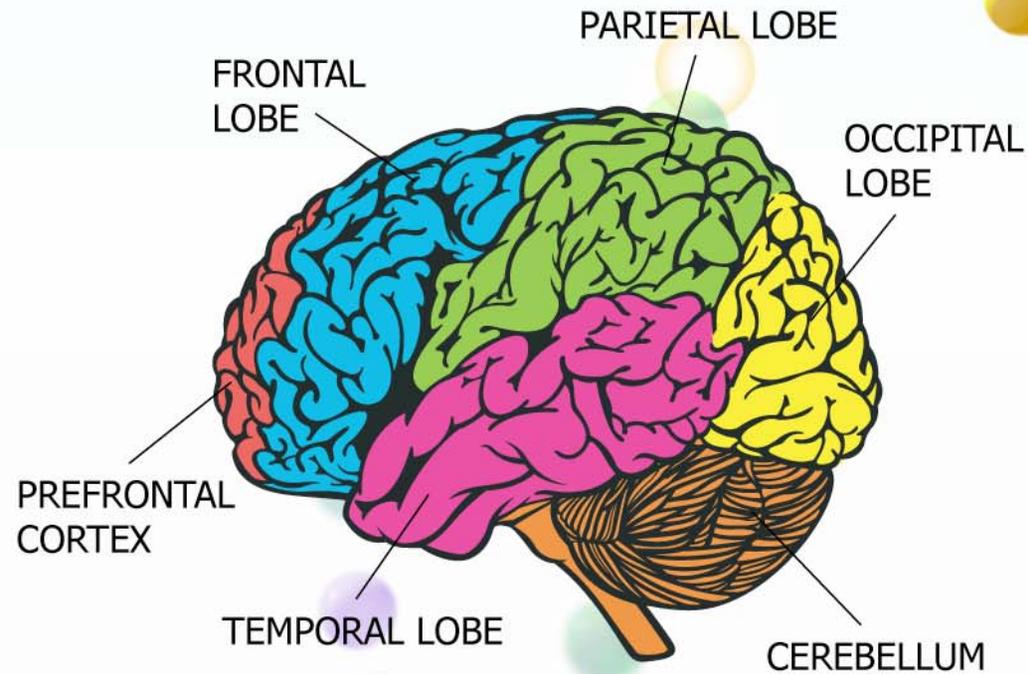
- Greater complexity of thinking
- Shaping vs. following rules & roles
- Solving “ill-structured” problems
- Big picture thinking
- Self-correction, self-evaluation
- Internalized commitment of relationships & work
- Evaluation of external expectations





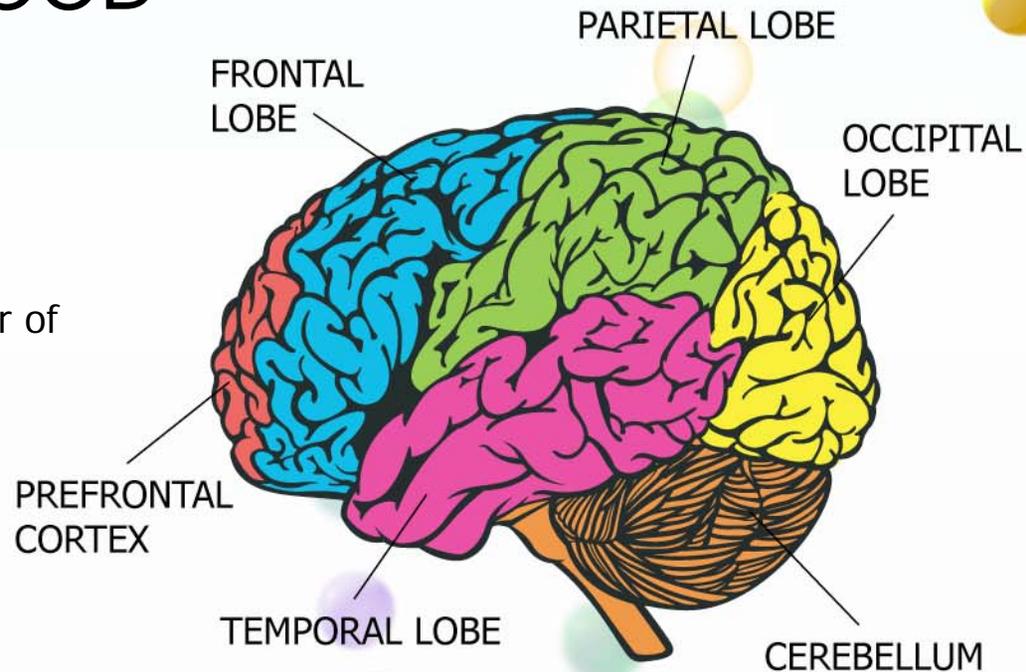
# BRAIN CHANGES

- Adolescence
- Young adulthood
- Later adulthood?



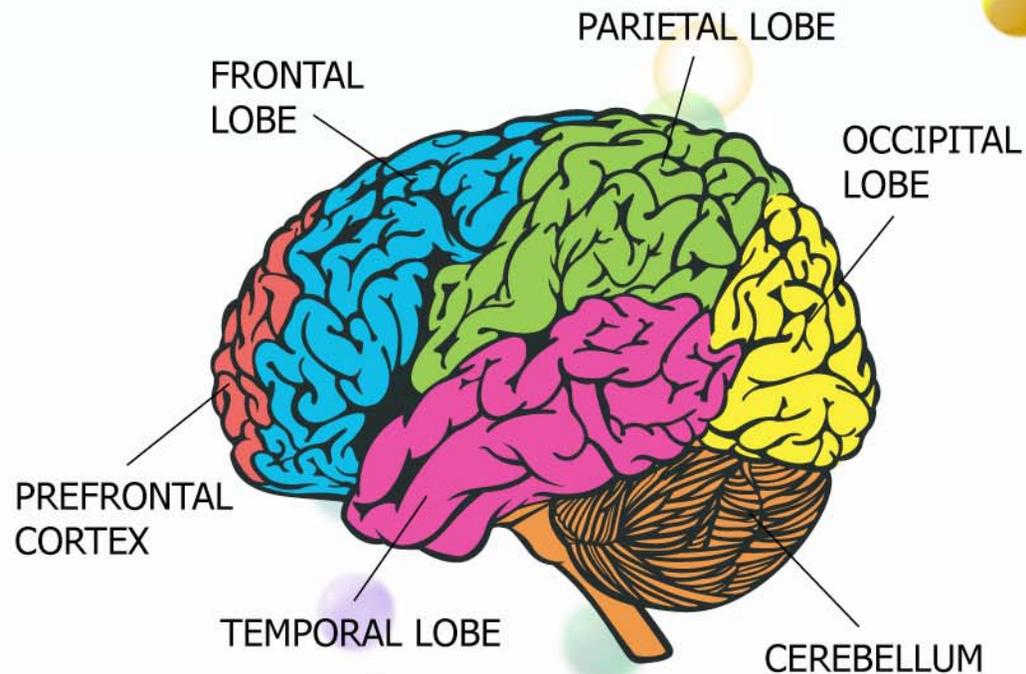
# BRAIN CHANGES IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD

- PREFRONTAL CORTEX  
Myelination: Adding white matter  
Synaptic Pruning: Decreasing number of connections
- CONNECTIONS AMONG REGIONS



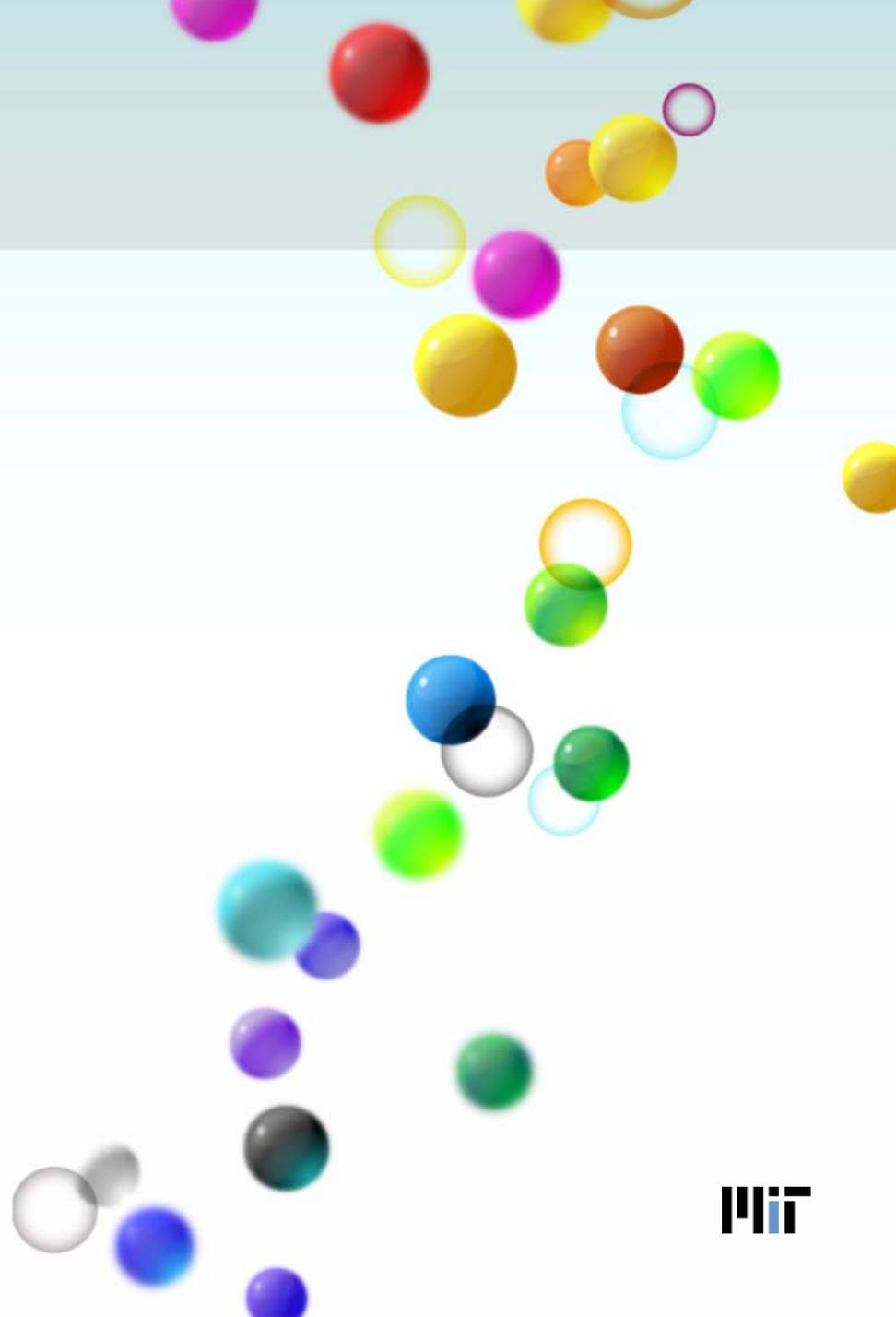
# EXECUTIVE SUITE

- Calibration of risk & reward
- Problem-solving
- Prioritizing
- Thinking ahead
- Self-evaluation
- Long-term planning
- Regulation of emotions



# CAVEATS

- Not automatic
- Roles for both nature & nurture
- Periods of equilibrium
- Intermediate steps
- Uneven across areas



# DEVELOPMENTAL RANGE

- OPTIMAL Spurts
- FUNCTIONAL Gradual



# INFLUENCES ON LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING

- Emotional arousal: “cold cognition” vs. “hot cognition”
- Alert vs. sleepy
- Familiarity of context
- Familiarity of content
- Practice
- Support



# INDIVIDUAL & CULTURAL VARIATION

- Age, education, gender
- Abuse, neglect, trauma
- Race, ethnicity, sexual identity
- Temperament
- Family background, parenting style
- Illness
- Learning disabilities
- Substance abuse
- Areas of concentrated interest
- Cultural background

# INFLUENCES ON DEVELOPMENT

If I were asked to... summarize my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary.

Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*

# POSITIVE INFLUENCES

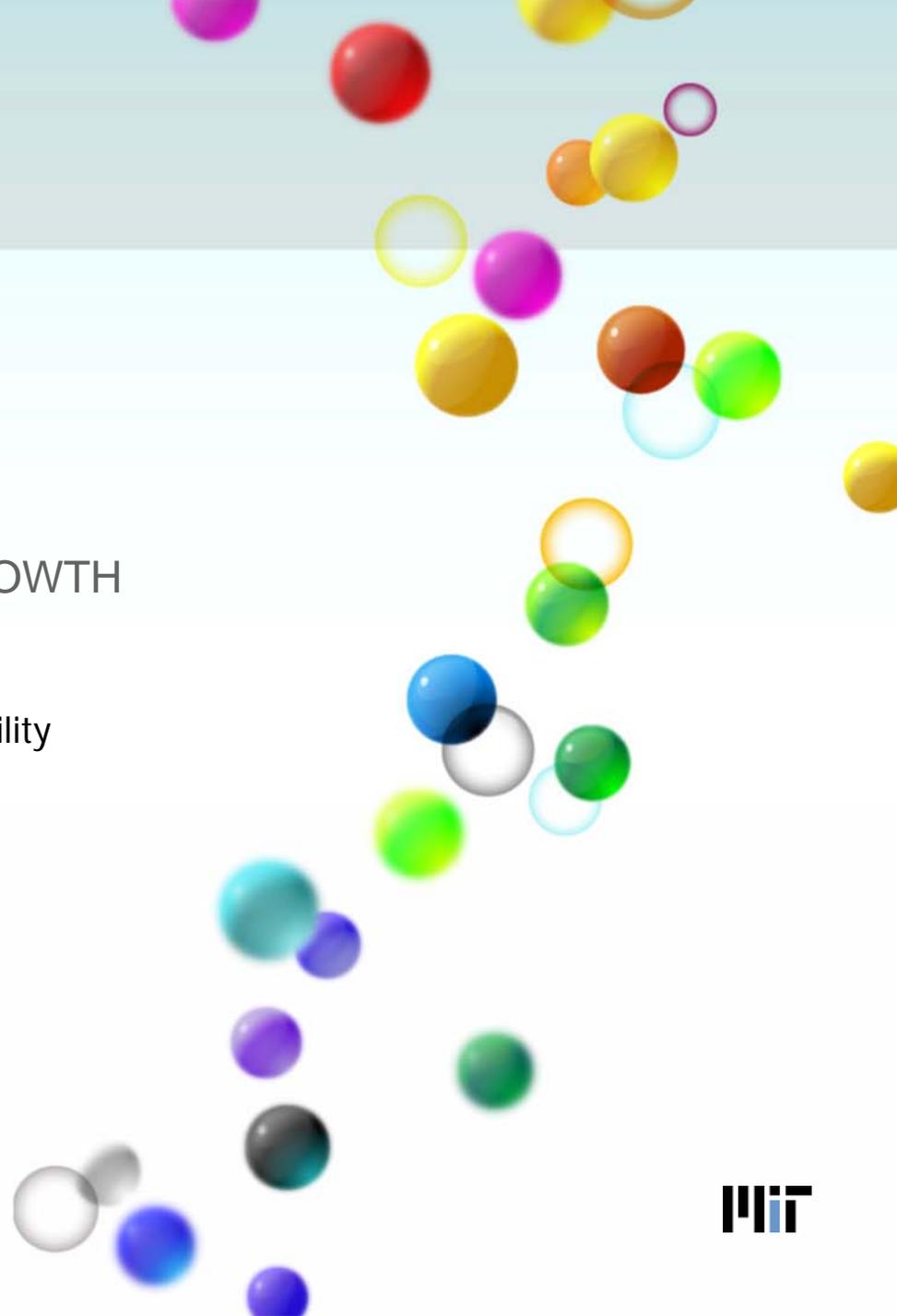
## CHALLENGING OLD THINKING

- Faculty & other adult interactions
- Diversity of peers
- Interdisciplinary & integrative approaches
- Out of classroom experience
- Instruction in cognitive skills, e.g. critical thinking

# POSITIVE INFLUENCES

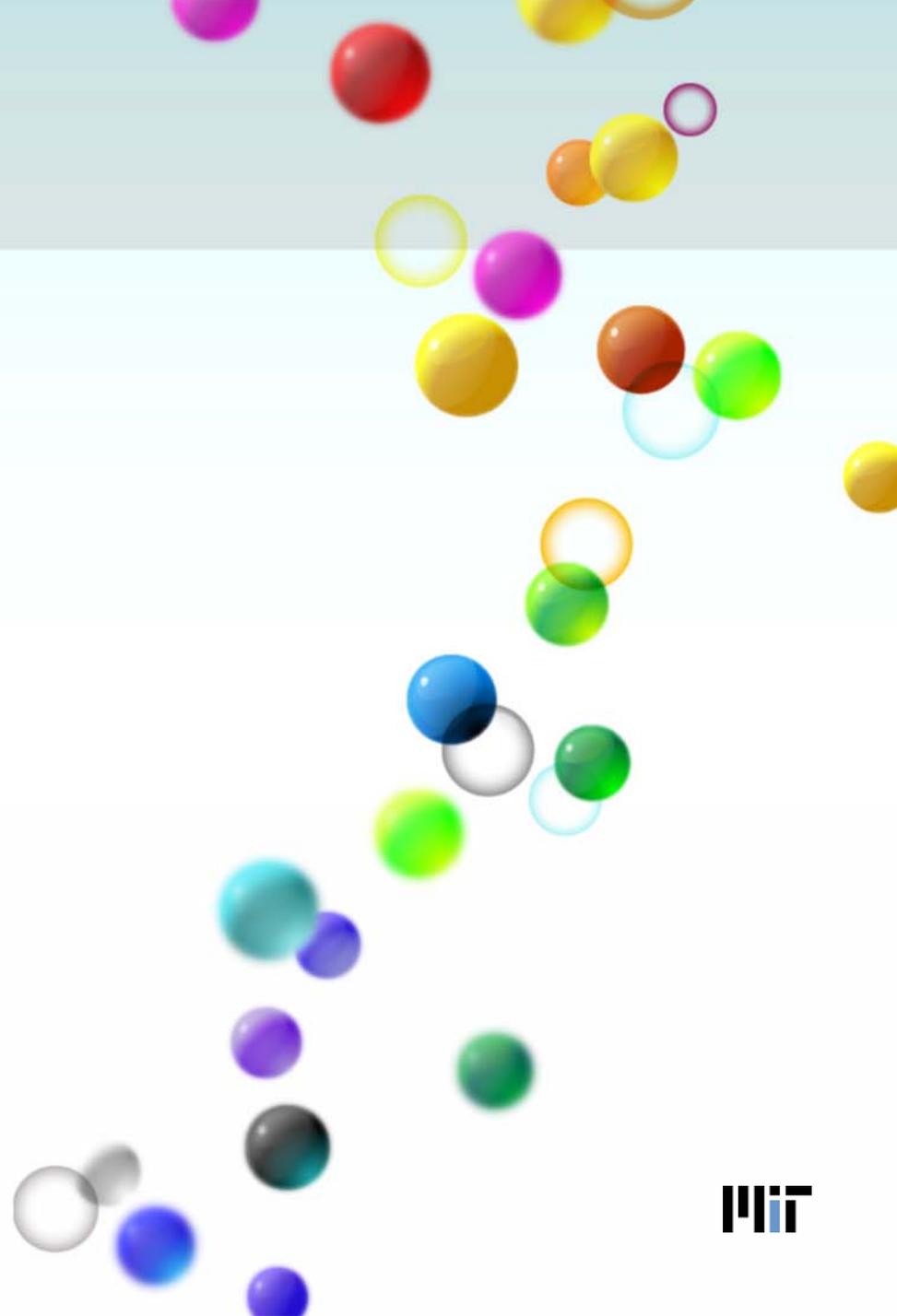
## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR GROWTH

- Matching level of challenge with ability
- Scaffolding, balance of structure & flexibility
- Safety net, monitoring
- Tincture of time



# THREE TIERS OF INFLUENCE

- Support optimal functioning
- Foster growth toward next steps
- Set the stage for ongoing development



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