On Adolescence and its Problems

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- The Adolescent Revolt (move to peers, etc)
- Increase in the malignancy of the adolescent revolt
- Casualties increased significantly now (suicide)
- They are more malignant than they were (drugs)
Sources of Problems

There are five different sources of behavioral problems and symptoms in adolescence:

1) Left over from the conflicts of the developmental phases that precede adolescence

2) Derived from the intrapsychic conflicts typical of adolescence
Sources of Problems

3. Derived from the impact that special environmental conditions have on the internal problems of the adolescence during this stage (developmental interferences). There are two types:

a) Parental developmental interferences (bodily seductive mother or father for example, not wanting them to grow, anxiety about and rejection of their developing sexuality, etc)

b) Social or environmental interferences (changes from generation to generation)
Sources of Problems

4. Due to peer group pressure

5. Due to conflicts between opposite ego and superego ideals.
What has changed?

- The drives (instinctual impulses) have not changed

- The tasks the adolescent must accomplish before reaching adulthood have not changed

- Changes in society and child rearing practices may account for some of the problems:
What has changed?

- Role played by the family organization in development has been gradually undermined, distorted and disrupted (broken marriages, divorces, parents abusing drugs, etc).

- The affluence of present day society. We live by the pleasure principle (buy today pay tomorrow!)

- Child rearing practices too permissive, leading to an inability to postpone gratification, accept substitutes, learning to establish controls, learning to wait etc.
What has changed?

- Teenagers are allowed by some parents to come and go freely, without supervision either of hours, individuals or groups with which they mix.

- The widespread use of drugs among children and adolescents (sometimes copying parents).

- The increase in promiscuity generally and among teenagers in particular.
What has changed?

- The increase in sexually transmitted diseases
- The increase in AIDS (high risk group, high school)
- All the above aggravated by adolescent omnipotence and at times omniscience
- During these years, they are an easy prey to the negative influence of the environment and specially of their most disturbed peers
- Need to move away from parents aggravates all this
What can be done?

- Parents need to provide sheltering and support against such negative influences.
- Parents need to continue to play the role of ego and superego auxiliaries as required.
- This should be done sensibly and with full awareness of the adolescents' needs and rights.
What can be done?

- Abandonment of the young adolescent to his internal and external struggles for the sake of peace is at best a disservice to them and may lead to very undesirable consequences.

- Indifference is always worse than legitimate concern.

- Parents' confusion about their parental roles is due to their having been subjected themselves to poor parenting (no role models).
What can be done?

- The above becomes a vicious circle going on from generation to generation

- Potential dangers of day care centers

- Adolescents have become a market of billions of dollars. They are constantly assaulted, manipulated and bombarded with inappropriate stimuli by the media

- Still worse they are a market for drug peddlers and the like
All the above constitutes an example of what we call collective or societal developmental interferences.

Forces in society have organized to exploit these new markets without any concern of the results in the development of adolescents (movies, T.V., etc).

Unfortunately, many of these things are spreading down to younger children as well.
What adolescents need to master

In the “boiling melting pot” of adolescence many things need to be accomplished:

- Some attempts at resolution of the conflicts of dependence-independence, adult-child, active-passive and masculine-feminine.

- Better control of pre-genital impulses through repression, sublimation, reaction formation, etc.

- Reasonable controls of genital impulses
What adolescents need to master

- Establishment of definite and firm ego boundaries with good mapping of the body-self and the psychological-self to include breasts, vagina, and uterus.

- More definite emotional separation of parental figures

- New binding of loving and sexual yearnings for non-incestuous and sex appropriate objects
WHAT ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE?

- In early adolescence they need to join a community of peers, a second step towards independence with continuing re-evaluation of parents (explain differences with latency).

- As mentioned, a more definite degree of independence from the primary objects (made difficult now by the length of education).

- Role of education in the formation of ego ideals, superego and superego ideals.
Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

The search for a final identity:

- Sexual identity
- Professional identity (sometimes delayed)
- A personal, individual identity
- The establishment of a personal moral code
Adolescent Girls' Development

What about adolescent girls development?

- Much more complex than boys for socio-cultural and biological reasons

- Societal roles as assigned until recently are changing rapidly and rightly so but there are consequences such as more delinquency, girl’s gangs, more aggression etc

- Like in males, adolescence brings sexual biological maturity, with pregnancy a possibility
Adolescent Girls' Development

- Needs to accomplish a basic feminine identification for her possible future role as a wife and a mother. Other roles now i.e. professional careers etc

- Attitude to puberty (breast development etc) and menses

- Usually, these are prized achievements of puberty with girls comparing size of breast etc

- At times these changes are frightening, felt as shameful and undesirable
Adolescent Girls' Development

- Role of mother’s attitude in the outcome of the above.

- Role of the father in promoting femininity or not

- Sometimes mothers become envious and hostile at the budding femininity of their daughters

- Some people worries about so-called tomboys but most of them develop into sweet feminine women
What Parents Can Do

What can parents do?

- Exercise discreet but necessary caution:
  - Do you know where your children are?
  - Do you know who they are with?
  - Do you know what they are doing?
  - Do you see them when they come back in the evening?
  - Do they look different to you or other family members?
  - Do you think they were drinking, look high, depressed, or overly excited?
What Parents Can Do

- Are they doing well at school?
- Are you aware of your genetic background?

- Watch for changes in their personality such as:
  - withdrawal, sadness, character changes, isolation from friends or activities, giving away possessions, depression (risk of suicide), failing at school, change of group and friends, money or things missing etc.