

## Reading About . . .

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### Adolescence

by Ian Berg

Adolescence is a stage in the development of an individual which links childhood and adult life. Nowadays in Western society adolescence lasts from the early teens, about the time that puberty normally begins, until the early twenties. The main feature of this period is the adoption of adult ways of behaving. There are a number of obvious milestones, the end of compulsory education in the mid-teens and the start of work or further education, the possibility of living independently away from the family and of marriage, as well as the right to drive a car and to vote. Adolescence is accompanied by accelerated physical growth, the development of secondary sexual characteristics, increased emotional maturity, the emergence of a new way of thinking and the formation of a particular identity. A glance at Boorer and Murgatroyd's selected bibliography published in 1972 and the list of references in Rutter's Rock Carling Fellowship Monograph: *Changing Youth in a Changing Society* (1979) shows the enormous number of books and papers which have been devoted to this period of life. For anyone wanting a readable introduction to the subject of Adolescence, the two relevant chapters of Mussen, Conger and Kagen's (1974) *Child Development and Personality* can be confidently recommended.

Longitudinal epidemiological surveys provide an informative account of adolescent behaviour. The *National Survey of Health and Development* was concerned with about 5,000 children born in Britain in 1946. Their features at the secondary school stage are described in *All Our Future* (Douglas, Ross and Simpson, 1968). The *National Child Development Study* involves children born during one week in 1958. Their follow-up in adolescence is described in Fogelman's (1976) booklet *Britain's Sixteen Year Olds*. The *Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development* concerns 400 boys who were aged between eight and nine in the early 1960s and who attended six primary schools in close proximity situated in a poor part of London. They were reviewed in adolescence particularly from the point of view of anti-social behaviour. (West and Farrington, 1973, 1977). Those who like lots of factual information and who wish to get a bird's eye

view of adolescence will find these surveys rewarding.

It can be profitable to read the work of some of the pioneers in the field. Tanner (1962) probably still provides the best source of information on physical growth in adolescence. It is always a pleasure to read about Piaget's ideas. One always comes away the better informed. Inhelder and Piaget's (1958) account of adolescent thinking nicely summarises the way in which reflective thought and hypothetic-deductive reasoning develop. Although a great deal has been written about cultural differences in the way young people develop, Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *Growing up in New Guinea* (1930) are still very well worth reading. Erikson (1968) is an influential writer on the emotional aspects of adolescence, particularly the development of a sense of identity, from a psychoanalytical point of view. He discussed his ideas with Tanner, Inhelder, Piaget, Mead and others in a series of *Discussions on Child Development* held at the World Health Organisation in 1955. (Tanner and Inhelder, 1958). Although a quarter of a century old, the published proceedings of these discussions are still a useful introduction to some of the problems of child development in general and the adolescent period in particular.

The distinguished American psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1904) claimed that adolescence is a stage of life characterised by stress and strife, 'Sturm und Drang'. This is a point of view which was enthusiastically adopted by psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud (1958) and Blos (1970) who took the view that psychiatric disturbance is virtually 'normal' in adolescents. Surveys of young people have, on the whole, not supported this conception. Coleman (1961) reported on some 7,000 young people and concluded that their culture was characterised by isolation from the world of adults. Douvan and Adelson (1964) on the basis of studying about 3,000 adolescents aged 14 to 16 found that disagreements with parents were common. Nevertheless, the information collected in both of these studies does not show adolescence to be a time of severe emotional upset. Offer (1960) interviewed a group of 'normal' American youths and found them to be relatively free from disturbance. Masterson (1967)

however did find anxiety and depression to be as common in the 'normal' controls as in the cases to whom they were compared.

The well-known epidemiological survey of children living on the Isle of Wight provided an opportunity to look at a sample of 14 and 15 year olds from the general population in the light of the controversy just referred to. The resulting paper called "Adolescent Turmoil, Fact or Fiction?" (Rutter, Graham, Chadwick and Yule, 1976) should be read by all those interested in this problem. The conclusion was that alienation from parents is not a common feature at this stage of development nor is the prevalence of psychiatric disorders at this time substantially increased. Even so, relatively trivial arguments with the family do occur quite often and symptoms of misery are frequently reported.

There is a substantial literature on undesirable aspects of behaviour which cause particular concern when they first occur in adolescence. One or two examples are given to provide a beginning for any reader who wants to find out more about them. These activities include smoking (Bewley, Day and Ide, 1974), drinking (O'Connor, 1977), drug abuse (Hundleby, Carpenter, Ross and Mercer, 1982), glue sniffing (O'Connor, 1979), dieting (Nylander, 1971), promiscuity (Schofield, 1965; Shaffer, Pettigrew, Wolkind and Zajicek, 1978) and violence (Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder and Huesmann, 1977; Stone and Taylor, 1977). Delinquency is particularly associated with adolescence. Good starting-off points for those who want to read about anti-social activities in the young are Walker's (1965) *Crime and Punishment in Britain* and Wadworth's (1979) *Roots of Delinquency*. The related subject of custodial care for deprived and deviant youngsters is nicely introduced in Tizard, Sinclair and Clarke's (1975) *Varieties of Residential Experience*. Evaluation of court procedures on adolescents who show truancy and delinquency by randomly controlled trials is a new development in criminology which can be read about in one of the writer's articles (Berg, Hullin and McGuire, 1978). *Out of School* (Hersov and Berg, 1980) is a book concerned with unjustified absence from school which the writer of this article helped to edit. It contains information from the *National Child Development Study* (Fogelman, Tibbenham and Lambert, 1980), the *Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development* (Farrington, 1980) and a cross-sectional survey of Buckinghamshire school children (Mitchell and Shepherd, 1980). What happens to absentees in later adolescence is dealt with by Robins and Ratcliffe (1980) and Gray, Smith and Rutter (1980). The influence of school factors in truancy is covered by Reynolds, Jones, St Leger and Murgatroyd (1980).

Psychiatric disorders affecting adolescents are not dissimilar from those affecting younger children. The majority of disturbances are either neurotic or conduct disorders, occurring about equally. Developmental difficulties which are quite common in earlier childhood such as enuresis, soiling or reading backwardness may persist into adolescence but are much less commonly encountered then. Severe tics can occur. Adult-type disturbances such as manic-depressive psychosis and schizophrenia occur in adolescence but are relatively rare compared with the 20s and 30s. Symptoms of depression are quite common. The features of adolescent disorders are discussed by Rutter (1979) in an informative way. A group of 187 adolescent in-patients who were followed-up six or more years later were described by Warren (1965) and this study provides a useful account of the sort of severe problems admitted to hospital at this time of life. Anorexia nervosa is a psychiatric disorder which mainly affects girls and begins in the late teens. Much has been written about this condition but there is only space to recommend three publications (Dally, Gomez and Isaacs, 1979; Russell, 1979; Crisp, Palmer and Kalvey, 1976). Overdoses are a common problem in adolescents, particularly girls. There is a large literature concerning overdoses in general and Kreitman's (1977) book is a good introduction to it. Some recent studies by a group of workers in Oxford will give the reader a good idea of how the problem affects adolescents (Hawton, O'Grady, Osborn and Cole, 1982; Hawton, Osborn, O'Grady and Cole, 1982; Hawton and Goldacre, 1982; Hawton, Cole, O'Grady and Osborn, 1982). School refusal is essentially a neurotic condition which affects children in primary school but is more often encountered in youngsters of secondary school age. The review by Hersov (1977) is a good introduction to the large literature on school refusal. The book *Out of School*, already mentioned, contains two recent contributions which the reader should find interesting. One by Waller and Eisenberg (1980) describes the 'masquerade syndrome' in which school refusal masquerades as physical illness. The other by Yule, Hersov and Treseder (1980) includes an outline of the literature on the behavioural treatment of school refusal.

Finally, the Court (1976) Report can be recommended as a useful outline of what adolescents require in the way of services.

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