

BOOK REVIEW

Female Adolescent Development. Edited by Max Sugar, M.D. Brunner/Mazel Inc., New York, 1979, 362 pages, \$19.50.

The prolonged moratorium of *Sleeping Beauty* has been likened to that experienced by the adolescent in her quest for identity (Bettelheim, 1976). Just as the wall of thorns protects the fairytale character from an intruder's view, so has the literature on adolescence tended to obscure our vision of the pubescent girl.

A number of theories have been advanced for the heavy emphasis on male adolescence either as a substitute or umbrella for the experience of female youth. Whether one subscribes to the view that males as "hot-blooded" aggressors provoke societal anxiety (Friedenberg, 1959) or to the theory that they are more flamboyantly visible than their female counterparts (Adelson, 1964) or to the historical conception that the female's identity has been vicarious in relation to the male (Bettelheim, 1963), almost all reviewers of the literature agree that the study of female adolescence has been neglected. Hence, this innovative collection of 18 papers is most welcome.

The book is divided into four sections. A brief and somewhat cursory review of research issues is followed by a very effective pair of chapters on biological and cognitive development. The third section presents a somewhat uneven review of "societal issues," while the concluding and longest section offers a psychodynamic approach.

Though many prominent experts on adolescent development are represented, their contributions are not necessarily their finest efforts in the field. One gathers that there is not yet enough consistently high-level research for a whole book on this subject. Yet whatever variations in quality we find are largely compensated for by several thoughtful papers which advance the field. Petersen's efforts to relate biological and psychological development are original, as is her paper (with Wittig) which attempts to integrate brain-structural, hormonal, and social theory with cognitive development. An intriguing finding is that androgynous males and females demonstrate more typically masculine patterns of cognition than do modal adolescents.

In the "societal" section, Wynne has written an engaging history of female adolescence, demonstrating the impact of society on adolescent experience. His paper implies that the age-old "generation gap" controversy may be largely an artifact of the cultural milieu. Under the "psychodynamics" heading, Barglow and Schaefer offer a useful critique of the concept of regression in adolescence, not unlike that proposed by Adelson and Doehman in *The Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (1979).

Among the most original and richest contributions is one of the briefest papers in the volume: Muslin's "The Superego in the Adolescent Female." This paper goes a long way toward resolving several core controversies in the field. Muslin offers a revision of Freud's battered formulation of an inherently weaker female superego. He suggests that male and female superegos function very similarly but have gender-specific content due to psychosocial influences. Muslin is also able to respond to the eternal issue of adolescent turmoil in suggesting that we separate more fluid intrapsychic processes and relatively more peaceful external behavior. Using this same scheme, Muslin elegantly summarizes the role of culture in the contents of the female adolescent's ego ideal, a point similarly emphasized by Spruiell in her paper on the ego-ideal.

Despite its overall excellence, two sets of problems trouble *Female Adolescent Development*. Like others, this collection offers a varied but not always well balanced smorgasbord. Many of its contributions are germane to a broad perspective on female adolescence, while others are narrower in scope, even esoteric. For example, the chapter on Saulteaux-Ojibway girls attempts to compare teenagers from a culture with radically different child-rearing practices to modal American adolescents. Given that the Saulteaux-Ojibway girl is sent out into the world at age 8 to fend for herself, one wonders about the wisdom of such a comparison, indeed whether this culture allows an "adolescence" at all.

The collection omits some important areas which might have been explored: a broader perspective on identity formation in adolescent females, the crucial role of friendship and peer relations (touched on only in passing in papers by Berkovitz, Rothchild, and Rosenbaum), and dynamics of psychopathology peculiar to the female adolescent, such as anorexia nervosa. (While this collection is described as a review of normal development, there are two chapters which relate primarily to female delinquency.) Short shrift is also given the differential role of early, middle, and late stages of adolescent development, this being another neglected issue in adolescent psychology (Blos, 1962). The methodologies represented are eclectic, ranging from armchair theorizing to review of the literature to efforts at objective research. With the exception of the papers in the "biological issues" section, the research in this volume is troubled by sampling and methodological flaws.

A second problem derives from the state of the field itself, and here the book does us the service of highlighting, though not resolving, some important controversies. The ubiquitous issue of adolescence as a state of turmoil or

tranquility is represented by the perennial armed camps – the psychosocial school, learning on the “normalcy” work of Offer and Offer (1975), Masterson (1969), and Douvan and Adelson (1966); and the psychoanalysts, supporting Anna Freud’s view of the ego-weak adolescent. These opposing views about female adolescence need the excellent research attention given male adolescence in the work of Offer and Offer. Barglow and Schaefer and others continually cite the work of the Offers on male development as evidence for a lack of turmoil during female adolescence.

There is one repetitive theme: the impact of the women’s movement on female adolescent development. Though this issue is popular, the most cogent papers in the Sugar collection present comparisons of sex differences in adolescence rather than tendentious descriptions of female dynamics. Some contributors appear to have a vested interest in “women’s liberation.” Berkovitz and Bienenstock, for example, write of the female (not necessarily adolescent) that “her freedom . . . lies mainly in her willingness to make clear to her partner her expectations of sharing duties . . . if she accepts anything less she has had it!” Several other authors imply that the women’s movement should have affected female adolescence, but we do not know if such evolution has occurred. Giovacchini, one of the authors more engagingly old-fashioned in his views on women, suggests that the unisex culture may be the adolescent girls’ reaction to their mother’s ambivalence to their own femininity. Certainly research is needed to shed light on such an intriguing dialogue – perhaps in the form of a current replication of Douvan and Adelson’s study.

Although the void in research on female adolescence is glaring, some topics suggested by the more theoretical papers in Sugar’s collection are fascinating. Shopper offers a thoughtful discussion of the menstrual tampon as a “rite of passage.” Rosenbaum suggests that separation-individuation issues affect the adolescent girl’s sense of body ego. As do Shopper and Sugar, Rosenbaum highlights the intrapsychic question of who has final control over the young woman’s body – the adolescent or her mother. Sugar provides additional material on adolescent pregnancy and motherhood, though the issue of developmental stages (Hatcher, 1973) is neglected.

The significance of this book stems from the fact that this field has for so long been hidden by a “wall of thorns.” Dr. Sugar’s collection of papers offers an impressive start in heightening our interest in “Sleeping Beauty’s” growth to womanhood.

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