

## REVIEWS

### Independent comment on audio-visual and print resources

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ADOLESCENCE: GUIDING YOUTH THROUGH THE PERILOUS ORDEAL. Miller Newton. London, Norton, 1995. Hard cover, 241 pages. \$45.95. ISBN 0-393-701944-8.

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Originally trained as a medical anthropologist, Newton defines ordeal as a ritual set of tasks (ritually dangerous but inherently safe) to prove a new status. However, he asserts, for a growing minority, adolescence is no ritual ordeal, but a purposely threatening and dangerous testing time. And, as adolescent therapists, our job is to help them avoid hazards so that they can emerge as recognised healthy adults.

Newton compares previous definitions of adolescence (usually thirteen to eighteen years) to his current definition (eleven to twenty-two years), identifying both earlier onset and a longer grey zone of pseudo-adulthood. This grey zone, he proposes, leads to insecurity and confusion, and lacks a clear ritual to signify the beginning of adulthood. He describes a mentorless adolescence, idealised through a youth culture fashion as an end unto itself.

Intended for therapists from a range of disciplines, this book offers a developmental framework for adolescence, set against a backdrop of research, and it recommends treatment modalities, suggesting a therapeutic stance that is somewhat diagnostic in flavour.

Part I (on Foundations) covers theories of adolescence and outlines normal adolescent neurological, physical and reproductive development. Newton presents adolescence as an extended rite of passage, identifying stages that need to be accomplished on the way to adulthood, the Adolescent Passage primarily being:

A. Withdrawal from family and society (distancing to break child role)

B. A period of isolation (for preparation), and  
C. Re-entry to family and society as an adult.

Part II (Developmental Tasks), describes the evolution of identity, spirituality and values, sexuality, family, social relations, educational and vocational choices. Therapeutic strategies and modalities are suggested for difficulties encountered with each of these tasks.

Part III describes a range of Developmental Traps: violence, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression and chronic diseases. The author concludes with suggestions for treatment and for societal change that incorporates mentors and a clear ritual for entering adult status. These concepts sound appealing, until illustrated by the suggestion that National Service should be reintroduced!

Having my appetite whetted by an anthropological analysis, I would have enjoyed further exploration of the rite of passage metaphor in therapy, perhaps as a collaborative process, marking adolescents' journey past identified perils and incorporating the definition and recognition of rituals which signify re-entry into society and family with early adulthood status. The diagnostic and treatment style promoted by the author often lacks an understanding of systems and family therapy, but the book contains some useful information and statistics on North American adolescents.

Fortunately this book does not assume that all adolescents undergo a perilous ordeal, but sees those who do as belonging to a rapidly growing minority. The descriptions of adolescent perils may be useful for therapists familiarising themselves with issues specific to adolescents, and would be more useful as a supplement to a sound systemic conceptual framework.

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