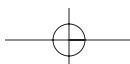
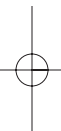
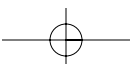
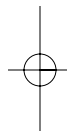
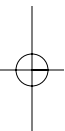




*Part I*

**Mapping Youth Futures**





## *Chapter 1*

# **Global Youth Culture: A Transdisciplinary Perspective**

*Jennifer Gidley*

### **YOUTH OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CHILDREN OF THE MONOCULTURE**

Any attempt to classify “youth” as a group belies the inherent diversity and heterogeneity, as well as the burgeoning individuality, of contemporary youth. Yet, increasingly, as an outcome of globalization over the past ten to fifteen years, the recognition of youth, globally, as a category of human existence requiring acknowledgment, has gained the attention and focus of such organizations as the United Nations (UN), especially UNESCO, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

An “official” definition of youth, created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1999 for the International Youth Year, and refers to youth as “all persons falling between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four inclusive.”<sup>1</sup> The limitations of this “definition” will be discussed later in this chapter in light of some psycho-social perspectives, including alternative images of youth since the Middle Ages. The ensuing chapters will present critical analysis of the construct of youth including multiple diverse constructions across a range of cultures. However, this UN definition has given rise to a global picture of the demographic composition of the “group of youth” worldwide.

#### **The “Global Village” of Youth**

If the 1 billion-plus youth who currently live in the world (approximately 18 percent of the global population) consisted of a village of one hundred people:

- there would be fifty-one young men and forty-nine young women;
- forty-nine would live in the village center and fifty-one in the rural outskirts;

- there would be sixty young Asians, fifteen Africans, nine Latin Americans and Caribbeans, and only sixteen young people from the industrialized countries of the world;
- fifteen of the villagers would be “illiterate,” nine of them young women (this refers to literacy narrowly defined and will be contested elsewhere);
- sixty-four would be living on an average of less than US\$1,000 per year, while only eleven would be earning an average income of more than US\$10,000 per year;
- by the end of the year, one person would have contracted the HIV virus.<sup>2</sup>

With the available technology, it is also possible to provide statistics on the health and mental health characteristics of the global youth population (as well as figures for unemployment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, juvenile pregnancy, and many others).<sup>3</sup> Ironically, this capacity of the “global bureaucracy” to monitor the health and well-being of particular populations globally may contain the seeds of globalization’s demise, as it points to the growing psychological “ill-health” of advanced Western societies. While the concern (of global nongovernmental organizations) on the well-being of youth globally has primarily emphasized health and education issues in the “developing” world, the emerging figures for growing mental health issues for young people in the “overdeveloped” world (discussed in a later section) confirm that “development” as part of the modernity project is not the panacea it was once thought to be. Yet globalization (called “Americanization” by some) has amplified the modernity project manyfold, supported by mass education and communication technologies, particularly the Internet and the mass media.

### **The Impact of Globalization**

Globalization is a series of powerful processes that provide both opportunities and threats. While much has been written in the last few years about the impact of globalization, particularly on the less “developed” countries and peoples, the discourse on globalization and youth has remained oddly silent. In its first definitive statement of the impact of globalization on youth, the UN’s Youth Information Network took a rather cautious view and conceded that more analysis is needed on the impact of:

Intensified evidence of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. . . . Furthermore, the trade imbalances between developed and developing economies, favoring the more developed economies, place development at risk in many countries. . . . Hundreds of millions of people are negatively affected by these factors. Young people are particularly affected, because it means that their transition to adulthood is made more difficult. . . . [On the other hand] . . . [t]here are constructive trends. Many countries are experiencing a deepening of democ-

racy. . . . This opens up opportunities for participation by all people. Young people will gain from this move towards democracy.<sup>4</sup>

This cool and balanced weighing of pros and cons masks a deeper, farther-reaching, and profound cultural transgression that is emerging in the literature on the impact of globalization. Globalization is increasingly perceived by many non-Western academics and researchers as “a form of Western ethnocentrism and patronizing cultural imperialism, which invades local cultures and lifestyles, deepens the insecurities of indigenous identities and contributes to the erosion of national cultures and historical traditions.”<sup>5</sup>

The tensions thus created have been referred to by Benjamin Barber as “McWorld,” the moving force of a borderless market towards global homogeneity, and . . . ‘Jihad,’ the rivaling process of localization, which originates in cultural, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Industrial Model and Youth**

With the onset of the industrial revolution, young people, and even children, became fodder for the industrial machine—cheap labor, used mercilessly by industry to keep the factories churning. These Dickensian images of children in sweatshops are no longer valid for the West; the global sweep of industrial geography has shifted these images into backyards of the newly “developing” nations. As gentrification emerges and child labor becomes unfashionable in one place, the multinational global agenda simply shifts to another locus—from Japan to Korea, from Malaysia to Taiwan, from China to Fiji—as the race for ever-cheaper products meets the craving to buy what the high-tech world offers. Who will be next? Ethiopia? Mongolia?

In addition to these overtly oppressive macro-economic forces, globalization also has an impact on non-Western youth resulting from at least two other major processes: mass education (based on the factory model) and the media. In a critique of the model of education put forward by the World Bank a decade ago at the Education for All (EFA) meeting in Jomtein, Thailand, a number of educationists and social activists cite this model as a further attempt to assert the values and culture of the Western materialist worldview. The Education for All agenda argued that education is essential for economic survival, but Sangeeta Kamat contests this yoking of education with economics. She argues that it is a flawed model for education because it is based on the human capital theory, named after the World Bank’s proposals relating to “building human capital for increasing national productivity, as in production and consumption of (economically valued) goods and services.” Furthermore, while the rhetoric of the Education for All strategy was to promote “flexibility and adaptability to

local culture,” according to Anita Dighe, in India at least, the reality of the World Bank–funded District Primary Education Project is homogeneity and “uniformity.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, Catherine Hoppers strongly critiques the EFA agenda on literacy: “Instead of looking at literacy as a continuum in different modes of communication, from the oral to the written, we (the EFA) equated being ignorant of the Western alphabet with total ignorance.”<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this process of mass education of children of the third world over the last decade has prompted increasing enculturation of the world’s youth into the Western worldview. Pawan Gupta describes this view: “The modern education system has used modern science (and vice versa) to successfully perpetuate many modern myths which both advertise the superiority of the modern development paradigm and devalue rural communities and their knowledge systems, values and wisdom.” He adds, in a description of what might be called “virtual colonialism,” “the West has succeeded in refining the instruments of control to such a high degree that the physical presence of the oppressor is no longer required at the site of exploitation.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Media as “Global Culture” Amplifier**

The mass media (such as television, music), and in particular the new media (such as the Internet) are important tools for spreading the global culture to young people around the world; conversely, it can be used as a platform for networking resistance. Researchers from Denmark, France, and Israel found that as a result of the media-induced processes of globalization, young people in those countries have a preference for transnational fiction and movie material (particularly American “soapies”) as well as a new sense of transnational social space provided by the Internet.<sup>10</sup> One of the paradoxes of the media’s Western cultural influence is the tension between the homogenizing effect of a dominant culture on diverse cultures, and the inherent individualism at the center of the Western cultural model. This creates a push-and-pull effect of “look-alike” teenage role models masking the ongoing struggle for individuality and identity that is at the heart of adolescence. However, when the individualism being promoted in tandem with the global media images of Western lifestyles is blended with aggressive market-driven consumerism, it can be a rather toxic brew for youth living in poverty unable to attain the image. Sonia Livingstone describes this process in which modern marketing directs popular culture, transforming the global citizen (or viewer) into the consumer. She adds, “Whether conceived optimistically or pessimistically, the processes of globalization of media and culture are seen by many as the means par excellence by which such social changes are effected.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet ironically, in the one place where the wealth seems to grow into infinity, the youth of the United States have activated their ethical con-

science. For the first time since the anti-Vietnam War marches of the sixties, students in large numbers are demonstrating in American universities. Paradoxically, the targets of their resistance are the multinationals who continue to abuse young people confined to work in the sweatshops of the third world manufacturing the very label-brands these students like to buy and wear. One of the processes used by these students, culture jamming, co-opts the powerful advertising images of the corporate giants and modifies them to show their shadow side.<sup>12</sup> This student resistance (United Students Against Sweatshops) is hailed as the beginning of a new anti-corporatist movement<sup>13</sup> and is just one of the many paradoxes that surround the complexities of being young and human on earth at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In this example, students are using their very commodification as their point of leverage. As long as globalization continues to be fueled by consumerism, the young (as “market-share”) hold some trump cards—their buying power and their peer influence—the Achilles’ heels of the multinationals.

### **Monoculture (or Toxiculture)**

The particular variety of culture underpinned by Western scientific thought, and in recent decades amplified by information technologies and the economic rationalist paradigm of commodification, has claimed cultural superiority since the Enlightenment. With this self-imposed authority (at first European, now American), it has sought to “develop” the “underdeveloped world” using the development paradigms of “deficit” and “disadvantage” rather than “diversity” as its justification.<sup>14</sup> This is not to diminish or underestimate the great gains made by the spread of the modernity project: the introduction of electricity; technology; and certain medical and other improvements. Yet, like all great civilizations of the past that reached their zenith before they begin to decay, the “over-development” of the Western culture, with its foundations rooted in a materialist worldview, has for decades showed signs of decay. The litany of symptoms exhibited by many young people of the “most-developed” nations exemplify this with great poignancy. As research presented later in this chapter and book will show, many youth of the West have increasingly high rates of depression and other forms of mental illness, are committing suicide and other violent crimes at an alarming rate, and are expressing a general malaise, loss of meaning, and hopelessness about the future. Western culture has recently been described by film director Peter Weir as a “toxic culture,” after a spate of violent school shootings by and of fellow students in the United States.

The next section of this chapter considers what has gone wrong in the enculturation of youth in Western (and increasingly global) culture.

## TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL BREAKDOWN AND RENEWAL

Before exploring some of the manifestations of this cultural breakdown, it is essential to go to the heart of what is missing from the Western materialist cultural model. Because it is based on a view of human nature that lacks a spiritual dimension (divorcing psychology from theology, science from ethics), all further fragmentations stem from this inherent tendency to segregate rather than integrate. Four forces of change that have emanated from this materialist worldview over recent decades, accelerating the breakdown of society “as it was” particularly in regard to the enculturation of young people:

- individualism versus community;
- the colonization of imagination;
- the secularization of culture;
- environmental degradation.

### Individualism versus Community

The current age of the “I,” which celebrates self-centered egoism, began in the 1960s and 1970s with the recognition of (and rebellion against) the injustices involved in the long-term cultural dominance of the “wealthy white male.” The various movements for “liberation” and human rights (feminism, gay, black, and indigenous rights movements) set in motion a process where rights began to dominate responsibilities. While not wanting to undermine the gains made in equity and human rights, in the process, the needs of family and community have often been compromised. While the development of the individual ego is an important stage in the evolution of human nature, linked to our destiny to discover freedom, it is also evident that the human ego is a double-edged sword. The striving of individual human beings throughout the twentieth century for self-identity and equal rights has culminated in what David Elkind called the “me decade,” the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was aware of the dangers of the “free human ego” unless it had some spiritual grounding:

The most tremendous thing that has been granted to man is: the choice, freedom. And if you desire to save it and preserve it there is only one way: in the very same second unconditionally and in complete resignation to give it back to God, and yourself with it.<sup>16</sup>

It might be added, “to use it in the service of the common good.”

From the demise of the tribe (with the breakdown of the chief’s authority in indigenous cultures) in the face of globalization, to the break-



down of families and other social structures (linked also to the shift in male–female power relationships), we are seeing an unprecedented fragmentation of the social glue, without which young people are rudderless in their social orientation.

Is it just coincidence that the symptoms observed today among Western young people, such as homelessness, alienation, and depression, have increased during the same few decades? By contrast, this individualism inherent in the West strikes a strong chord with youth as they strive for their own identities. This provides a balance for some of the homogenizing cultural forces.

### **The Colonization of Imagination**

Over roughly the same period, the education of the imaginations of children and youth has changed from the nourishment of oral folk and fairy tales to the poisoning of interactive electronic nightmares. Since the advent of television, and video game parlors, followed by the use of computer games (originally designed to train and desensitize soldiers before sending them off to the killing fields), Western children and youth have been consistently and exponentially exposed to violent images.<sup>17</sup> Toys once made by mothers or fathers from simple materials lying around have given way in this “wealthy consumer age” to what are very often grotesque monster-like toys given ready-made to young children. These are not food for the souls of children, but the food for nightmares. The imagination, like the intellect, needs appropriate content to develop in a healthy manner. It will be shown in my later chapter that powerful, positive images in education can help young people envision strong, positive futures—which they feel empowered to create.

Is it surprising, then, that over the past decade in particular, symptoms have appeared among young people (particularly in the United States but also other “developed” countries) of ever-increasing violence and suicide. The American Medical Association and American Academy of Pediatrics have recently made a joint statement that “the prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization towards violence in real life.”<sup>18</sup> Most of the research on suicide and suicidal ideation shows strong links with depression and also hopelessness about the future.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, young people educated with an eye to the development of a healthy, positive imagination are not disempowered by their concerns about the future.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Secularization of Culture**

Secularization of society is the third major change that has accelerated over the past few decades. This triumph of secular science over spiritual

science, coinciding with the widespread crisis of values reflected in post-modernism as a “belief system” has resulted in a dominant world culture, which, although ostensibly Christian, is in practice amoral. The egoism that brings greed in its wake, the economic rationalism that denudes politics of the principals of social justice, the secularization of education (leading to a loss of the values dimension), the death of churches as inspiring community organizations, and ultimately the cultural fascism (and religious fundamentalism) that leads to ethnic cleansing are all symptoms of societies that have lost connections with moral, ethical, and spiritual values.

The resultant symptoms in young people are a cynical “don’t care” attitude, loss of purpose and meaning, and a “dropping out” of mainstream society, assisted of course by the high levels of youth unemployment. On the other hand, the counterpoint is that many young people are beginning to recognize this void and are seeking meaning through a search for spiritual values.

### **Environmental Degradation**

Finally, the culture that has dominated the global environmental agenda, and valued private and corporate profit over community or planet, has been responsible for the systematic and pervasive pollution of our earth, air, and water. What message, we might wonder, has this given our youth? In addition, while the scientific/medical solution of chemical approaches to mental as well as physical illnesses provides “newer and better drugs” for depression, hyperactivity, and anxiety, the numbers of depressed adolescents and children diagnosed as having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) continue to climb.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, genetic engineers push forward to develop improved strains of everything, bringing us closer daily to the age of the “designer baby.”

Is it any wonder that in this unnatural world so many youth are turning to drug abuse to escape, or to alcohol binges to drown their sorrows? Conversely, the environmental awareness of youth is high, with “green futures” almost universally present in their preferred futures scenarios.

### **Cultural Renewal**

*If we're not allowed to dream, we turn to things that will destroy us, drugs, etc.*

—Jesse Martin, Australian who sailed solo around the world at age 16

In the face of all these cultural stressors and related symptoms, especially among young people, that signal the breakdown of our cultural system, the formal approaches of most government, professional, and academic systems is “business as usual,” or try to return to “the way it was.” Many right-wing conservative governments have been returned to power

as a fear response to all the rapid changes, with the hope that they will take life back to how it was. Such governments also slash spending on education, health, and welfare as part of the “free market” ideology. As a counter-response to renewed conservatism, “alternative” approaches abound (to medicine, education, agriculture). However, most of the responses, even the alternative ones, are responses to symptoms or effects of the cultural malaise of our times. Yet unless this malaise is addressed at its systemic roots and in a transdisciplinary and holistic manner, new symptoms will continue to replace the old ones.

How does one transform a culture, especially one that has become a colonizing monoculture, homogenizing diversity in its path?

There are many ways to attempt to transform a culture, and all are fraught with contention:

1. directly by structural change such as reform and/or cultural revolution;
2. directly by taking charge of the enculturation processes of the young people, as Singapore has tried to do (see Chapter 9);
3. directly by transforming the education system, as some alternative approaches attempt (Steiner, Montessori, Ananda Marga Gurukul);
4. indirectly by making subtle, gradual inroads via literature and the arts;
5. indirectly by telling ourselves and our young people different stories about the future and encouraging them to create and enact their own personal futures stories.

The successes and failures of the first four are well known. The fifth utilizes the processes of futures studies to facilitate for and with young people a cultural renewal, inspired by the hopes and dreams of these young people. This book is about the diverse futures that young people would like to create, a world that would go beyond symptom treatment into a place of hope, renewal, potential, and creativity, a place where a society might reflect the health, not the symptoms, of its members, and where the young people draw physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance.

Before considering these issues further, some perspectives on how youth have been and are conceptualized are presented.

## **IMAGES OF YOUTH AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

### **A Genealogy of Western Youth since the Middle Ages**

All theories about human nature (and therefore youth) are embedded in the broader sociocultural (and more recently politico-economic) milieu in which they are conceived. This is highlighted by the recent shift to the term “youth” (a broader politico-economically defined category than “adolescence”), which raises the age level of the passage to adulthood for expe-

dient purposes. The most frequently used conception of adolescence this century is that of George Stanley Hall, who initiated the seminal psychological study of the period between puberty and adulthood (at around twenty-one) and coined the phrase “storm and stress.”<sup>22</sup> Earlier usages of the term youth are synonymous with this period of life.

Prior to the psychological conceptions of this century, we must refer to literature for a historical understanding. In a study by Violato and Wiley (1990), Chaucer’s fourteenth-century squire was “frivolous” and demonstrated “adventurousness . . . (and) . . . turbulent sensuality,” while Thomas More’s sixteenth-century utopian youth experienced a smooth transition, based on an emphasis on moral training as well as academic learning. Shakespeare’s youth were sympathetically characterized by “excess, passion and sensuality,” while Lewis Bayly, also writing in the seventeenth century, foreshadowed a Freudian view of youth as “untamed beast.” By contrast, John Milton, also a Puritan, saw youth as “carefree and joyful” as well as a time for intellectual development. By the eighteenth century, the Romantic era, which began the critique of the materialist worldview with its “narrow rationalism and . . . its mechanized universe,” is well represented by William Wordsworth. Influenced by what is called “primitivism” that the earliest conditions of humanity were glorious and that children reflect this—Wordsworth saw youth as a unique stage of cognitive development, in transition from the more spiritual world of childhood, and toward adulthood, which is fully separated from God and Nature. “The Youth, who daily farther from the east/Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest” (Ode, II, 72–73). In the nineteenth-century environment of industrialization, child labor, urbanization, and mass education, writers such as Charles Dickens initiated the “sentimental” view depicting the visionary image of the “saintlike young person, battling against the immense forces of evil.”<sup>23</sup>

The contemporary Western images of youth seem to be a mixture of those explained above, all of which are inscribed in the collective “cultural memory,” depending on one’s philosophical standpoint. Further variations can also be taken from different professionalized standpoints, such as the social deviance model, youth as victim, or the youth rights model.<sup>24</sup>

For a cross-cultural perspective, a cultural anthropology study using a world sample of 186 pre-industrial societies recognizes a distinct stage of social adolescence as almost a cultural universal.<sup>25</sup> However, the inevitability of adolescence as a period of “storm and stress” in traditional cultures is strongly contested. Diverse cultural conditions relating to traditional family roles, community embeddedness, and, most importantly, initiation ceremonies appear to reduce and/or ameliorate the stressors of Western adolescence in many non-Western cultures, such as China, Indonesian Java and, Micronesia, to name a few.<sup>26</sup>

How long this will remain so in the face of global cultural change is impossible to say.

### Contemporary Psychosocial Perspectives on Adolescence

In the present era, not much has changed in the psycho-social domain since Hall's turn-of-the-century conception, except that the earlier (pre-Hall) images contained a sense of lightheartedness and joyfulness, where today in the West the "storm and stress" for many is increasingly tinged with sadness and even despair. This may be seen as sentimental and even disempowering, but from the "chalkface of school counseling," it is a reality that needs to be addressed. In spite of reports that as many as one in five young people in "developed countries" experiences some form of mental illness (particularly depression),<sup>27</sup> contemporary psychology and pedagogy are surprisingly unable to arrive at any clear understanding of what adolescence is. According to Collins (1991), "The study of adolescence is the Cinderella, the neglected person, of developmental psychology. It is the Forgotten Era, having been the focus of less than 2 percent of research articles on human behavior for many years."<sup>28</sup>

Much contemporary education and social policy, operating in the absence of coherent psychosocial theories of adolescence, takes a "waiting room" approach to the vital years between puberty and adulthood. The economic rationalism underpinning this policy considers secondary, and now post secondary, education to be training for future employment, in spite of the fact that most of this employment no longer exists. The youth labor force in the "developed world" reduced from 106 million to 88 million between 1980 and 1995. A comprehensive study of the psychosocial effects of unemployment on young people found that the transition from school to work is a significant phase in their maturation as "it represents their initiation into the adult world."<sup>29</sup>

It is becoming increasingly evident that with the sleight of hand that is politics, the psychology and sociology of adolescence have been appropriated by expedient politico-economic policy. While psychologists are edged to the sidelines to "manage" the resultant behavioral and emotional chaos that ensues, sociologists are left to argue about how best to situate the crises of today's youth within the polemic of Marxist or Foucaultian approaches to "youth subculture" theory. Further, most of what psychologists and sociologists have written about youth is from the position of outsiders looking at youth as the "other," where the youth themselves are primarily silent. This book attempts to demonstrate the plurality and diversity of voices of many youth from around the world, on their own terms.

### A Plurality of Voices from a Monotone of Silence

In spite of the pressure toward homogeneity, of the globalizing influence of Western values, youth everywhere refuse to be suppressed. One of the great challenges and excitements of working with young people is their irrepressible spirit of rebellion. Sociologists and ethnographers (and, more

recently, market researchers) have devoted numerous dissertations to the various characteristics and types of “youth subculture” and new-age “tribes” such as “punks,” “Goths,” “homeys,” “surfies,” “ferals” and “skinheads” to name a few.<sup>30</sup> One theory suggests that each main youth subculture has been superceded by another, each generation attaching themselves to a drug of choice—the hippies favored LSD, the punks were partial to speed, while the latest metamorphosis, rave culture, prefers designer drugs such as MDMA or Ecstasy.<sup>31</sup>

If we look to the extremes of the Western youth profile, on one end of the spectrum we have recently been hearing of some areas where the young can make it in society—where they can rise to heights of success in certain predefined areas. These would include the Olympic heroes and heroines, popstars, and, of course, the new breed known as “the dot-com boys”—the young twenty-somethings who have made their first million from floating a successful dot-com company.

At the other end of the spectrum are the marginalized and disenfranchised—the “street kids” who spurn society because it has rejected them. In Australia and the United States, growing numbers of young people have become disenchanted with schooling, lack of work prospects, and the general malaise of materialism. It seems the more that policy-makers try to codify and rectify their curricula, to nationalize their agendas, and to increase their retention rates, the more young people will slip through the cracks. They live a life on the streets of cities and rural towns—hanging out with friends to make up for the sense of belonging and meaning that once came from working and community life. Many are children of the long-term unemployed, who don’t look to employment as the norm, but others are from diverse backgrounds, who choose the school of life rather than the life of school.<sup>32</sup> Although the “street-frequenting” youth of the “developed” world are living in relative poverty, they are still wealthy compared to the “street kids” in Brazil or the Philippines, who do not have the safety net of Social Security.

In this context, the extent to which Western culture is adequately initiating its youth into the stage of adult maturity needs to be seriously considered.

### **The Puberty Transition: Initiation into What?**

Traditional cultures have always offered rites of passage to their youth around the time of puberty. These diverse forms of culture, being gradually extinguished, formed the basis of the knowledge, the mores, and indeed the wisdom that was the curriculum for the education and enculturation of their children. Each unique culture had also developed, over centuries and even millennia, appropriate initiation ceremonies for marking the stages of acquisition of this knowledge. These initiation ceremonies

require disciplined preparation and are a symbolic recognition of an important stage—sexual maturity, and increased consciousness, requiring orientation to and knowledge of the world at a level beyond that of childhood. The teaching of responsibility is an integral part and generally physical challenge especially for males. The spiritual values of the culture are also introduced in a new way, as are life-survival skills.

The importance of honoring the esoteric nature of the crucial changes involved in puberty transition has been ignored by our postmodern Western culture at its peril. It has been suggested that if a society, or the responsible adults, do not provide some adequate initiation or orientation for adolescents, one of two things may happen:

- They may seek to initiate themselves through drugs, and other customs referred to as part of “youth subculture”—dress, body mutilation, “street living,” and even risk-taking behaviors.
- They may become disorientated and lose their sense of meaning or hope about the future, or at worst attempt to take their own lives.<sup>33</sup>

Sohail Inayatullah suggests in the next chapter that consumer-oriented processes, such as shopping and buying one’s own car, are the contemporary alternatives for youth with spending power.

### **Animal or Angel? A Transformed View of Youth**

Regrettably, the puberty transition issue was discarded as “stage theories” of child development went out of vogue. While stage theory has been unpopular with psychologists and educationists for a number of decades, there is renewed recognition of the importance of learning readiness and of the dangers of intellectually accelerating children beyond their biological maturity.<sup>34</sup> One of the few educational approaches that is still underpinned by an understanding of developmental stages of childhood and adolescence is the Rudolf Steiner (or Waldorf) approach.<sup>35</sup> Steiner’s theories, while not entirely inconsistent with the approaches of Piaget, Erickson, and Kohlberg, take developmental stage theory into a comprehensive, coherent pedagogy. There also seems to be a resurgence of interest in Erickson’s seminal work on adolescence, which no contemporary theory has really replaced.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps it is also an indication that the moral and spiritual aspects of development are being called for today. One of the great stage theorists, Kohlberg also made important links between the uniqueness and vulnerability of adolescence and the importance of being able to retain idealism and hope and a positive relationship to the future.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding the contentiousness of developmental stage theory, the fact that puberty marks a stage of dramatic changes cannot reasonably be denied. Taking this perspective, I would argue that adolescence is a stage

when powerful, opposing forces are emerging that require harmonizing over time. The changes of puberty bring with them, simultaneously, new experiences of two forces:

- the coolness of newfound intellectual reason (with ensuing idealism tempered by opinionated argument, a sense of fragmentation, and critical judgment);
- the heat of passions, romantic emotions, and the generative energy of hormonally charged, emerging sexual capacities (with impulsive, demanding urges).

A culture that polarizes and fragments reality can make the harmonizing of these forces difficult for many and impossible for some. The swings between the polarities are common fare for most. What is required of a culture and an enculturation system to support the adolescent stage of development and maximize the potential of this transition is not what is currently offered. What is needed is enculturation processes that integrate and synthesize and include social, cultural, and educational processes that encourage wisdom, healthy imagination, and creative and ethical activity through:

- an integrated knowledge system, underpinned by wisdom;
- exposure to and involvement with the aesthetics of the arts, music, theater;
- appropriate opportunities for engagement in worthwhile action through employment and/or useful occupation.

Such transformed enculturation processes could provide a powerful balance, harmonizing the conflicting inner forces experienced by contemporary adolescents. Who knows, this may even allow the angel to appear.

## NOTES

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