

Adolescents in Turmoil*

Turmoil is defined as a state of great agitation and confusion. The term well describes adolescence, the period of development between childhood and adulthood characterized by a remarkable transformation in every aspect of an individual's functioning within the self and in relationship to the parents and to society. During this transitional period there is quite routinely an upsurge of sexual and aggressive impulses. Also seen are a multitude of symptoms and problems, for example, anxiety, depression, increased intensity and volatility of emotion, poor judgment, and antisocial behavior. There is often a search for "kicks" and immediate gratification.

While many readily concur with this description, there is far less agreement when it comes to explaining adolescent turmoil. Why does this change in functioning happen? Why has this situation repeated itself in every generation over thousands of years? How is it possible that adolescent turmoil is found in so many diverse cultures? Is it a normative, biologically determined developmental phase? Or does culture play the most important role in its genesis?

Although scholars of different schools and theoretical orientations provide varied answers to these questions, the impression remains that the problem and its origins escape a deeper understanding. Ergonomic science, however, provides the missing, more profound perspective—in particular, a knowledge of armor and its function and the distinction between healthy and disturbed sexuality.

Society has always been aware of the difficulties adolescents experience during their transition to mature and responsible

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sometimes violent, behavior. Indeed, the news is full of stories of young people involved in anti-social and self-destructive acts. In particular, the violence among adolescents seems to have reached unprecedented proportions. For example, the murders committed by students over the last few years are no longer considered unusual, isolated events. They have come to represent a true change in social behavior, reflecting how children are raised and the attitude of adults and society toward them.

Those of us who are in contact with adolescents in schools or mental health centers routinely see the most serious casualties: youngsters with depression, impulsive behavior, involvement with drugs and alcohol, those who threaten or attempt suicide, and those with an inability to achieve academically and adapt socially. Studies reveal that the incidence of these behaviors and problems has increased every year. We are seeing adolescents engaging in risky behaviors at a younger age and appearing more disturbed and more difficult to understand than in the past. Yet all this is happening at a time of greater wealth and higher living standards than ever before.

We know that during adolescence the individual goes through puberty and attains sexual maturity. In the relatively unarmored adolescent this process proceeds more or less undisturbed and healthy heterosexual sexuality is established. If this process of development is disturbed by the presence of armor and by life-negative social influences, as it has been throughout history and as it almost always is today, the result is an individual unable to give himself fully to love and work, and at risk of living out his own secondary, neurotic impulses. These destructive impulses arise from the secondary or great middle layer of the armored human emotional structure, as identified by Wilhelm Reich. The secondary layer is itself the result of armoring, a traumatic consequence of development in a life-negative society, and not an innate condition of mankind.

In the past, family and society were able to more effectively limit, contain, and redirect rebellious and irrational behavior of adolescents. Today, this is no longer the case. The last forty years has seen

the greatest increase in personal freedom and individual rights ever known in human history. The individual has become more emancipated from the family and other authoritarian institutions. Opportunities for self-expression have increased while moralistic and repressive regulation of individual and social life have markedly decreased. When external, authoritarian regulation is weakened, destructive and anti-social impulses emerge from the secondary layer of the armored individual with increased frequency and intensity. In order to maintain personal order and stability, the armored individual needs external moral influence, education, and control.

With regard to adolescents, their developmental task is to achieve adult genitality and to be able to function in an independent and responsible manner. However, the adolescent encounters both internal and external obstacles to healthy, natural functioning. The inner obstacles usually derive from the armoring caused by life- negative attitudes and practices impacting the individual from the earliest moments of life throughout childhood.

Birth, for example, is almost always a traumatic event given the prevalent conditions of delivery in most hospitals and the routine separation and isolation of newborn from mother in the hospital nursery. Following birth, the ability of the mother to make contact with her infant may be disturbed and she may be unable to rationally respond to the infant's needs. She may be unable to tolerate the intensity of the infant's feelings and their expression and may react with anxiety, fear, or hatred. The lack of breast-feeding or unsatisfying breast-feeding for the infant, or abrupt weaning, and circumcision also have destructive effects. Such traumas cause bioenergetic withdrawal and contraction of the infant with impairment of its vitality and ability to make contact with the world. Unfortunately, the majority of adults in virtually every society are oblivious to these traumatic events and effects and the fact that they lay the foundation for all disturbed functioning in later life.

Throughout the child's development, his need for emotional contact, security, and self-expression is thwarted. At the different

caretakers and inconsistencies in their attitude generate emotions and responses that must be suppressed by the child. The child accomplishes this by developing protective armor, chronic muscular and characterologic rigidity, which disturbs or distorts natural processes and healthy development.

Armor, in its defensive function, intensifies during adolescence when instinctual impulses reach their highest intensity, and interferes with the adolescent's ability to achieve healthy adulthood. Also, impulses that originate from the biological core are distorted by armor, become destructive, and must be held back from expression. For example, the original core impulse to love, frustrated by armor, becomes sadistic, or the original impulse to be creative becomes hatred of another's work.

Without healthy sexual functioning and periodic, full orgasmic release of bioenergy, bioenergetic tension increases and becomes unbearable and pregenital and neurotic secondary layer impulses intensify. At this point, the individual may become more contactless or withdrawn, or may "act out" destructive secondary layer impulses. This then is the origin of adolescent turmoil as seen from an organomic perspective.

Given that the individual's capacity for self-regulation is impaired because of the presence of armor, it is clear that external control, in other words, authoritarian and moral regulation by family and society, becomes necessary to limit or contain individual neurotic behavior. If the adolescent's capacity for self-regulation were not so seriously damaged by the development of armoring in early life, and if parents and society limited neurotic behavior yet allowed for natural sexuality and its rational expression, then the adolescent would pass through puberty without significant problems—he would be free of turmoil. With regular, satisfying sexual release, he would maintain a genital character structure, have the capacity to love and work with satisfaction, and possess a deep sense of independence.

In some primitive matriarchal cultures (like certain of the Trobriand islands in Melanesia), the child develops naturally without

puberty" between four and six years of age, enjoying a healthy sexuality with age-appropriate peers. As for adolescents, sexuality is accepted and supported by social customs and traditions. The result is that Trobriand children and adolescents grow up without the neurotic characteristics and rebellious, irrational behaviors that are considered "normal" in patriarchal authoritarian societies.

Let us now review some of the external obstacles to healthy, natural, adolescent functioning, those changes in society and in the family that are making the expression of secondary layer impulses more possible than in the past. A shift toward less authoritarian child rearing practices has been widespread in the United States and in virtually every culture worldwide. Unfortunately, this development has too often given way to permissiveness, which under the rationale of offering freedom to the child, hopes to avoid repression and secure happiness. In reality, this permissiveness is an abdication of parental responsibility and reflects a lack of genuine emotional contact between parent and child. It also fails to provide parental support for the child's appropriate sexual expression and the sense of security that a child needs and can only get from a parent who has sufficient emotional contact with him.

Additionally, permissiveness leads to confusion and a sense of helplessness on the part of adults. Parents vacillate between letting the child's inappropriate behavior go unchecked or punishing it. When the parents ultimately decide to punish a particular behavior that has become intolerable, they often do so in a harsh or exaggerated manner.

Parental wavering or vacillation between permissiveness and discipline has other serious consequences. It sends the child a clear message that if he tries hard enough and long enough he can prevail over his parents and get his own way. At the same time, the child may experience anxiety states, even confusion, because he is uncertain whether a particular behavior is or is not going to be allowed at any given time. He is never certain of what he can or cannot do, and therefore constantly tests his parents to see how far he can go. What

he really wants and desperately needs, despite his often vehement protests to the contrary, is external control to limit his neurotic behavior so that he can be more certain about his boundaries, and hence feel secure within them.

The lack of control in the child's life is aggravated by the fact that parents are spending less time with their children than ever before. The predictable presence and availability of parents provides a safe physical environment and a sense of security which helps the child maintain control and experience tolerable levels of anxiety. Day care for children, although widespread and supported by the notion that children need "early socialization," simply cannot provide the child with what he really needs. By exposing children to multiple caretakers, whose capacity for emotional contact and whose attitude toward living functions is unpredictable, day care centers may have a disturbing effect. Too often the more sensitive and healthier child is subjected to the bullying or cruel behavior of a less healthy child, or to the insensitivity of caretakers.

The increased number of parents who are separated or divorced also contributes to the difficulties of children and adolescents. At least fifty percent of children in the United States are likely to spend some of their life being raised in a single-parent home. While separation and divorce may be the most appropriate solution for parents who no longer want to remain a couple, often the change becomes an opportunity for one or both to continue to act out neurotic conflicts, with the child being used as a pawn in their struggles. In reaction, the child may become depressed and withdrawn or act out his anger and resentment. Parental separation also frequently results in greater permissiveness and an escalation of the child's impulsive behavior. Once this child reaches adolescence, his rebelliousness and irresponsible behavior will reach their peak given the increase in bioenergetic charge and bioemotional intensity occurring during puberty.

The expression of these secondary layer impulses is facilitated and supported by the ongoing social breakdown. As a result, irrational

behaviors such as drug use, acts of violence, lack of respect for authority, inability and refusal to engage in productive activities are all around us. The mass media are another major source of support. Publicizing and even glamorizing rudeness, crude language, and antisocial behavior makes them appear acceptable to those armored, emotionally compromised adolescents who find irrational, neurotic behaviors as special, different, and opportunities for "being cool."

More importantly, the media expose adolescents to myriad forms and expressions of sadistic violence and pregenital sexuality. The adolescent's secondary impulses are thereby stimulated and supported instead of being suppressed. When the social environment condones and promotes permissiveness, it becomes easier for adolescents, as well as others, to act out secondary impulses. This is destructive because it allows the individual to avoid facing and meeting age-appropriate developmental tasks and challenges and the anxieties attendant to them.

Traditionally, close-knit community life exerted its own control on an individual's behavior. Fear of condemnation and rejection required the individual, known and judged by everyone, to keep his irrational tendencies in check. Thus, the community was a source of control external to the individual that did much to inhibit secondary layer impulses from breaking through. With the increasing breakdown of the traditional community, the individual lives in relative anonymity, and social restraining influence and control have been weakened. In such a situation the adolescent has less motivation and ability to contain his secondary layer impulses. This leaves parents and educators in a difficult position. They try to cope by using either the positive reinforcement behavioral management technique ("You can use the car if you clean the kitchen") or they adopt its opposite, an authoritarian punitive attitude ("You will be grounded for one month if you get a bad report card").

The main source of conflict between parents and their teenage children, however, is sexuality, although this often remains not acknowledged. In the face of apparent societal "acceptance" of

sexuality (its presence is pervasive in the media), parents and children remain uncomfortable talking to each other about sex. Much of the time, parents discuss sexuality with their children only when they are forced to. Then, overdy or coverdy, they transmit their negative sexual attitudes and anxieties. For some, this takes the form of emphasizing the negative: cautioning the adolescent against unmarried sex, warning of the risk of pregnancy and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. For others, despite apparent liberal views on the subject, sexual fears and shame are nonetheless still conveyed to their children.

Researchers have shown that a "negative communication climate" exists when most parents and children talk about sexuality. This negative communication climate is the most superficial manifestation of a deep, pervasive anxiety that all armored individuals harbor about their sexuality.

Negative messages about sexuality often are revealed not so much in *what* the adult says, but rather in *how* the adult says it. The form and style of communication is more important than the content. Sociologists have been able to demonstrate this in several studies, but for the medical orgonomist these findings are not surprising. In clinical practice, the orgonomist gives special importance to the quality of a communication—the tone of voice, facial expression, and degree of emotional contact. These can change the intended meaning of a communication to its exact opposite.

What is most important is that in the midst of all the talk about dysfunctional and rebellious adolescents, the relationship between disturbed sexual functioning and destructive, anti-social behavior goes unnoticed. In the late 1920s, when working in Germany with the youth and workers' movements, Reich recognized the basic connection between adolescent sexual misery and juvenile delinquency. Today, this connection is not even perceived, let alone understood. Even the brightest and most progressive educators are unaware of it, limited as they are by an ignorance of energetic functioning and the central importance of the orgasm in maintaining bioemotional health.

This is the case because mechanistic thinking, thinking which explains living functions in terms of mechanical concepts, prevails. The currently accepted explanation of adolescent turmoil describes it as the result of biochemical abnormalities in the brain. A "biochemical imbalance" has become the pervasive, "medicalized" explanation for all behavioral and emotional symptoms and problems. It is also a new ideology whose function, like that of every ideology, is to conceal and evade the truth. Its narrow, mechanistic focus places the real cause of adolescent turmoil and neurotic behavior beyond reach.

Even though there are a significant number of sociological studies of the sexual behavior of adolescents, they are of limited value given the investigators' mechanistic perspective and minimal or lack of understanding of natural, healthy sexual functioning. Several, for example, have found a correlation between early adolescent sexual activity, ambiguously defined in these studies, and rebellious, anti-social behavior. According to these authors, early adolescent sexual activity leads to juvenile delinquency. Although there may, in fact, be a statistical correlation between the two, from an organomic perspective, a basic, critical distinction must be made—is this healthy sexual activity, a core expression, or is it neurotic, an expression of the secondary layer? All of these studies fail to make this important distinction. Thus, one is left to believe that *any* form of adolescent sexuality leads to juvenile delinquency. Given the prevalence of armor, it is fair to assume that the sexual behaviors they have considered derive from the secondary layer and are, therefore, neurotic. If that is the case, it should not be surprising that early onset of sexual activity is associated with increased anti-social behavior.

None of the authors of these studies have a positive, supportive attitude toward adolescent sexuality. They all, directly or indirectly, discourage or openly oppose it. Very few support the adolescent's right to a healthy, satisfying sexual life. This sex-negative attitude reaches back through history and can be found in every patriarchal culture. Reich, confronted with sex-negative attitudes in his work for

sexual reform in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, countered these in his public "hygiene" meetings and in his published writings. He not only advocated noninterference with the sexual development of children and adolescents, but also stated that a sex-positive attitude was essential.

The social environment today is very different, of course, from that in which Reich lived and worked. Reich was confronted with an overall repressive and sex-negative society. Today, we are confronted with a permissive but, nevertheless, sex-negative society. Although the media abound with explicit sexual material and sexual references and expressions are part of everyday language, the underlying attitude about sexuality has remained the same. Despite a superficial bravado, sexuality is still steeped in anxiety, shame, and fear. In this age of "liberation" from almost everything, modern man continues to disdain his natural functioning and is unable to fully enjoy what most everyone knows deep down is his most longed-for pleasure.

Parents and educators are struggling to find a solution to the problem of adolescent sexuality. They are, however, largely ambivalent about the subject. On the one hand, they realize that expectations of abstinence until marriage are unrealistic, but on the other hand, without an understanding of the *distinction* between healthy and neurotic sexuality, they are unable to acknowledge and accept the reality of sexual functioning as good and necessary for health. As a consequence, we have a society that remains confused, paralyzed, and ineffectual as it struggles with the issue of adolescent sexuality.

What then can orgonomic science contribute to the solution of adolescent turmoil? Orgonomy can offer its understanding and acceptance of the natural, healthy sexuality of children and adolescents and its capacity to distinguish primary biological impulses, *manifestations of health*, from secondary layer impulses, *manifestations of sickness*.

A sex-positive attitude is of primary importance if we want infants, children, and adolescents to fully develop their innate capacity for independence and responsibility. In the absence of fear

and guilt about their sexuality, healthier, less armored individuals will be better able to establish a satisfying sexual life and discharge the bioenergy that would in the more armored, less healthy, fuel the harsh, destructive impulses of the secondary layer.

Those individuals who have been more seriously damaged during childhood will require medical orgone therapy to bring them to healthier functioning. If the sex-positive attitude is maintained from one generation to the next, it will be possible to reach a state of more natural, healthier functioning for individuals and society as a whole. Toward this goal, orgonomic science can provide young people, parents, physicians, educators, and others the knowledge they need to understand healthy sexuality and its central importance in sustaining bioemotional health and the individual's capacity for love, learning, and work.

In closing, I quote from Elsworth Baker's *Man in the Trap*:
The average adolescent today has too much life and health in him to repress, but has not learned responsibility, nor has he the knowledge of how to handle his problems. He knows only rebellion; so we have juvenile delinquency. The youth no longer will be denied their rights. Society must recognize this and help them to assume the responsibility of these rights.

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