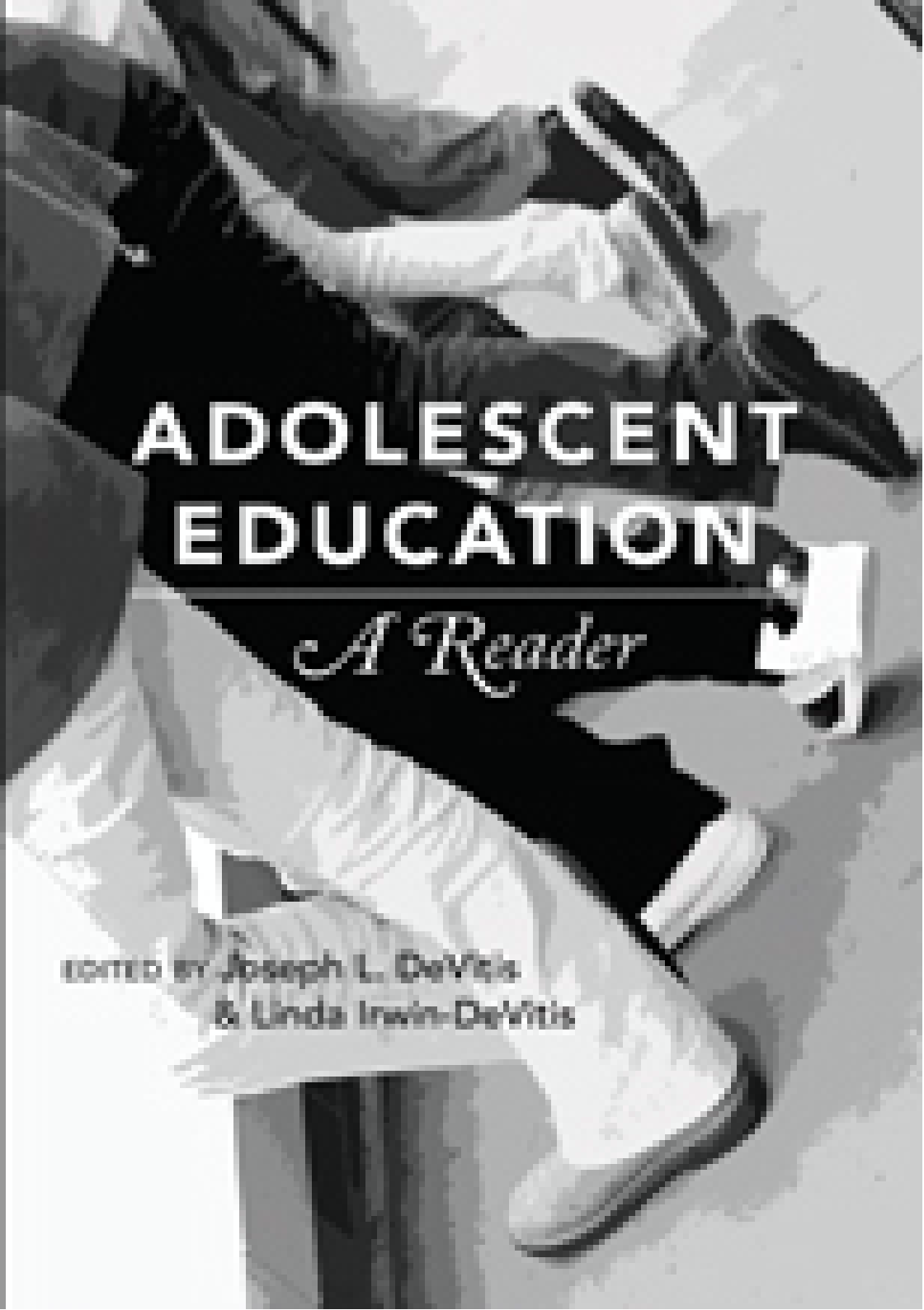
ADOLESCENT
EDUCATION
A Reader
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CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Overview

Adolescent Culture and the Culture of Refusal

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> In the best of circumstances, the tasks and striving of adolescence are tumultuous . . . purposelessness and rolelessness create a heightened sense of despair and an increased risk of disaster. Add to this the devastating effects of poverty, violence, and drugs, and the passage of adolescence becomes absolutely treacherous (Ayers, 1997, p. 140).

The onset of adolescence is a critical period of biological and psychological change for every child involving dramatic transitions in one's physical as well as one's social environment. These "transitions" have become more difficult in recent years as a combination of socioeconomic factors has led to an "erosion" of the traditional social-support networks (schools, family, and community) upon which adolescents so desperately depend. And yet, little, if any, work done on adolescence prior to the 1980s has focused on the implications of the loss of these support systems. And, further, little, if any, work since the 1980's has taken into account the dramatic effects that gender, race, and class have on adolescence, nor has any examined these intersections within the context of such a rapidly changing, and increasingly violent, social environment. Simply put, we know far too little about the relationship between adolescence, ethnic identity, and the perceptions and expectations of multiply-marginalized youth, the youth Ayers (1997) so eloquently describes as having a "treacherous" ride into adulthood.

In this chapter, I will first historically situate commonly-held theories on adolescence and individual development, beginning with Freud (1978), Erikson (1963, 1968) and Kohlberg (1981,1987) and moving on to Gilligan (1982, 1990) and the "new literature" on boys (Faludi, 1999; Garbarino, 1999; Pollack, 1998; Real, 1997). I will then examine some of the cultural and social factors at play in adolescents' lives, emphasizing the roles of family and community as crucial contexts in which adolescents develop. With this in mind, I will examine recent literature that points toward the "staggering array of guises" (Strauss, p. vii) that violence takes among adolescents, and the importance of recognizing that violence, too, can best be understood by plac-

ing it in socio/cultural and historical contexts. And finally, I will turn toward a discussion of the notion of "adolescence as social policy" as I explore the role of the school, examining, in particular, how and why multiply-marginalized youth share "precious little with other [adolescent] groups" (Strauss, p. 4). Exacerbated by institutionalized racism and fueled by the reality of the poverty and the lack of opportunity within the outside community, school simply becomes another place where these adolescents experience loss, precipitously entering a "culture of refusal."

Historical Settings: Individual Development

At the turn of the 20th century, adolescence was believed to be a time of "ambiguous and prolonged transition" (Straus, p. 4) in part because of an intense interplay between sexual and moral life (Freud, 1978) that needed to be resolved. In fact, this dichotomous notion of adolescence as a time period in which sexuality interrupted one's moral reasoning and thereby one's subsequent successful transition into adulthood remained firmly entrenched in the work of psychologists well into the 1980s and still can be found today in selected pieces of research on the topic.

Kaplan (1984), for example, centered much of her discussion on the physical manifestations of adolescence, including, most notably, work on the harmful effects of masturbation. If unchecked, she claimed, adolescent masturbation would "serve regression and *impede* the forward-moving aspects of adolescent development" (p. 201) as well as "threaten[ing] the needs of the larger social community" (p. 196).

At the same time, researchers were re-visiting the notion of "turmoil theory" to explain the rite of passage of adolescents. Led by Erikson (1963, 1968), turmoil theory, re-coined as "identity crisis theory," posited that adolescents were not able to function well until they encountered a series of struggles that would help them form their own identities. The primary task of the adolescent, therefore, was to develop an "ego identity," as he or she struggled with developing "basic" skills that included literacy, intimacy, and problem solving. This was predicated, however, on the premise that adolescents had an overall sense of "personal safety." If adolescents were unable to develop this sense of self within a safety network they then would fall prey to "role confusion" and become dangerously vulnerable to "delinquency, peer pressure, and . . . severe psychological disturbances" (Straus, 1994, p. 3). Erikson, importantly, too, was one of the first researchers to link personal identity and its evolution with the changing nature of culture and social change. Kohlberg (1981, 1987), on the other hand, reframed Freud's original work on the connections between identity development and moral development. Essentially, Kohlberg claimed that in order for adolescents to develop any sense of personal identity, thereby gaining entrance into adulthood, they needed to adopt a common understanding of a "*singular*" notion of morality.

Based on a longitudinal study of 84 boys (almost all white and middle class) over a period of 20 years, Kohlberg (1981) developed a model of "normal" cognitive development that included an acceptance of a code in which "moral dilemmas are discussed and resolved in a manner which will stimulate normal behavior" (p. 675), i.e., an "ethic of justice." Because young women (and presumably young men who were not middle class and white) did not see right and wrong

in the same way as young men in the study did (i.e., they did not always hold an "ethic of justice" as central to a notion of morality and moral behavior), they experienced an abnormal transition into adulthood. Young women (and young men) who did not articulate an ethic of justice, therefore, were presumed to have critical gaps in their abilities to conduct moral reasoning and exhibit moral behavior.

In her crucial work of the 1980s, however, Gilligan (1982) presented an alternative theory of adolescent development that examined, specifically, a *female* model of transition. In this model, "morality is conceived in interpersonal terms and goodness is equated with helping and pleasing others" (p. 18). Grounded in opposition to the "ethic of justice" that served the white male privilege so well, this "ethic of care" firmly re-centered young women's (and others') cognitive and moral development within a stable, balanced and thereby "normal" framework. Gilligan's work, for the first time, had begun to shift the understandings of adolescent transitions to include more perspectives and voices. Interestingly, although Erikson (1963, 1968) had attempted to make connections between his theories of identity development to the changing nature of society, it was not until Gilligan's work that any notion of discussion of identity development was discussed outside of the "normal white male" range.

Adolescent Girls and a Loss of Voice

According to Gilligan (1990), it is absolutely crucial at the early adolescent stage (usually considered to begin around the fifth grade or at 10 years of age) for girls not to separate formal education from other powerful out-of-school learning experiences. As young women learn to deal with evolving emotional issues such as connection and relationship and learn to deal with the perceived validity of these evolving emotions, they require guidance, role models, and confirmation to further their emotional development. Instead, however, because formal education has traditionally centered on other issues—i.e., autonomy, independence, detachment, and separation—adolescent girls not only begin to "observe where and when women speak and when they are silent" (Gilligan, 1990, p. 25), but also begin to learn precisely how to separate formal educational experiences from their other learning experiences. In other words, girls learn, and internalize, that what they consider to be central to their learning and knowledge lies, in fact, outside of any formal school realm. Girls understand that the image of the nice girl is so persuasive that they learn to modulate, silence, or appropriate others' voices altogether.

Feminist researchers (Belenky et al., 1986; Fine 1987, 1991a; Gilligan, 1982, 1990; Gilbert, 1989, 1991) see an appropriation of voice as extremely problematic for girls. Because girls have traditionally held few positions from which to speak (Gilbert, 1989), they typically learn to do what these researchers have called "doubling their voices. This doubling of voice is considered to be a direct response to a situation of a "deeply-knotted dilemma of being at once inside and outside of the world they are entering as young women" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 148). In other words, girls feel they must present separate voices depending on the context, audience, purpose, and theme for both speaking and writing.

Fine's (1987) work among urban adolescent girls supports the notion that girls learn to develop two or more separate voices. "Good" girls trained themselves to speak and produce in two voices, one academic, and one at the margin. While the academic voice was one that denied class,

gender, and race and "reproduced ideologies about hard work success, and their 'natural' sequence; and stifled the desire to disrupt?" (p. 163), the marginal voice expressed more private experiences and snuggles such as those that *revolved around* discussions of gender, race, and class. This particular two-voice dilemma was often more permanently resolved by "creative, if ultimately self-defeating strategies" (p. 164) such as dropping out of school.

One major result of this emphasis on the differing experiences of girls' transitions into adulthood has been to re-examine boys' development, finally, perhaps, from within the socio-cultural perspective so desperately lacking in any early studies.

The New Literature on Boys: A Loss of Heart

Recently, both psychologists and educators (Faludi, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Garbarino, 1999; Pollack, 1998; Real, 1997) have begun to write that "a national crisis of boyhood" (Hall, 1999, p. 33) is upon us. Tragically realized before much of the research reached the mainstream public (see news accounts on the school shootings by adolescent males in Littleton, Jonesboro, Springfield, and Columbine High School in Colorado, 1998 and 1999), the crisis has now captured the attention of the general public. In a desperate attempt to ascribe blame, however, policy and law-makers seem to have obscured (or discounted) the very real challenges inherent in the volatile social environment that adolescents are faced with at the beginning of the 21st century. And yet, as a result of the school tragedies (and partly fueled by the AIDS epidemic), a new "masculine ideology" (Pleck, 1988) has emerged from the literature. Called the "new literature" on boys, this ideology measures risk for dangerous sexual behavior, substance use, educational problems, and encounters with law enforcement and the criminal justice system by the degree to which males subscribe to traditional roles (e.g., a need for physical toughness; a reluctance to talk about problems; an unwillingness to do things "feminine," such as housework or childrearing; and an undying need for respect of masculinity). That is, boys who have difficulty reconciling the traditional values of their fathers and other older male relatives with a feminist culture that celebrates sensitivity and girls' voices are in danger of becoming "un-done."

According to Real (1997), for most boys, becoming a man is not so much an acquisition of something good, but a disavowal of something bad. He explains:

> When researchers asked girls and women to define what it means to be feminine, the girls answered with positive language: to be compassionate, to be connected, to care about others. Boys and men, on the other hand, when asked to describe masculinity, predominantly responded with double negatives. Boys and men did not talk about being strong so much as about not being weak. They do not list independence so much as not being dependent. They did not speak about being close to their fathers so much as about pulling away from their mothers. In short, be[coming] a man generally means not being a woman. As a result, boys' acquisition of malehood is a negative achievement. . . . Masculine identity development turns out to be not a process of development at all but rather a process of elimination, a successive unfolding of loss. (p. 130)

This successive unfolding is undoubtedly exacerbated by the effects of race and class. In an adolescent world already fraught with strife and confusion, multiply-marginalized adolescent males, in particular, attempt to make the transition into adulthood amidst social systems designed to segregate and punish, rather than include and support.

Cultural and Social Settings: Family and Community Roles

The family remains the primary group from which adolescents learn the norms and social expectations of human behavior, as well as the most important source from which children receive emotional nurturance. In fact, much like the development research on the individual, family life-cycle theories address the various stages that adolescents must complete from within the familial structure itself, a structure that, once again, must be perceived as "safe." And yet, family life-cycle theories become distinct from individualistic theories in that here the development, that is the emotional and economic stability of the family, directly impacts adolescents' growth.

Today, one in four adolescents is raised in a single-parent household where 70% of the mothers in those households are working and 46% of those households are poor, with a median income of only $9,000. Adolescents are greatly over-represented among poverty populations of all races, but among Blacks that figure mirrors the general populace at 46.1%; among Latinos it is slightly lower, at 40.9%. (As a single parent of a 15-year-old son who, along with family and friends, has raised him exclusively since he was two years old, I cringe when I hear that "single mothers" are to blame for societal ills, and I, therefore, in no way mean to imply that children cannot be "successful" in single parent households.) Further, there is a strong positive correlation between poverty, i.e., economic stability, and "delinquency" and violence. Children raised in poverty, with parents who are either working long or unusual hours or who have become too isolated and disenfranchised to care for children on a level that white mainstream society sees fit, often find that they have little to depend on both emotionally and financially within their homes. Lacking resources and the ability to tap into the support systems available to other adolescents, poor adolescents often react to the victimization they endure by engaging in "anti-social" or violent behavior. (A caveat here, too: obviously there are other important factors at work besides poverty as evidenced, again, by the school shootings in white middle-class and upper-middle-class communities.)

Fifty thousand adolescents—a number equivalent to all of those Americans who died in the Vietnam War—have been killed in violent acts in the United States since 1979 (Strauss, 1994, p. xiv). Although typically violence flourishes where familial abuse, neglect, poverty and societal and institutional racism and inequities abound, putting urban, poor adolescents most at risk, recent research (Dryfoos, 1990) claims that violence in the 2000s will cut across social and economic lines. A staggering one in four adolescents today will experience a form of violence so severe that they "have little chance of becoming responsible adults." In fact, Dryfoos (1990) sees the problem so overwhelming that she states:

> a new class of untouchables is emerging in our inner cities, on the social fringes of suburbia, and in some rural areas: young people who are functionally illiterate, disconnected from school, depressed, prone to drug abuse and early criminal activity, and eventually, parents of unplanned and unwanted babies (p. 3).

Violence in adolescence is primarily the result of the profound economic, social, and political inequalities that many adolescents are faced with on a daily basis. In a society dominated and controlled by an entrenched patriarchy, poor adolescents, in particular, find few adults whom they can look up to and on whom they can model their behavior. Violence, therefore, becomes an adaptive, and often a sole, coping mechanism.

Adolescence as Social Policy: School, Cultural Compatibility Theory and a Culture of Refusal

The violence so prevalent in our communities today makes it an unrealistic expectation that schools alone can prepare adolescents for work, further education, and life in general. The debilitating living conditions that so many of our youth encounter as routine make it a difficult task indeed for these adolescents to succeed in a traditional school setting. Incongruent with their life experiences and unprepared to give the support these adolescents so desperately need, middle or junior high schools typically become the very sites where delinquency develops.

At the turn of the 20th century it was thought that all adolescents' lives and experiences were incongruent with the way schools have been set up and run. Therefore, it was decided that schooling for adolescents needed to be re-conceptualized, and thus, the idea of the junior high school was born. Essentially, the junior high school was established to differentiate, and isolate, as well as to help society create a means and a context in which to not only "protect" but also to help "sort" adolescents for future work and careers. At the same time, three major social policy changes were being enacted to coincide with the invention of the junior high school. These were mandatory high school, the juvenile justice system (see Ayers' 1997 account), and federal legislation against child labor (Strauss, 1994, p. xi). These social policies, coupled with a new vision for the schooling of this age group, established "adolescence" as a bona fide developmental period between childhood and adulthood over which the government had much control. Out of policy makers' favor from the 1930s to the 1960s, junior high schools enjoyed a revival that eventually led to the modern-day creation of middle schools, the places where, it was believed, both the educational and developmental needs of adolescents could truly be met (Hechinger, 1993).

Today's middle schools, however, are still ill-defined. Seen as places where the transition could be eased from childhood to adulthood (and from elementary school to high school), where the notion of incongruence could be addressed and soothed, a lack of understanding (by teachers, administrators, and other support personnel, including parents) of what constitutes this transition is apparent. In fact, the middle school has been described as the "breeding ground for behaviors and attitudes that cause many students to drop out of school" (Takanishi, 1993, p. 73).

Realistically, though, we still know far too little about how these "incongruent" worlds "combine in the day-to-day lives of adolescents to affect their engagement in educational settings" (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998, p. 3). If we, for example, believe, as Giroux (In Jipson et al., 1995, p. x) would have us believe, that "schools function as cultural sites actively engaged in the production of not only knowledge but also social identities," then we might come to understand how poor youth, in particular, seek to develop their social identities outside of school, where cultural space and expectations of everyday life are in line with their daily experiences.

Cultural compatibility theory seeks to describe and explain this incongruence and lack of common cultural space between minority youths' lives and experiences at home and their lives and experiences at in school. Cultural compatibility research not only draws on observational data to document the important differences between home and school for minority youth but also describes in detail the rich, though different, home and school learning environments within which these students live and learn. Much of what we have learned from cultural compatibili-

ty theory has provided us with empirical evidence that supports the claim that "problematic" interactions in schools [among minority youth] are, in fact, related to cultural differences (Heath, 1983; Trueba, Guthrie, & Au, 1981; Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1988).

The notion of cultural differences as a major factor in the challenge of the poor, urban adolescent's development is found in recent research that strongly posits that school is simply not "enveloping" enough to help these (and similar) adolescents approximate success. In a work entitled "Schools Are Not the Answer," Traub (2000) argues that "school . . . as we understand it now, is not as powerful an institution as it seems." In effect, poor (urban) students' educational inequality, he claims, is not rooted in the school; rather, it is deeply entrenched in the existing social, cultural, and economic problems and challenges of the urban community. Coleman (in Traub, 2000) elaborates:

> the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (p. 55)

Coleman continues by saying that it is an "impossibility" to expect that school can provide all of what he calls the "child's human and social capital," terms invented by social scientists in the 1960s to "describe and quantify" the effects of family, community, and school on the developing child. Human capital refers to all human capabilities that are passed along from family to their children, accumulating like other capital, and "produced," in part by school. Social capital is defined as "the norms, the social networks, the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the children . . ." (Coleman in Traub, 2000). Because of the enormous influence of the human and social capitals, "the effects of home and community *blotted out* (emphasis mine) almost all those of school" (p. 57). The imbalance, therefore, once seen as being firmly entrenched in the lack of connections between home and school, is now regarded as being situated on much larger continua. Where schooling, the resources of the local community, and the needs of the larger society in today's global, technological workplace become at odds—where the school is not providing the extra support missing from the family, the community is not providing the extra support missing from both the family and the school, and the larger society offers no support in the form of work—multiply-marginalized adolescents, in particular, become effectively engulfed in the *incongruence* of their lives. This incongruence leads, then, precipitously to a culture of refusal, where it is believed that the lack of support systems are unnecessary, unwanted, and certainly undermining of adolescents' true needs and desires.

Adolescence was invented for specific reasons at a particular point in history; its roots, therefore, are both social and political, and so, too, especially is the hopelessness, joblessness, and violence associated with it (Straus, 1994, xiv). Contrary to the days where unskilled work could be found in the industries of mass production, today's high-tech society requires finely-tuned skills, particularly in what the *New York Times* once called "the manipulation of letters and symbols." Further, the obsolescence of our traditional learning systems as well as a changing, global economy that depends increasingly more on human resources has, in fact, most adversely affected poor and minority students.

Undoubtedly, school remains a "pivotal institution" in adolescents' lives. Along with the other major factors (e.g., family and community) that strongly influence the adolescent's transition into adulthood, schools, too, remain notoriously ineffective in attending to "the social meanings of

ethnicity and the identity development of minority adolescents" (Takanishi, 1993, p. 56). Indeed, much of the current research states that "the real damage gets done in middle school" (Hall, 1999, p. 35). Being an adolescent in this society is intrinsically stressful, but among multiply-marginalized adolescents, the transitions into adulthood may be particularly so as race, class, and gender intersect to produce different and more pronounced patterns of anxiety and challenge.

We have a great need for continuity in schools (i.e., curricular and developmental) and congruence among social institutions (i.e., families, communities and community organizations, and schools). In essence, to begin, we need to give students the "cultural space within dominant arenas" (Ferrell, 1997, p. 22) where, "among marginalized kids, battles over cultural space, are . . . more intense . . . [as the] creation and contestation of cultural space shape expectations/experiences of everyday life." Without such spaces, I argue, schools, as one crucial support system needed for adolescent development, fail the adolescent.

Multiply-marginalized adolescents, just like all adolescents, are "avid seekers of moral authenticity" (Ayers, 1997, p. 139), and yet they come face-to-face with a society that disdains them, i.e., does not legitimize their understandings of themelves and their perspectives of their social world. Like the girls about whom Brown & Gilligan (1992) write, marginalized adolescents learn, too, to separate their formal education experiences—to refuse their formal educational experiences—for more powerful learning experiences in out-of-school contexts, taking their voices, their cultural spaces, and their literacies underground, to that place I call "a culture of refusal."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. The author claims that traditional psychological theories have failed to provide adequate socio-cultural perspectives on adolescent development. How convincing is her argument? Why or why not?

2. What is meant by "a national crisis of boyhood"? If true, what has contributed to that "crisis"? How valid is the assessment of the purported "crisis?"

3. In what ways have economic, social, and political inequities affected violent youth behavior? Give examples.

4. Has the transition from "junior high school" to "middle school" effected significant change in adolescent development? Why or why not?

5. How does "cultural compatibility theory" explain the dissonance in youths' daily lives, both in and out of school? How do race, class, and gender contexts contribute to that theory?