

COMING OF AGE IN AMERICA: WORK, ABORTION, AND THE FAMILY

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- Ellen Greenberger and Laurence Steinberg. *When Teenagers Work: The Psychological and Social Costs of Adolescent Employment*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986). xvii + 275 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$17.95.
- Gary B. Melton (ed.). *Adolescent Abortion: Psychological and Legal Issues*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). 152 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$17.50.
- Hyman Rodman and Jan Trost (eds.). *The Adolescent Dilemma: International Perspectives on the Family Planning Rights of Minors*. (New York: Praeger, 1986). x + 251 pp. Notes, bibliography. \$35.00.

In their book entitled, *When Teenagers Work*, Greenberger and Steinberg argue that to be meaningful, jobs for adolescents need to impart skills or knowledge valuable for adult life, contribute to the financial need of the family, and create interaction with adults who have a stake in preparing them for adulthood. These elements tend to be missing in the current adolescent workplace. As a consequence, this book questions the popular view that teenage involvement in the world of work is positive.

The conventional wisdom is that teenagers learn to assume responsibility on the job. They help their families financially while keeping themselves out of trouble. This book warns that a superficial ability to play adult roles does not necessarily mean that there has been a corresponding development of self-understanding. Young people may acquire the appearance but not the substance of maturity, what Erik Erikson refers to as *pseudo-maturity* (Erikson 1968; Friedenberg, 1959). Excessive commitment by adolescents to earning money may interfere with introspection, active and meaningful engagement with others, and experimentation in a variety of social roles. Extensive part-time employment during the school year may undermine education, lead to a higher level of luxury spending without helping the family, promote some forms of delinquent behavior, and increase cynicism about the pleasures and worth of productive labor.

The authors disagree with several influential commissions which argue that adolescent employment has a variety of positive effects, such as providing training for the adult world. Wrapping

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hamburgers, the authors claim, does not provide valuable training. In the past certain occupations provided continuity from adolescent to adult employment: the skilled trades and crafts, factory work, and farm work. Adolescent work in these occupational groups has diminished significantly and has been replaced by employment in areas that have little connection with adult employment. In 1940, farm work accounted for nearly half of all employed sixteen- and seventeen-year olds and over two thirds of all employed fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds. By 1970 this figure had dropped to about five percent.

While raising good questions, the book is less convincing when it comes to alternatives. If teenagers were not working, would they be using their time more effectively? Many youngsters do not seem to participate, either on their own initiative or through some formal program, in activities that adults define as worthwhile. It would be nice if school were a stimulating environment for all children; but what about those who find it boring and degrading? The authors suggest making work a condition of maintaining a certain grade-point average. While this may be helpful for some, it is not clear that it would provide support for the less talented or for those who have already found the school system to be a very unrewarding experience.

The book does not show that having more time would lead to introspection and psychological exploration. Similarly, one might debate the argument that there is greater need for psychological development than social development. It is also difficult to see what policies would lead to more satisfying experiences in schools, especially for lower class youngsters, even though there is evidence that some programs have improved the quality of activities in the classroom (Hawkins *et al.*, 1986; and Gottfredson, 1986a, 1986b).

Other policy implications are somewhat clearer. Raising the minimum wage may reduce the incentive to hire adolescents for longer hours. Limiting the hours that juveniles can work may also have merit. However, the fast food industry prefers to hire teenagers, who work cheaply and who fit a certain image, over adults who may be unemployed. Constructive legislation would be difficult to design, pass, and implement.

The authors also suggest that working could increase rather than reduce delinquency. However, in citing the work of Gottfredson (1985) and Lyle (not Lee) Shannon (1982) they may be misreading that research. For example, Gottfredson writes "teenage working does not increase delinquency and does not have a detrimental effect on commitment to education, involvement in extra-curricular activities, time spent on homework, attachment to school, or attachment to parents" (1985). The book is guilty of selective bias at times, and it should be viewed as an interesting and plausible argument rather than a convincing presentation of facts.

Adolescent Abortion: Psychological and Legal Issues, edited by Gary Melton, is the report of the interdivisional committee on adolescent abortion of the American Psychological Association. Chapters cover epidemiology, psychological issues, the consequences of child bearing and abortion, and legal and ethical issues in counseling. The United States Supreme Court has made decisions related to the conflicting interests of the adolescent, her family, and the larger society. In trying to resolve some of these dilemmas, the courts have usually made three questionable assumptions regarding these adolescents—their unique physical and psychological vulnerability; their competence; and the assumption of parental support and the right to know.

First, the book reviews evidence that teenagers are no more likely than adult women to suffer complications as a result of abortion. In fact, the mortality rate for proceeding with a pregnancy is five times higher for teenagers than the mortality rate associated with adolescent abortion. Evidence is also lacking that the psychological effects of abortion are more severe than for adults. Although any decision to abort will be stressful, the modal response to abortion is one of relief, for both adolescent girls and adults. By contrast, a decision to give birth has many potential negative consequences. Adolescent parenthood typically results in lower educational attainment, decreased ability to stay off public assistance, and if the girl marries, the likelihood of an unstable marriage. Another consequence of making teenage abortions difficult to obtain is that the unwanted children themselves become the victims. Unwanted children experience a higher incidence of referrals for mental health services, low educational attainment, and high maternal emotional rejection.

Second, adolescents are as capable as adults of understanding the alternatives. They are, however, more likely than adults to perceive that their decision was determined by parental wishes and less likely to anticipate consultation with a professional about the decision. We automatically assume that age is related to good judgement, but the evidence on cigarette-smoking doctors suggests that neither age nor education guarantee wise decision-making.

Competence and maturity are difficult to assess if one regards any minor who becomes pregnant as “immature,” while others perceive any unmarried pregnant teenager who seeks an abortion as demonstrating a “mature” response to the situation. However, comparisons between adolescents who abort and those who give birth show that those who abort display more adaptive and healthier personality functioning. They also seem to become more effective users of contraceptive methods than those who give birth; this, in turn, reduces the number of unwanted children in the future.

Third, the book shows that research on the communication between parents and adolescents gives reason to doubt the helpfulness of many parents in advising their children regarding preg-

nancy. The involvement of parents is usually helpful when adolescents feel supported by their parents in their right to make a decision. A pregnant adolescent sometimes overestimates the negative reaction of her parents. The perception of probable hostile reactions in their parents can increase the delay in seeking medical attention if parental notification is required. Delay in seeking abortion substantially increases the medical and psychological risks associated with abortion. Unfortunately, the contemporary reality of family life suggests that sexuality is usually not a comfortable topic for parents and daughters.

The issue of the parents' right to know is currently being debated with some vigor. Requiring parental notification seems to increase the medical and psychological risks for minors by increasing the likelihood of delay and inhibiting a more reasoned weighing of the alternatives. A number of states have enacted statutes that provide the option of bypassing parents and seeking approval for an abortion from a judge. If the judge finds the girl to be mature, her privacy must be respected. If she is immature, the judge must determine whether an abortion would be in her best interests. In practice these proceedings have been a ritual supporting the decision of the minor. It is difficult to imagine an adolescent too immature to make the decision regarding an abortion but mature enough to rear a child. Thus, the three basic assumptions underlying current laws do not square with reality.

The psychologically-oriented authors of this book naturally favor counseling. Sociologically-oriented readers may be more favorable to recommendations relating to other policies, but most scholars in this area would probably agree with the main implications of this work: minors would be better served if they get advice early, receive support for their final decision, and, if abortion is the chosen alternative, have the operation completed early rather than late. Unfortunately, the efforts of the Reagan administration to cut support for abortion-related research and counseling services will hamper efforts to help pregnant adolescents make careful decisions.

The authors should be commended for emphasizing the hazards surrounding adolescent abortion that are increased by delays in the decision process, delays that are often created by legal procedures. As in many edited volumes, there is a certain amount of repetition; but the clarity of the arguments make this book an important contribution.

In *The Adolescent Dilemma*, editors Rodman and Trost examine the rights of minors with regard to family planning in different countries. Such an enterprise is fraught with problems of data gathering and interpretation, and it is not clear that innovative or efficient policies in one country can be adopted by another country. Moreover, developments are often confusing in any particular country. In countries where the population is predomi-

nantly Catholic with anti-abortion traditions (Belgium, Ireland, Italy), for example, significant anomalies exist. In Belgium, abortion has been illegal until very recently, but the conditions there are heavily influenced by the availability of abortion in the Netherlands and Great Britain. It is somewhat surprising that the frequency of abortion in young women (about one per two births) is so high, when the attitudes are more opposed to abortion in Belgium than in most other northern European countries.

Ireland illustrates a closer link between attitudes, laws, and practices. The rate of illegitimacy in Ireland has always been low relative to other countries, even though marriage usually occurs at a later age by international standards. Pregnancy outside of marriage was considered to be a shameful matter to the girl and her family. A 1977 study found premarital sex was regarded as "always wrong" by seventy-one percent of a national sample of the adult population. Ireland differs from other European societies in terms of higher levels of permanent celibacy, a later age for marriage, and restricted premarital intercourse. Abortion has been illegal in Ireland since 1861, a law that still seems to have general acceptance. However, women seeking abortions have their pregnancies terminated in the United Kingdom and incur no penalty when they return to Ireland.

An altogether different picture emerges in Canada and Czechoslovakia. Canada has special committees to make decisions regarding abortion, as does Czechoslovakia. In Canada, abortion cannot be legally performed without approval by a therapeutic abortion committee set up by the hospital. While the law is somewhat unclear on the matter, in practice most hospitals require the consent of the parent for a therapeutic abortion on an unmarried minor. In addition, more than two thirds of the hospitals surveyed required that married women have the husband's consent. In the case of unmarried adult women, hospital committees required the consent of the women's fathers, even though there is no legal requirement for such a step. Although a minor has a legal right to an abortion, she may be denied access by a restrictive abortion committee policy or by the lack of such a committee at the hospital in her community. The Canadian situation illustrates the discrepancy between law and practice as well as traditional adherence to norms reflecting male dominance.¹

A common theme runs through many of these chapters: depending on wealth, local conditions, and practices of various agencies, juveniles receive differential treatment in many countries regardless of their legal rights. The poorest and those with the greatest family problems get the least amount of help. The therapeutic abortion committees in Canada, like the courts in the

¹ Since this book and book review were written, the Supreme Court decision regarding Morgentaler has done away with such committees.

United States and elsewhere, create delay and degradation with little evidence that they make a contribution.

Additional chapters on Spain, Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, Hungary, and United States have insights, but the reader should be wary of some of the comparisons. The quality of evidence is difficult to assess and some of the authors make claims when they should be offering hypotheses. The difficulties that arise when broad generalizations are attempted is illustrated by the chapter on the World Health Organization, which describes a survey of nations regarding their attitudes toward sex education and other family planning practices. When I think of the Canadian scene, I have trouble imagining which government agency or civil servant would be able to complete such a survey on behalf of my country. There might be considerable debate regarding the correct response to each question. This World Health Organization survey illustrates the almost impossible task of generalizing certain characteristics of national family planning.

Despite these flaws, the book provides clear illustrations of societies with superior strategies. Denmark and Sweden have reduced the damage to peoples' lives compared to countries such as the United States and Canada. For example, illegally induced abortion has virtually disappeared. The fear that abortion might be used as an alternative to contraception, especially by the very young, seems to be unfounded. After an initial increase in the range of legal abortions, due to the decrease in illegal abortion, the rate has declined steadily since 1975. Fewer children are born to unmarried adolescents. In Sweden mothers under sixteen gave birth to 1.4 percent of all children born in 1959 but only .08 percent in 1979.

Adolescent Abortion and *The Adolescent Dilemma* deal with an issue where there is considerable correspondence between evidence and desired social action. Both books argue that there are clear advantages to helping adolescents make their own decisions regarding family planning. While right-to-life groups will not share the conclusions that arise from these two books, they must accept the reality that the imposition of their views would lead to much suffering and heavy social cost.

As one searches for an intelligent policy regarding family planning, it is quite clear that women bear the bulk of the burden, whether married or not. However, the people who make the major decisions in terms of policy, in the courts, or on therapeutic abortion committees, tend to be old, white, male, and affluent. Should decision-makers include the young, black, female, and poor?

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