

Book Review

Adolescencias del Siglo XXI. Del Frenesí al Vértigo: ¿Cómo Acompañarlos? [21st Century Adolescences. From Frenzy to Vertigo: How can we Support Them?]

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This small yet remarkable book could warrant a review nearly as long as the book itself, given the plethora of fascinating topics it addresses. All of this is done without straying from its primary subject: adolescence. In fact, it situates adolescence within the changing context of our society—a society marked by vulnerability (Pérez Álvarez, 2025). The book is about adolescence and, at the same time, it is an X-ray of the 21st century.

To begin with, it speaks of “adolescences” in the plural, reflecting the diverse adolescent experiences and lifestyles, moving beyond an understanding of adolescence merely as a developmental phase explained by evolutionary factors (bodily, hormonal, emotional, cognitive), as it is traditionally considered. Because of this, the book also discusses our society in transformation—arguably, a society that is itself adolescent. In this regard, the introduction presents one of the most significant (and perhaps surprising) novelties of today’s society, which is nonetheless crucial for understanding adolescence: the infantilization of adults and the adultification of children.

The infantilization of adults has been identified by terms that encapsulate this phenomenon, such as “generalized childhood” (Lacan), “kidult” or “child-adults” (Hayward, 2024), and “collective immaturity” (Urra, 2024), as well as the familiar “Peter Pan syndrome.” As the author says: “adults who aspire to behave like adolescents.” Conversely, the adultification of childhood is also recognized in expressions such as “hyper children,” a term coined by the author himself in a previous book in reference to demands and competencies that exceed the child’s years (including, for example, the sexualization of young girls). The result is the “erasure of childhood” and the “adolescent muddle.” And that, essentially, is where we find ourselves.

To understand this erasure of childhood and the extension of adolescence into adulthood (adulthood), the author devotes the first of the book’s two parts to analyzing the keys to the 21st century. He highlights three ongoing social transformations unfolding live, in real time, before our eyes—these are changes that, needless to say, “muddle” adolescence and confuse everyone else as well. These transformations include: the hyper logic captured by the metaphor “from frenzy to vertigo” (from euphoria to dysphoria); the trans phenomenon, broadly conceptualized as the body becoming a battleground for problems that do not originate in it; and finally, the hybrid real-virtual reality in which, as with a Möbius strip, “we enter from the outside (the in-person sphere) and, seamlessly, slide into the inside (the virtual sphere)”. Although this new world offers solutions to the “muddles” it creates, they are false solutions, as the author shows.

In the second part, the book offers real solutions to the complex “adolescent desert crossing”. Here the author brings into play a fine

analysis of contemporary society and the wisdom of clinical practice. The author emphasizes the strategy of accompaniment, but, far from adhering to its more common meaning (which seems like something that anyone could do), he reconstructs this approach in a more professional, anthropologically informed sense (including listening and questioning, as well as conversation and the recovery of rituals).

This great little book embodies the well-known principle—essential for any psychologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst worthy of the name—according to which one must act locally, but think globally. This dual local-global perspective is brought into play by the author both in his analysis of society, illustrated with clinical cases, and in his proposed solutions, never losing sight of the desert crossing. If, on the one hand, clinical cases embody the problems of ongoing social transformations by shedding light on them, on the other hand, the interventions, while they must be local—focused on the present case here and now—must also be considered within the broader social context.

The reader is thus guided and accompanied on this double global-local, contextual-clinical plane, moving back and forth between the analysis of society and the centrality of the individual clinical case. The reader will undoubtedly appreciate the apt and precise metaphors that are found throughout the text, for the purpose of clarity, avoiding the clinical technical language that always tends towards pathologization. The selected quotations that introduce each chapter and section, taken from a variety of sources, including young clients seen in the clinical practice, are sure to be appreciated. It is worth repeating, once again, the well-known aphorism, originally applied to physicians and strikingly fitting for psychologists, according to which the psychologist who only knows psychology does not even know psychology. Ramón Ubieto, in this and his other works, exemplifies this double focus: combining social and clinical analysis (global-local), as well as cultural wisdom and psychological knowledge, all informed by his “convicted and confessed” psychoanalytic background.

References

- Hayward, K. (2024). *Infantilised: How Our Culture Killed Adulthood*. Constable.
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