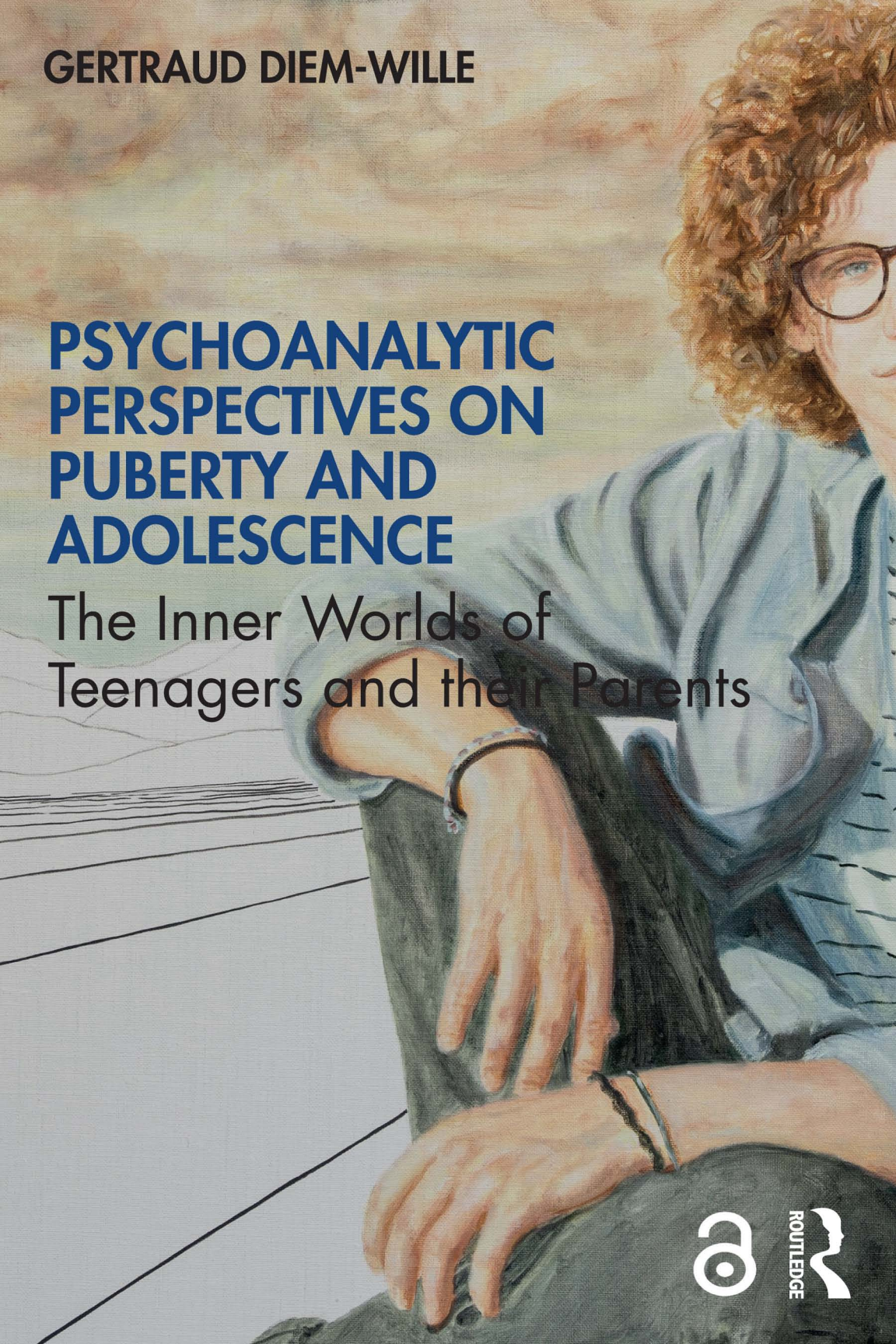
GERTRAUD DIEM-WILLE

# PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE

## The Inner Worlds of Teenagers and their Parents



ROUTLEDGE

# Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Puberty and Adolescence

Puberty is a time of tumultuous transition from childhood to adulthood activated by rapid physical changes, hormonal development and explosive activity of neurons. This book explores puberty through the parent-teenager relationship, as a "normal state of crisis", lasting several years and with the teenager oscillating between childlike tendencies and their desire to become an adult.

The more parents succeed in recognizing and experiencing these new challenges as an integral, ineluctable emotional transformative process, the more they can allow their children to become independent. In addition, parents who can also see this crisis as a chance for their own further development will be ultimately enriched by this painful process. They can face up to their own aging as they take leave of youth with its myriad possibilities, accepting and working through a newfound rivalry with their sexually mature children, thus experiencing a process of maturity, which in turn can set an example for their children.

This book is based on rich clinical observations from international settings, unique within the field, and there is an emphasis placed by the author on the role of the body in self-awareness, identity crises and gender construction. It will be of great interest to psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, parents and carers, as well as all those interacting with adolescents in self, family and society.

**Gertraud Diem-Wille** is Professor Emeritus at the University of Klagenfurt in the field of Psychoanalytic Education. She is a training analyst for children, adolescents and adults (IPA) and has pioneered and supported the training in psychoanalytic observational approaches to training in psychoanalytic and educational fields in Austria. She is the author of *The Early Years of Life* (Karnac 2011), *Young Children and Their Parents* (Karnac 2014) and *Latency: The Golden Age of Childhood* (Routledge 2014).

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# Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Puberty and Adolescence

## The Inner Worlds of Teenagers and their Parents

Gertraud Diem-Wille

Originally published as Pubertat – Die innere Welt der Adoleszenten und ihrer Eltern. Psychoanalytische Entwicklungstheorie nach Freud, Klein und Bion by W. Kohlhammer GmbH

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# Introduction

Puberty is a time of tumultuous transition from childhood to adulthood. This transformative developmental spurt is activated by rapid physical changes, hormonal development and the explosive activity of neurons. My book will describe both this physical development and the typically adolescent "state of mind" – something that can remain active long after adolescence is over. When the child attains independence, this developmental step demands a difficult balancing act from parents: they must be able to release their child without cutting their ties to him. Thus, accompanying an adolescent through adolescence constitutes a difficult emotional task for parents and teachers, although this development is also a quite "normal drama". This "normal state of crisis" lasts several years, with the teenager oscillating between childlike tendencies and his desire to become an adult. The more parents succeed in recognizing and experiencing these new challenges as an integral, ineluctable emotional transformative process, the more they can allow their children to become independent. In addition, parents will ultimately be enriched when they can also see this often painful crisis as a chance for their own further development: they can face up to their own aging as they take leave of youth with its myriad possibilities, accepting and working through a newfound rivalry with their sexually mature children, thus experiencing a process of maturity, which in turn can set an example for their children. In parents' interaction with children, the quality of a marital relationship is also important. Are they truly a creative, Oedipal, loving couple, capable both of love and of taking opposing positions? Can they support one another and master this turbulent time together?

First, let us clarify the often diffuse concepts of puberty and adolescence. "Puberty" is derived from the Latin word "pubertas", meaning sexual maturity and/or capacity, and refers to the period when the child's body transforms into an adult body capable of reproduction. This process of physical change is initiated by hormonal signals from the brain transmitted to the female ovaries and male testicles. With both genders, secondary sexual characteristics also develop during this period. For girls, puberty begins with the first menstruation between the ages of nine and eleven, and is concluded between the ages of sixteen to seventeen; with boys, puberty begins with the production of fertile sperm between the ages of eleven and twelve, and is concluded between the ages of sixteen and seventeen.

"Adolescence" is derived from the Latin word "adolescens", which means growing up or towards; "adolescent" denotes the individual who is growing, i.e., the adolescent female or male. It encompasses the mental and emotional reactions to physical signs of puberty, including a particular transitory outlook from the world of the child to that of the sexually mature adult. The biological capacity to conceive and give birth to a baby poses completely different questions than does the emotional readiness to embark on an intimate, responsible relationship to a partner. It is difficult to draw a clear and general distinction between puberty and adolescence. Waddell writes:

> For in essential ways they (puberty and adolescence, GDW) are inextricable – the nature of adolescence and its course are organized around responses to the upheaval of puberty. Adolescence can be described, in narrow terms, as a complex adjustment on the child's part to these major physical and emotional changes. This adjustment entails finding a new, and often hard-won, sense of oneself-in-the-world, in the wake of the disturbing latency attitudes and ways of functioning.
>
> (Waddell 2002, 140)

Thus, puberty is a more limited concept than adolescence and refers to physical changes and maturing. The time range of adolescence has been defined variously. In the USA, adolescence is equated with the "teenager years", from 13 through 19. In Europe, its time range is seen differently, from 16 to 24 years, with a distinction drawn between early, middle and late adolescence (Zimbardo and Gerrig 2004, 449). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescence as the period between ages ten and twenty. Cultural and societal conditions are also of major significance here, both for the onset of physical changes and for the mental and emotional tasks of finding a place in the world.

Only at the beginning of the 20th century did the term "adolescence" begin to be employed in academic or scientific discourse. G. Stanley Hall (1904) founded the sub-branch of psychological research into childhood and adolescence. He wrote:

> At no time of life is the love of excitement so strong as during the season of accelerated development of adolescence, which craves strong feelings and new sensations.
>
> (Hall 1904, Volume I, 368)

This understanding of the turbulent "storm and stress" (the German *Sturm und Drang*) period became the object of intense discussion, and was questioned by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, since she could not detect this phase in other cultures (see also Arnett and Hughes 2012, 9–10).

The developmental phase of adolescence long constituted a "neglected area" (A. Freud) in psychoanalysis. Anna Freud dubbed it *Sturm und Drang* in reference to a Romantic epoch of German literature.

Today, the adolescent phase is viewed to be equally as important as the first three years of life, since in both phases essential aspects of the personality are formed, giving rise to a coherent, stable self. The difference among individual adolescents can be enormous: whereas in earlier phases development centers on more general tendencies, in adolescence individual characteristics come into relief, widening the divergence from one adolescent to another.

We will seek first to describe the emotional cathexis (emotional investment) of the body as body ego, then the development of feeling, psychosexuality and thinking. These various aspects cannot be separated from one another, but consideration of them all should sharpen our view of each, even though they are interwoven as in a musical score: only together can they yield a sonic experience, as it were – the understanding of this phase of life.

# 1

# The body ego

There is no period – aside from the time in the womb – when the body alters as much as in puberty. Bodily changes are subject neither to a person's will nor their control, erupting and eliciting fiery emotions in the adolescent. Later, massive physical changes occur during pregnancy and aging, significantly affecting our emotional state, sense of identity and fears. Freud emphasizes that we cannot directly rule our bodies and that a person cannot experience objective biological gender identity; instead, we "libidinally cathect" our bodies from some inner source, consciously and unconsciously, linking a given drive energy to our body or some part of it. This in turn determines whether a person views his body as native or alien to him or as a mere mechanism – and whether he loves or hates his body in whole or in part. Each spurt of growth or change through growth or illness alters this emotional attitude toward the body. For instance, if a tooth or toe causes pain, a special contingent of attention and devotion is mobilized: the person then thinks only of this tooth or toe – for a given time, it constitutes the center of their emotional life.

During the relatively stable phase of latency, focus is on increasing body skills and mobility, with physical skills, sports and movement in competition with peers constituting important and pleasurable outlets. Now, without prior warning and without the child's participation, the body they have grown so familiar with undergoes a fundamental change, with no definite end in sight. This physical growth often already occurs at the end of latency, with the attendant emotional impact only following one or two years later: for instance, girls today often experience their first menstruation at the age of ten, without any mental and psychic readiness for motherhood. The great psychic task of adolescence consists of the adolescent finding his own place in the world and accomplishing the transition from his family to the greater world of adults. We will first describe the physiological changes of puberty, and then the adolescent's emotional and mental answer to them.

How massive these changes are – changes to be mastered within a short period of time – is indicated by the difference in physical appearance between 12 and 20 years of age. Some people change so drastically that they are virtually unrecognizable: out of a little girl emerges a sexually attractive young woman, or out of a little boy a tall, powerful man. Within a few years, adolescents must brace

themselves for a change not only in size but also in strength. The body's new form, an adolescent's changed voice, newly developed primary and secondary sexual organs: all elicit a new sense of body, with the most essential difference consisting in the biological capacity for becoming a mother or father. As Anderson writes: "What we see clinically in adolescence is the way the body that the adolescent relates to is a container for a whole history of sexual and other primitive object relationships both dyadic and triadic" (Anderson 2009, 1). The adolescent's massive bodily growth is accompanied by an alteration in emotional balance, influencing the deepest layers of the personality. Many adolescents arriving in therapy exhibit somatic symptoms such as anorexia, drug abuse and self-harm (slashing, for example) – all indicating deep subconscious fears. Anderson feels that these often bizarre symptoms – that could otherwise point to borderline or psychotic phenomena – should instead be seen as an exaggerated form of normal alteration in the personality. Adolescents now perceive the necessity of defining themselves anew – not only as their parents' son or daughter, but taking their own place in the world, becoming a potential husband or wife and acquiring the capacity for intimacy and sexuality in a close relationship.

These tasks must be accomplished during a time when the deepest wishes and passions from early childhood are revived. Adolescents must embark on a love relationship to someone of their own age and renounce earlier desires for their parent of the opposite sex. The adolescent must reorder his inner life. Contradictory wishes exists parallel to one another.

The wish to be loved, cared for and nourished – and to possess the source of these qualities – is accompanied by the wish to become independent and attain a better, more interesting place in the world. We will examine the adolescent's emotional and mental development in later chapters. First, we turn in more detail to physical alterations – not forgetting that both the secretion of hormones and attendant physical changes will awaken and intensify emotional and mental conflicts.

In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud writes of the changes puberty brings:

> With the arrival of puberty, changes set in which are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape. The sexual instinct has hitherto been predominantly auto-erotic; it now finds a sexual object. Its activity has hitherto been derived from a number of separate instincts and erotogenic zones, which, independently of one another, have pursued a certain sort of pleasure as their sole sexual aim. Now, however, a new sexual aim appears, and all the component instincts combine to attain it, while the erotogenic zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone.
>
> (Freud 1905, 206)

Particularly characteristic for this developmental phase is the setting of new priorities, where erogenous zones such as the mouth, skin and anal area – as well as pleasurable observing and gazing – are all subordinated to the goal of sexual

unification. However, Freud repeatedly emphasizes that this "partial instinct" (observation, exhibitionism, oral gratification, etc.) also plays an important role in foreplay and in enhancing the sexual act.

## 1.1 The body as an object of observation

### *Changes in the female body*

One peculiarly adolescent phenomenon can be seen when a girl gazes at great length into the mirror, something that can go on for several hours a day, to parents' astonishment. To the parents' great surprise (and often enough, to their irritation), adolescent girls begin to spend considerable time in front of the mirror, examining their changing bodies from all angles, trying on various clothes and posing in front of the mirror – apparently a more satisfying observer than the human eye – as if it were a camera. This mirror-gazing is often subsumed or concealed under the ostensible motives of skin and hair care, blow-drying, etc. Pimples and other blemishes are examined precisely, removed or examined yet again when they become inflamed. Groups of girls go to flea markets, buying clothes for reworking, hats and unusual accessories, which they often turn into surprisingly attractive features. They apply makeup alone or in pairs. They photograph themselves or each other in various poses and facial expressions, then posting the pictures online.

What motivations can be detected in these behaviors? The frequent complaint heard from parents, particularly fathers, is that their daughter has become vain, never tiring of her appearance. But from the psychoanalytic perspective, this accusation is too shortsighted. As discussed earlier, an adolescent's physical growth, both desired or undesired, is always accompanied by considerable feelings of insecurity. The latency child's unquestioning, carefree relationship to his well-functioning body is now disrupted. A new relationship, a new sense of the body, must now be discovered. But why do girls then observe themselves so long in the mirror?

The neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine traces this behavior to hormonal changes in the female brain, describing the process as follows:

> The teen girl's brain is sprouting, reorganizing and pruning neuronal circuits that drive the way she thinks, feels and acts – and obsesses over her looks. Her brain is unfolding ancient instructions on how to be a woman . . . the high-octane estrogen coursing through their brain pathways fuels their obsessions. . . . They are almost exclusively interested in their appearance . . . they spend hours in front of the mirror, inspecting pores, plucking eyebrows, wishing the butts they see would shrink, their breasts grow larger and waists get smaller, all to attract boys.
>
> (Brizendine 2006, 31ff)

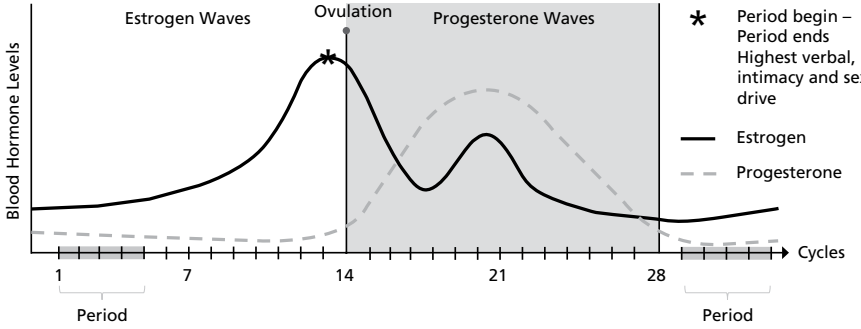


*Figure 1.1* Estrogen-progesterone waves (from Brizendine 2006)

Brizendine holds chemical changes – effects of the estrogen level in the female body – responsible for this behavior (Figure 1.1).

The psychoanalytic perspective focuses on an adolescent's inner world and asks which early experiences become revived in adolescent behavior. Gazing happily into a mirror is hardly innate – it constitutes a result of learning from experience. Only when a baby or young child has had the experience of being lovingly observed by its father or mother can it internalize a positive self-image. The child experiences: "I am worth loving; I can make my mother's eyes shine". Indeed, the baby is metaphorically mirrored in its mother's eyes, which function something like a lovingly focused mirror in which the baby views itself. Winnicott asks:

> What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*.
>
> (Winnicott 1967, 110)

A mother's eyes express her feelings towards her baby: if she loves her child, she looks at it lovingly, but if she is full of agitation or depression, her gaze is stiff and seems to pass through her child. The child's gaze then cannot establish contact to its mother, just as the child cannot feel contained or accepted. André Green (1993) described how a baby might experience its depressed mother, with her empty, expressionless gaze, now devoid of her pre-depression vitality; as Green puts it, the child experiences his mother as "dead" – physically present, but looking exclusively inward, without a mother's loving gaze at her infant. Green's concept of the "dead mother" describes the baby's experience of its mother in depression, as opposed to her normal self. Inside this child, a "spiritual hole" arises where there was hitherto space for the love object (mother). The gaze and attempted contact are no longer possible; the child is left to its own devices and must hold

itself emotionally, which it attempts to do through a pseudo-independence and premature maturity.

> I can make my point by going straight over to the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defenses.
> (Winnicott 1967, 112)

Such early experiences form the roots of a child's personality. Psychoanalysts presume that the emotional reaction a baby evokes from its mother supplies it with a sense of its own "reality" – the sense that it is indeed alive. The baby internalizes this experience, which in turn serves as a basis for the fundamental feeling of self-worth. Only when we have experienced the feeling of being loved and observed, admired, can we love ourselves. Winnicott continues:

> To return to the normal progress of events, when the average girl studies her face in the mirror she is reassuring herself that the mother image is there and that the mother can see her and that the mother is *en rapport* with her.
> (Italics in original; ibid, p. 112)

Winnicott believes that girls see not only themselves but (unconsciously) also the image of their mother here. We must remember that no mother or father always looks upon their baby with love. Winnicott speaks of a "good enough mother", who encounters her baby mainly with love, while sometimes reacting in annoyance, irritation or tension. The adolescent girl now graduates (so to speak) from her mother's gaze – which is effectively replaced by her own gaze into the mirror, as well as observation by her peer group. Particularly for an adolescent, it is of vital importance to be considered attractive by friends, and to be viewed – gazed upon – affectionately and with interest.

It is a fact that some autistic children cannot look at themselves in the mirror, since – for diverse reasons – they could not embark on a relationship to their mother, instead withdrawing into their private world. Schizophrenics also avoid looking into the mirror, and indeed are more likely to shatter a mirror than to gaze into it.

In a footnote to his paper "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning" (1911), Freud pointed out the function of maternal nurturing in the infant's emotional development.

> It probably hallucinates the fulfillment of its internal needs; it betrays its unpleasure, when there is an increase in stimulus and an absence of satisfaction, by the motor discharge of screaming and beating about with its arms and legs, and it then experiences the satisfaction it has hallucinated. Later, as an older child, it learns to employ these manifestations of discharge intentionally as methods of expressing its feelings. Since the later care of children is modelled on the care of infants, the dominance of the pleasure principle can

> really come to an end only when a child has achieved complete psychical detachment from its parents.
>
> (Freud 1911, 219)

We can only speculate how many memories of her parents' loving, happy, solicitous (or also annoyed, baleful) gazes are evoked when the adolescent girl gazes into the mirror.

Another motive for adolescent mirror-gazing is the two-fold revival of Oedipal desires: the adolescent compares her body to her mother's both in a spirit of rivalry and as a model for comparison and emulation (libidinous identification – the admired person to be emulated). Lari, a 13-year-old girl, writes in her diary:

> Daniel said that I have the best figure of any of the girls at the ski course! I like that, but I haven't become conceited because of what he said. . . . I went home: at home I tried on Mom's gold evening dress, it fit me well. I'm beginning to get a womanly shape. And now I'm sitting here writing my diary.
>
> (Erhard 1998, 54, translation McQuade)

A child's fantasy of wearing the Queen/mother's golden dress can only become reality with an adult body, even when she poses secretly before the mirror. The impression from Lari's diary is that she has internalized a loving image of her mother – an admiring mother who is glad her daughter is growing up and becoming a woman. Lari seems very happy at her friend's compliment that she has the best figure, accordingly viewing herself as the victor in an imaginary contest. And yet two days later, we read in her diary how unsatisfied she is with her body.

These extreme mood fluctuations – similar to early childhood – are one characteristic of puberty we will examine more closely in Chapter 3 ("Development of Feeling"). Lari writes:

> Oh God, I'm so fat again (51 kg), and so ugly. My nose is getting bigger and bigger and my behind too, my eyes are getting smaller and smaller and wrinkly and I just look ugly as a whole.
>
> (Erhard 1998, 54)

During this period, bodily changes can constitute a threat. Body proportions alter drastically – to Lari, it almost seems her body is no longer her own. Although she wishes for it to stay the same, she is nevertheless glad when Daniel declares she has the best figure, of course including her posterior curves.

The body stands at the center of attention – both the adolescent's own body and other adolescents' bodies. Girls often sit together and rate individual body parts, discussing and evaluating their legs, shins, waists, hands, noses, mouths, eyes, eyelash length, etc. Girls derive satisfaction from this communal rating; typically, one girl will profess what she dislikes in her own body and the others vehemently disagree, attempting to convince her otherwise. The exhibition and

observation – plus evaluation – of individual body parts can occupy considerable psychic space. Lari writes in her diary:

> I'm writing a list of whom I like the best right now (I feel like doing that right now);
>
> I Eva J. 1. LARI P. (ha, ha)
> II Caro M.
> III Babsi R.
> IV Sabine M.
>
> (Erhard 1998, 59. Note: Lari's original grammar and layout are here reproduced.)

She only enters her own name later, penciling in "(ha, ha)". She is able to express her narcissistic wish to be the most beautiful ironically, assigning herself an Arabic numeral and the others Roman numerals. She evaluates her friends' appearance and also her own. The particularities of girls' friendships are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 ("Development of Feeling").

Let us now examine an adolescent girl's self-description as she experiences changes in her body. At the time of this interview, Katharina is almost 15 years old. To the question of how she feels about the changes in her body, including menstruation, she answers as follows:

K: I am glad I don't feel anything with menstruation. Some girls in my class have pain and even have to take medication for it, like my friends. Sometimes it seems stupid that I don't feel it, I don't know when it's coming. I only see that my underwear is red; then it's dirty, not hygienic and smells, too.
I: And otherwise, with the other changes in your body?
K: I only now grew underarm hair, first I grew a bust. My doctor said either the bust is first and then armpit and pubic hair, or the other way around. I liked it that way. I got my period when I was eleven and the others when they were twelve or thirteen. They complained about their underarm hair. My waist has changed, my hips are wider now – that's when you look like a woman. I like that. I look in the mirror – my parents say it's too much. I feel so insecure. Earlier I couldn't have cared less how I look. Now I do my hair much more often and put on makeup. Right now I don't have any makeup on. When I do sports I don't care how I look.
I: Are you satisfied with your body as it is now?
K: On the whole, yes – I'm neither a top model nor am I ugly. I'm not really thin and not really fat – more or less normal. It doesn't look good when you don't have a feminine form. I'd like to be thinner, but food tastes so good. I don't want to be unhappy, what can you do?
I: What do you find NOT beautiful in your body?
K: Basically, I think my feet aren't good-looking.

### *Discussion*

Katharina seems quite satisfied with her body's development; although she is further along than her friends, she sees this as something positive. Her friends seem to be waiting impatiently to become "womanly", and see themselves as children still. Katharina can speak of these matters with unusual freedom and without embarrassment, as natural developments that are basically pleasant for her. We can view an adolescent's situation before the mirror as a triangle. In Katharina's imagination, her mother is standing behind her, observing her approvingly and happy that her daughter is taking the step towards becoming a woman: in fact, Katharina later tells how her mother, when Katharina informed her she had menstruated for the first time, fell weeping into her arms as she welcomed her to the realm of womanhood. She and her mother enjoy buying clothes together and evaluating which clothes fit each of them; they also enjoy putting on jewelry and generally making themselves beautiful.

A mother's dismissive or indifferent reaction to her daughter's first menstruation will have a different impact on the girl. One patient, Ms. P., said:

> I was eleven when I had my first period. I was very excited and ran to my mother, expecting her to be happy with me. But she seemed to find nothing of importance in what I told her, turned around, came back with a sanitary napkin which she handed over to me without a word and then went away. For four years after this, I didn't menstruate, never spoke with my mother about this. When I then did menstruate, I obtained the necessary items for myself.

The fact that Ms. P. did not menstruate for four years indicates the traumatizing effect of this massive dismissal by her mother. It is a psychosomatic reaction to this dismissal, as if she interpreted her mother's behavior to mean that the mother did not wish her to become a woman. Instead of feeling welcomed into the woman's world, as Katharina did, Ms. P. had to find her own way. Her mother's dismissive attitude had an even greater effect since Ms. P.'s father was an exceedingly insecure personality – an alcoholic who became so drunk each Friday that he would destroy the furniture or china. We will speak later of how the adolescent selects a love object; in this case, Ms. P. chose a violent alcoholic and was unable to extricate herself for many years.

The interviewer asks Katharina:

I: And what's the situation with boys?

K: . . . something changed. When I was ten, I could walk down the street, boys came by and I didn't pay them any attention. Now, boys come along and I look at them – first their feet and shoes, and then upwards – the same thing with girls. I like to look at people first, their feet, shoes, whether I like them. Whether he's my type.

I: How exactly do you do this?

K: When a boy comes my way, I glance at him quickly, then I look again and think about whether I could have something with him, whether I'd like to get to know him.
I: How does he register this?
K: Sometimes they look at me – because I look at them? Maybe so. It's a reflex – it sounds a little like I'm a girlie. I look quickly, only five seconds, and then look away. If I'm together with a girlfriend, we talk about it. It just happens, I can't help it. I'm like an animal looking for a mate. (She laughs.)
I: And how do you know when a boy likes you?
K: When he looks at me, when he stops to look at me, then I think he must like me.

### *Discussion*

Katharina can describe her behavior with a certain self-irony – something that surprises even her. Her behavior is unplanned: it simply happens – as with a female animal hunting for a male. Although the idea of sexual union seems far away, she enjoys putting her attractiveness to the test. Her self-perception is shrewd as she gives boys a swift glance, then immediately looks away. Complex studies of girls' and boys' non-verbal behavior in a disco have come to similar conclusions as Katharina: girls were found to initiate the first eye contact much more often than boys, only to yield the initiative for beginning a conversation to the boy. Katharina's conversations with her girlfriend help to exchange criteria for what is considered attractive.

In this time of inner conflict, the adolescent's presentation of her body can be contradictory for various places and situations. One patient reported that she tended to exhibit her body provocatively at discos or at school, but shamefully hid it at home. Indeed, she described her exhibitionism in a playful, proud way, and her shame in a shameful, small voice, in fragmented phrases.

Now an excerpt from one of my analytic sessions with a 30-year-old patient I will call Fritzi. In the previous session, she had described the great tension and lack of tenderness she experienced as a child and how cruelly her older brother treated her and her younger brother. She began the session with these words:

P: Nothing fits in my body. Nothing is built right, the different parts don't fit together. Especially down there.
A: You're quite vague about this.
P: My boyfriend – I was in love with him this summer – judges every part of my body: this is good, that isn't so good, he says: your back is nice, your (incomprehensible).
A: You want to see whether I am like your boyfriend, you want to make me judge every part of your body and every sentence you say. Or whether I can see that

basically something's wrong with you. You think, there's no place where you are desirable; you're convinced that there's nobody who will take you and your body as they are.

P: (in a stronger voice): With me, everything went so fast. Within two years I got breasts and hips. Everyone in my family made a comment. I was so ashamed and wanted to cover up my body. I always put a sweater over my waist when I went in the kitchen.

A: You lived together with three men (the father and two brothers) at home.

P: My mother was the one who commented most, and everyone found it so funny. One time it was really bad. I had on a pair of pants with an oil spot. My mother said: the oil is dripping out like crazy. Everyone laughed. I had gained three kilos. (Pause) When I went out with my girlfriends, it was different. We put on funny clothes and set forth: halters, shorts and high boots, you could see everything in between.

A: You liked being under the protection of your girlfriends, when you all showed off your bodies and were admired. There, it was provocative and fun. At home, you hid your body and were ashamed, in order not to provoke your jealous mother.

### *Discussion*

Fritzi first told me in a broken voice, in disjointed sentences, of how shameful she found the changes in her body. Before the changes she had dressed like a boy – wearing her brother's clothes, with a short haircut. Then everything became different. Instead of helping her to accept her new body, her family mocked her and it. Presumably, there was rivalry with her mother, who may have found Fritzi's transformation from a "little tomboy" to an attractive young woman threatening. (The topic of mother-daughter rivalry will be examined more closely in the following chapter on psychosexual development.) Remarkably, Fritzi covers her body in loose, long dresses even at the age of 30. As an adolescent she lacked the confidence to exhibit her new curves, instead tying a sweater around her hips. Yet in her circle of friends, she embarked on campaigns to show off her body, making it an object for admiration; in order that boys could not overlook her body, she at times donned particularly extreme clothes. These two patterns of behavior were not integrated but had a parallel existence. Now, we will turn to the development of the male adolescent's body.

### *Changes in the male body*

Changes in the male body – and the adolescent's reaction to them – manifest themselves in diverse ways. Growth of secondary sexual characteristics is activated by the secretion of the masculine hormone testosterone. The neuropsychiatrist

Louann Brizendine compares the abruptly initiated change in the boy's brain with a "construction site", writing:

> Between the ages of nine and fifteen, his male brain circuitry, with its billions of neurons and trillions of connections, was "going live" as his testosterone level soared twentyfold. If testosterone were beer, a nine-year-old boy would get the equivalent of about one cup a day. But by age fifteen, it would be equal to two *gallons* a day.
>
> (Brizendine 2010, 53; italics original)

Testosterone causes enlargement of the testicles, activates growth in muscles and bones, stimulates growth in facial and pubic hair, lowers the pitch of a boy's voice and increases the length and thickness of the penis.

The scope of change due to this hormonal activity lasts eight to nine years, according to Brizendine (Figure 1.2). According to Halpern et al. (1998), puberty sees a pronounced change and increase in sexual and aggressive thoughts, with testosterone the driving force behind this heightened tendency toward aggression (see also Archer 2006). Testosterone levels also rise before competitive situations and contests.

For an adolescent boy's sense of his body, these alterations are confusing. In contrast to girls, the sign of sexual maturity – the first ejaculation – is not as (potentially) evident to the world as the first menstruation. According to Kaplan, the awakening and growth of the so-called inner sexual organs – testicles and scrotum, prostate, seminal vesicle and Cowperian gland – tend to remind boys of femininity, passivity and weakness, characteristics they were able to suppress in the years before puberty. Boys in puberty often see their testicles as feminine organs like breasts or ovaries; the German slang word "Eier" (eggs) is an indication of this view. The softness of the first pubic hair threatens to make conscious the unconscious fantasies of being transformed into a woman (Kaplan 1991, 51).

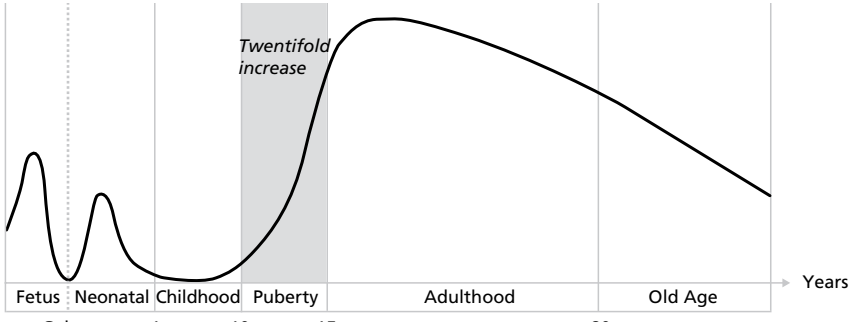


*Figure 1.2* Testosterone levels throughout male life (from Brizendine 2010)

How does the 15-year-old Sebastian describe the changes in his body?

I: When did you notice that your body was changing?
S: I don't know, I didn't notice at all when it began. I never really was aware of it. Earlier I was very short and then I just grew and grew. I felt better then. I'm still not a giant (author's note: Sebastian is 1 meter 75 cm), and I always wanted to be very tall.
I: What did you notice about puberty then?
S: My parents began to get on my nerves. There are things where they really piss me off. No idea. It's still that way. Going out was never a problem. No idea, when we make meals, even if I don't want to, I still have to do it.
I: How did your body change?
S: The way it does when you're in puberty. You get hair where you get it when you're in puberty. No idea. I didn't care. I was always that way – I never got too surprised when something changed, as long as it didn't change too fast.
I: Did your penis get bigger?
S: Yes, the penis does get bigger; well, that's nothing special. Of course I noticed, no idea; I don't compare it. I really couldn't care less. No idea.
I: What else changed?
S: You get more interested in girls, you get self-involved. No idea. The way you are as a person. Sports – no idea. What kind of girl do I like? No idea.
I: Did you have wet dreams?
S: Yeah, sure. No idea.
I: How did you notice?
S: Well, after the dream, like any normal guy. It was just there.
I: Was it pleasant?
S: I didn't care.
I: Did you talk about it with your friends?
S: Yes, but only much later. My body got bigger, more muscles. Sure, it was nice. My voice also got much lower. Dad showed me videos where I had a little squeaky voice. Now, it's much better. When I talk very fast and loud now, my voice still goes way up and squeaks at the very end. It changed very slowly. I noticed it when I sang, no idea, I couldn't sing the scales all the way up anymore.

### *Discussion*

Although Sebastian is glad not to be the shortest in his class anymore, he only mentions his recent growth quite casually. It is remarkable how often he emphasizes the slow pace of his bodily changes. Only in retrospect and when he compares his squeaky voice to his current one can he praise his new, lower one. His often-employed "no idea" – current Austrian slang – is a form of defense, but it also expresses that he truly has no idea yet the uses to which he will put his new body. He plays football in a team and practices twice a week, with games on weekends. He is very talented at football and is often praised, yet does not

mention this once in his self-description. He is too "cool" to notice that he has grown six centimeters over the past summer.

How has his interest in girls developed, and how does he discuss this with his friends?

I: What's the situation with looking at girls?
S: I look at them completely differently now. First I look at their faces, then how their body is. And then I imagine what they're like as people; I don't care whether it's true. That all goes quickly. Before, I would just look at them, hmm, a girl.
I: Do you talk about it with your friends?
S: Sure, but how? No idea. "I just think she's pretty." Or: "Did you see her, she has a good figure."
I: When you think about who you are, what do you think?
S: For instance, I think about my strengths in sports – no idea. Whether you're an individual competitor or – now I noticed I'm really a team player. I like to be with other people. With friends.
I: How is it going with Dad?
S: With us, family is intense, the weekends are intense, fishing. Before we did much more together, now I do things with friends on the weekends.
I: Are you better at sports than Dad?
S: I was never better, it was never a competition.
I: Do you sometimes tell him how things go?
S: It's not that I think I'm better. I just like showing him how things go. The point is to go fishing with Dad, not by myself, and he makes it possible.

### *Discussion*

Sebastian is laconic when he describes his view of girls, without establishing undue contact to his feelings – perhaps he finds this emotional distance important to his observations.

Conspicuously, Sebastian emphasizes that he has no rivalry with his father. He only enjoys showing him how something should go. In reality, Sebastian is the best in almost all sports when his family goes windsurfing, kite-flying or fly-fishing with other families. Sebastian baits the lines and fishes so skillfully that many more fish bite his line than the others. Perhaps his numerous experiences of easily taking up sports unfamiliar to him helped develop his self-confidence. He is very independent, good at using public transportation in Vienna, traveling alone to visit a friend or to return home from a sports event. The great importance his friends hold for him becomes only indirectly evident when he mentions that he spends most of his weekends with them. Regret is implied when he speaks of his formerly "intense" family activities. He avoids a precise description of his physical changes: they are like those of any boys undergoing puberty. He finds it hard to put his own sexual excitement into words.

Female sexual organs exhibit their maturation through a sustained, ostensibly visible sign – the monthly menstruation – which can become an unconscious aspiration for male adolescents, too. The first menstruation represents a break with childhood,

demonstrating a woman's power to bear human life and give birth. The procreative capability of the man is demonstrated through his first "wet dream", but this phenomenon is more private, less noticed or acknowledged in the social realm.

In conclusion, I would like to describe a phenomenon observed by Bruno Bettelheim with his emotionally deeply disturbed children in the Sonia Shankman Orthogenetic School.

In his book *Symbolic Wounds*, Bruno Bettelheim hypothesized that "one sex feels envy in regard to the sexual organs and functions of the other" (Bettelheim 1962, 19). Initiation rites can be understood as an attempt to express envy of womanhood through rituals. Self-injury is meant to result in a bleeding similar to menstruation.

In the Sonia Shankman Orthogenetic School for emotionally disturbed children at the University of Chicago, founded by Bettelheim, several professionals noticed that adolescents were damaging their genitals in order to make them bleed. These spontaneous "rites of initiation" on the part of 12- and 13-year-old girls and boys started as a secret club with the plan of cutting their genitals once a month to mix the blood together (see Bettelheim 1962, 30). The schizophrenic girls exhibited various reactions to their own menstruation: they viewed the blood as "disgusting" or "dirty", yet they spoke almost exclusively of menstruation and showed the others their sanitary napkins. All the boys under his care saw it as a "cheat" or "gyp" that they had no vagina. (Some even said: "Why can't I have a vagina?") When somebody else was crying, one boy said: "I know why he's crying – it's because he wants to have a vagina" (Bettelheim 1962, 30), "Viewing menstruation not as something debilitating but as something that confers extraordinary magic powers may make genital sexuality more acceptable. The new power again makes men seem less enviable and dangerous and sexual intercourse with them less hazardous" (Ibid, 51). Based on his analysis of various rites of initiation, Bettelheim posits the thesis that such rites can be understood as a somewhat hidden fascination centered on pregnancy and giving birth.

In all phases of puberty, the body also becomes a medium for protest, provocation and propaganda. Although manifestations thereof vary markedly in the 20th and 21st centuries, adolescents have always attempted to gain hegemony over their bodies, which in itself often constitutes a provocation for parents and teachers.

## 1.2 The body as a medium of protest, provocation and propaganda

The transformation of the child's body into that of an adult transforms the adolescent's sense of his body along with its structure. Attendant insecurity and shame is often turned outwards in the form of provocation, reversed into the opposite pole: instead of a transformed but concealed body, the body becomes an agent for protest – in conscious contrast to more "adult" modes of presentation.

In Figure 1.3, the two adolescent boys are presenting their attractive, mature bodies in a regressive and provocative fashion – on the one hand reminiscent of babies exhibiting their behinds, and on the other hand like a broken taboo, as they shamelessly expose their rear ends.

*Figure 1.3* John with his friend (16 years old)

In every successive generation, divergence from the previous one has been exhibited in a different fashion. In the German-speaking countries, an early 20th-century adolescent *Wandervogel* youth movement expressed rebellion against bourgeois constraints through clothing, propounding a free life in harmony with nature instead of narrow sartorial restraints and militarism. The nude body was meant to inspire liberation from strictures and morality. With their guitars and knapsacks, these youths wandered the woods and sang romantic songs by the campfire.

Neither these outward trappings and closeness to nature nor the protest against military drill kept the movement from being co-opted by a completely opposite, authority-oriented ideology. The youth movements between the two World Wars – such as the *Wandervogel* and the *Pfadfinder* – segued smoothly into paramilitary national movements and later into the Nazi Hitler Youth. Uniforms, boots and flags and powerful hierarchical structures took the place of the formerly freedom-loving, individualistic ethos. Wilhelm Reich made the disciplining of the body through military drill a central focus for examination.

In 1950s Germany, what was called the "swinging 50s" (as distinct from the "swinging 60s", both in Germany and elsewhere) swung the pendulum once again in the other direction: modest, tight-waisted, broad-belted petticoat dresses

conquered the fashion world; girls got engaged quite young, married and quickly became pregnant. With the possible exception of Elvis Presley's hysterical fans, there were no protests. Young men dressed like their fathers and aspired to emulate their successful careers.

Only in the 1960s did a broad movement emerge from what had originally been a student counterculture – the hippies. This subculture propounded a new lifestyle: instead of success and perseverance, love and communally experienced music were the new ideals. Music festivals such as the legendary Woodstock Festival were crystallizing events. Inspired by The Beatles, male adolescents wore their hair longer, causing controversy with parents and teachers. Today, we might have difficulty imagining the eruptive force of long hair, especially since it was often not much longer than before – and yet it still elicited vehement reactions. Girls tended to wear mini- or maxi-dresses, with their hair free (Miles 2005). The previously rigorous sartorial distinction between the sexes was dissolved: inspired by Indian clothes, young people wore batik fabrics, symbolizing a break in gender roles. Tattoos, piercings and blackwork tattoos were popular. The "Jesus sandal", a healthy form of footwear, was the opposite pole to the preceding bourgeois tweed jackets, dirndls and loden look (in German-speaking countries) of youth culture. The core of the hippie period was between 1965 and 1971. In the 1980s, the hippie movement segued to alternative movements such as punks and the "no-future" movement, but before (and after) this, men and women alike often wore long hair and jewelry. "Free love" and free drug consumption became widespread, with The Beatles' song "All You Need is Love" embodying the hippies' motto. Today as well, adolescent fashions often trigger conflicts with parents, leading to denial and opprobrium.

Why is the body of such importance as a locus for provocation? Especially during this period of fundamental physical change, the body is most intimately linked to the ego. "The ego is always a body ego," writes Freud (1923, GW XIII, 253). Since all dimensions from the relatively peaceful latency period are in flux, the adolescent now finds a kind of refuge in his body – even though it is also a source of insecurities and fears as it rapidly changes. Even if the adolescent suddenly knows nothing about himself – about his values, his desires, his position within the family – at least (he believes) he can control his own body. Just as the infant derives direct reinforcement from his corporal sensations and the experience of being held, the adolescent uses his body to evoke massive reactions from his parents and other adults. Hotpants revealing everything but a girl's posterior, or bushy hair under a headband, become the object both of commentary and power struggles: the question of who should control the adolescent's body becomes a controversy between adolescent and parents, one which I describe more closely in Chapter 3. Parents, who have until now guaranteed the survival of their children through devotion and loving care, now are meant to feel a border: "I control my own body!". This constitutes a painful rejection and a new positioning of the parents vis-à-vis their adolescent children, as responsibility is transferred to the children step by step.

If physical changes were at the center of this chapter, in Chapter 2 we will examine the emotional responses to them and psychosexual effects.

2

# Psychosexual development in puberty

> Eating is the second most important thing in life.
>
> —Honoré de Balzac

Psychosexual development in adolescence has a special significance, since now child sexuality develops into its conclusive form. A "re-formation" occurs, causing Freud to speak of a "double time frame of drive development". During this phase, three tasks must be mastered: 1) to once again work through infantile sexual urges, integrating tender impulses with sensual impulses; 2) to choose a love object, i.e., the person to which these impulses are directed; and 3) to develop a stable sexual identity.

Melanie Klein emphasizes the significance of the adolescent crisis for the growth of personality and development of the adolescent's character. The psychosexual reformation affects all layers of the personality, going back to the baby's early feelings of helplessness/solace and including the passionate Oedipal longings and rivalries that were put on the back burner during latency. Before we turn to psychosexual development in puberty, we will examine the extended concept of sexuality in Freud, the concept of bisexuality and the phenomenon of ambivalence.

The extension of the close concept of sexuality to *psychosexuality* can be understood as an expression of Freud's deep-lying interpretation of love, eros, tenderness and the body, which he linked to desire and passion. Here, sexual aspects of seemingly asexual behavior and phenomena are described in a systematic form (see Niztschke 1976, 362). Through this extension of the concept of sexuality, the border between pathological and "normal" sexuality becomes relativized, since "normal" and "abnormal" manifestations of sexual drives can only be understood in conjunction with each other. As Freud propounds in his "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" (1916–17), there are only quantitative, not originally qualitative factors characterizing psychic health or illness – including in the sexual realm. Both for adolescents and for parents, it helps to be aware of this flexible border when attempting to understand adolescent behavior as a developmental phase of sexual experimentation.