

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

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James A. Farmer (1990). *High-Risk Teenagers: Real Cases and Intervention Strategies with Resistant Adolescents*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

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*Reviewed by:* Mary Ann Carter, Doctoral Student, Department of Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.

The increasing incidence of teen-age criminal activity and suicide is an area of growing concern across North America for parents, adolescents and professionals alike. Addressing itself to professionals working with teenagers, Farmer's book attempts to explain fundamental problems he has experienced in working with manipulative high-risk teenagers. The book offers suggestions for professionals to use in their work with teenagers. Descriptions of various ways teenagers manipulate adults, as well as a brief review of current etiological theories and treatment options are included. The writing and depth of coverage are appropriate for the novice child care worker or social worker in the field. The author's use of numerous case histories serves both to illustrate his explanations and to provide models with which the professional can relate. Farmer's approach is positive and encouraging for those new to the field.

Chapter One focuses on potential contributing factors that promote violence in children. The discussion includes the fact that in our culture violence is rewarded, accepted and categorized as play through team sports, cartoons, the movie industry and play items. Other causal factors mentioned include dysfunctional parental models and the teenage stage of development. Subsequent causes include home violence, peer group, substance abuse, child abuse, nutrition, self-esteem, anger and the adolescent's unrealistic expectations. Besides outlining factors that contribute to violence, Chapter One includes five theories that offer social scientists' assumptions of why teenagers behave in manipulative fashions. Unfortunately for the reader, there are few references related to this latter material and it is presented in a cursory manner.

Chapters Two and Three cover teenage resistances to establishing constructive relationships with professionals and manipulations used to accomplish this. Chapter Two includes vignettes of practice exercises for the reader to use. Basic constructive suggestions for identifying manipulative teenagers and simple techniques to diffuse their resistance are suggested (i.e., humor, confidentiality, being a role model). Adult-vs.-Teen power issues, are mentioned in Chapter Four. Farmer suggests that establishing consistency and leadership is important in order to help teenagers to develop or maintain some aspect of their dignity. He stresses the value of acknowledging the personal space of teenagers.

Chapter Five presents a high school learning experience program for black youths funded by the U.S. Office of Education. This program included academic preparation and structured learning experiences for the students, who in turn, received financial support for their participation. In a variety of ways, this program was grossly inadequate to meet the needs of high-risk teenagers. The author's report reads like a field study that has been conducted at the expense of the teenagers' self-esteem. The expectations of the teachers and the students were highly incompatible. The acquisition of knowledge was the goal of the faculty while the financial reward was the goal of the students. The results that Farmer reports appear to revictimize these distressed youths rather than provide them with an opportunity to develop a more satisfactory life style. The Chapter's title, "Behavioural Conflict Resolution," belies the contents. The short section on theory belongs with the etiological concepts. Although the Chapter is interesting, the reader would have benefitted if Chapter Five had been omitted and the contents summarized elsewhere.

The final Chapter offers case examples and basic, constructive suggestions for dealing with parents of any children. Suggestions for counsellors dealing with high-risk teenagers include being honest with parents, possessing a flexible personality, listening and asking questions. The Chapter would have been stronger if Farmer had further developed these suggestions rather than outlining five treatment models only briefly.

Throughout the book, there are discrepancies. At the beginning, it would be helpful for the reader if the author had defined "High-Risk" adolescents. This term can take on various meanings, depending on one's orientation, experience, profession and age. For example, "high-risk" adolescents may be defined as teenagers who have been convicted of a criminal offense involving bodily assault or "high-risk" adolescents may be defined as teenagers who live in a low socio-economic environment, have quit school, are unemployed and use drugs. Farmer suggests that the professional refrain from using teenage jargon while further on in the book he refers to professionals "getting their heads together." The author stresses the importance of developing trust with teenagers but gives conflicting messages in his examples such as setting up meetings with the client's parents without the client's knowledge or interviewing siblings separately. He repeatedly mentions touching teenagers of both sexes, while at the same time commenting on the need for the professional to respect the personal body space of the teenager. The author does not seem to realize how this same invasion of personal privacy may increase the teenagers' anxiety level and potential resentment toward invasive and insensitive adults.

The differences between the sexes and between early versus late high-risk teenagers is not addressed in this book. It would be helpful to offer alternative responses for the professional to consider when dealing with these specific categories of high-risk teenagers in manipulative or resistant situations.

In sum, *High-Risk Teenagers* lacks a sound theoretical basis in its coverage of etiology. It suffers the omission of relevant information that might have strengthened the presentation. The organization of the material becomes

scattered towards the end of the book. These weaknesses notwithstanding, the text does have several assets. For example, the case descriptions are interesting, the author's enthusiasm for his work is evident and a basic framework for working with teenagers is presented. Novice child care workers and social workers, who are interested in working with teenagers, will benefit from reading this short book.

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Robert Coles (1988). *Harvard Diary: Reflections on the Sacred and the Secular*. New York, New York: Crossroad.

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*Reviewed by:* Daniel Klassen, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Harvard professor of psychiatry, Robert Coles, makes a daring statement in his reflections on the sacred and the secular. The history of counselling and psychotherapy, with a few noted exceptions, has been quiet on the spiritual and religious life of individuals. If the spiritual is found in the literature, it is cited, at best, under a special category such as pastoral counselling, or at worst as a reflection of a psychopathology such as the cause of excessive guilt.

In the *Harvard Diary* Coles records the painful journey of an academic who describes his ongoing questions regarding the spiritual and religious dimension of being human. The difficulty Coles had was not that he began his journey as an atheist or an agnostic, but that as a professor of Child Psychiatry at Harvard, well-versed in his field, he failed to see the relevance of the religious and the spiritual as a normal part of everyday life. He had not conceived of spiritual and religious life as being integrated with everyday living. It did not seem "worth comprehending on its own merits, with its own dignity and significance" (p. 141) in the early days of his career. Spiritual and religious life therefore had to be explained and seen as a reflection, an expression, a consequence of some antecedent of a personal event or of a given cultural phenomenon, but never as an event with credence of its own.

This quest for the sacred and the secular was quickened in Coles' study of children. He was more interested in what children "do" than what they "think". Coles observed that children (as well as adults) are capable of brilliant, high level, moral responses to scenarios provided by researchers. However, these same children may respond at significantly lower moral levels to the scenarios that everyday living provides. At the same time, Coles needed to come to terms with a child named Ruby, who was not capable of making clever, high level, verbal responses demonstrating reasoning and ethical analysis. But Ruby, in the face of a mob who tormented her daily on her way to school prayed, "Please, dear god, forgive those people because they don't know what they are doing" (p. 143). The girl managed the deed.

Coles found the psychological investigation of Ruby's behaviour to be arrogant and insensitive to her humble, forgiving position. Such a method would leave out the spiritual dimension of her being. Understandably it is difficult to be scientifically analytical and reductionistic about the notion of