

# Adulthood: on the way to maturity in the contemporary world

Eloisa M. D. Penna\*  
Félícia Rodrigues R. S. Araujo\*\*

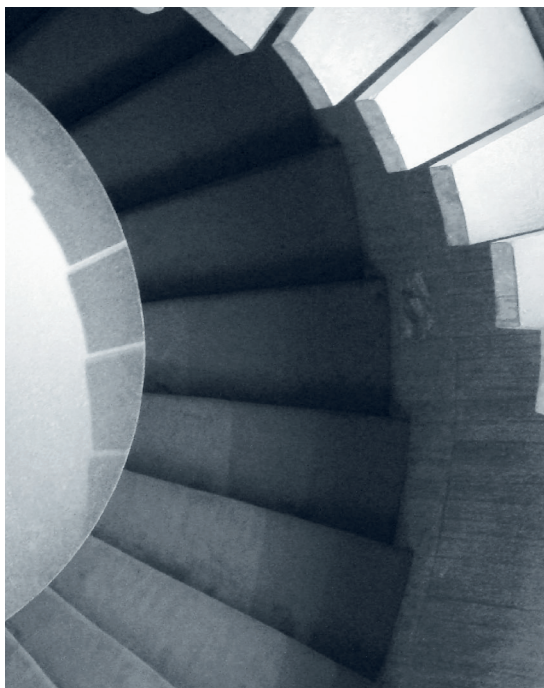
## Abstract

This article is dedicated to reflecting on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, which in some cases can be experienced with great difficulty. The term adulthood is a very recent neologism used to describe the prolongation of adolescence and the difficulty of entering adult life. The reflection on this issue includes the discussion of the archetypal dynamics taking place during this stage of development and the consideration of aspects of contemporary culture that are influential and relevant to the lives of young people today. The interaction among the forces of the Great Mother, Father, Alterity, Hero, Puer-Senex and Eros archetypes add to the influence of aspects of contemporary cul-

ture, weaving a complex web of interactions, which can either benefit or hinder the entry into adult life. ■

## Keywords

adulthood,  
adolescence,  
puer-senex,  
hero, eros,  
individuation.



\* Junguian analyst, *Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia Analítica* – International Association for Analytical Psychology (SBPA – IAAP). Ph. D. in Clinical Psychology, PUC-SP.

\*\* Junguian analyst, *Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia Analítica* – International Association for Analytical Psychology (SBPA – IAAP). Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, PUC-SP.  
email: <elopenna@gmail.com>

## Adulthood: on the way to maturity in the contemporary world

### Introduction

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adolescence emerged as an important stage of human life. Stanley Hall (1904) was the first to draw people's attention to this stage of human development from a psychological point of view. Today, this phase of life is widely studied by several fields of knowledge, such as medicine, sociology, anthropology, education, and psychology. The field of psychology alone encompasses different theories, lines of research and reflections on clinical practices that are specific to adolescence.

Many 21<sup>st</sup> century authors devote their studies and reflections to a new stage of human development – the adulthood. Becoming an adult has proved to be a difficult task for a significant part of the young population, and the prolongation of adolescence has proved to be a typically contemporary phenomenon. Clinical experience shows that the transition from adolescence to adult life poses no noticeable difficulties to some young people, to whom the issue of adulthood does not apply. Nevertheless, reaching maturity can be a critical and painful experience to others, often leading to a crisis in their Individuation Process and causing them to seek psychological help.

This paper aims to reflect on the passage to adult life, highlighting the conflicts experienced by young adults who face severe difficulties when entering adulthood. It will discuss matters concerning archetypal elements that are active during this stage of the Individuation Process and cultural components involved in this issue. The intention is to understand what this phenomenon means to human development and how it relates to the contemporary collective consciousness.

A brief review of the psyche development process will be useful to put adolescence and

adulthood into context and provide a better understanding of this phenomenon.

### The development process

Jung described the process of development of consciousness and the shaping of individuality and called it the Individuation Process. As the ego travels through life, the individual psyche becomes more complex and diverse, increasing the possibilities and its resources to deal with relational life (the self with others and the world) and intimate life (the self with the self). During the process of individuation, the ego is influenced by archetypes of the collective unconscious and existential facts and events, which drive and move the ego in the form of symbols. The psychic complex of individuality encompasses conscious (ego-consciousness) and unconscious (shadow-complexes) elements. This individuality, however, is part of, and based on, a collective, broader supra-individual system both at the conscious (collective consciousness) and unconscious (collective unconscious) levels.

The ego is first introduced into life through the powerful archetype of the Great Mother, which nurtures, protects and supports the human soul, grounding it to earth and matter. Children feel safe when attached to matter, embraced and held by their Mother, the bond with nature also makes them feel secure. The archetype of the Father is the second form of introduction of the ego into life, this time into social life, through relationships beyond the nest. The archetypal energy of the Father introduces the child into actual human life, governed by the law of man and no longer merely by the laws of nature.

Patriarchal consciousness is built and consolidated over a long period of time at the expense of considerable effort and investment made by the ego, especially in the sense of con-

taining matriarchal yearnings, which urge it in the direction of preserving life, substantiated by basic survival needs. The patriarchal hero fights against the dragon of instincts and defeats it to attain the Father's goals, thereby ensuring the individual's entry into social relations that go beyond the sphere of the Great Mother's archetype. The child learns how to live in society, to read and write, to get to know and follow the path of law, order, discipline, perseverance; acquires a degree of command over his/her actions and decisions and also experiences the order of cause and consequence brought about by his/her acts and wills. Psychologically, this path is equivalent to acquiring the patriarchal command of consciousness which, added to a matriarchal command of consciousness, leads to a transition to a post-patriarchal level of consciousness towards the consciousness of Alterity, which will subsequently lead him/her to the maturity of the second half of life and old-age, in one continuous movement from birth to death.

The influence of Alterity can already be felt at the beginning of puberty, when the archetypes of *anima/animus* surface in the form of a profound analysis of parental values. Questions and claims regarding family demands arise; institutions and social values are criticized and questioned by adolescents. Nevertheless, during the first stage of adolescence, young adults are still unable to cope with the commitments and social responsibilities their ideals require, as they are still highly dependent on their parents. Adolescents are well known for criticizing and rebelling against the order established by their parents' world. This order, which is known and learned since early childhood, no longer seems to be enough or acceptable to adolescents. New possibilities are forged and expressed through ideals and the nonconformist behavior that is typical of this phase.

Having acquired a reasonable command of the world of instinctive nature and the social rules of conviviality, body and spirit are ready to go beyond, to move forward and transcend

the domains of the matriarchal and patriarchal realms, which the ego supposedly already knows how to navigate. At this stage, the body rises up with new yearnings and the spirit lights up with new ideas. It is against this social psychosomatic background that adolescence sets in.

The World Health Organization (WHO) currently defines adolescence as the age group ranging from 10 to 20 years; according to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*), adolescence ranges from 12 to 18 years of age. The voting age varies from 16 to 21, depending on the country, which confirms the civil maturity of individuals. According to Jewish tradition, girls become adults at 12 and boys at 13. According to Catholic tradition, the sacrament of confirmation (12 to 14) marks the entry into adulthood, when individuals confirm their catholic vocation. These are some of the parameters that may or may not set the limits on this stage of life.

There is a certain degree of consensus in science and culture that the beginning of adolescence is associated to the physiological changes of puberty. However, the point at which adolescence ends is quite imprecise, which makes it hard to define parameters for the passage into adulthood.

The indicators of maturity most frequently pointed out by authors who discuss adolescence can be succinctly translated into the achievement of autonomy. Psychic autonomy refers to the capacity for 'self-management' in the various spheres of life: it is the ability to make choices and decisions and to bear the consequences. Such choices and decisions, at this stage of life, focus on achieving professional training that can lead to productive work and provide independence; searching for and maintaining a stable intimate, loving relationship (in whatever format it may be), building an emotional structure that is capable of taking care of himself. Therefore, the passage from adolescence into adult life is related to acquiring skills that enable the distinction of consciousness,

discovering an increasingly better-defined individuality and building a life for oneself.

With adolescence, individuals begin to experience the transition from the patriarchal dynamism, which prevails in consciousness, to the dynamism of Alterity. This transition requires that patriarchal demands be restructured, in the sense that the values that were structured during childhood are put into perspective and there is a need to integrate matriarchal demands that were left aside (shadow). Moreover, entirely new possibilities are posed by life in terms of opportunities and requirements and these must also be processed and integrated, so the fullest form of individuality can be achieved when maturity is reached.

Once established in the matriarchal and patriarchal planes, the ego is capable of navigating the material, concrete and bodily world, as well as the ideal, abstract and spiritual world; inwardness and outwardness; objectivity and subjectivity; intimacy and sociability. However, navigating these extremes is still quite difficult during this time, since that, frequently, in order for one extreme to be available its opposite must be inactive in consciousness. This is the entry into the dynamics of Alterity, whose presence gradually increases in the psychic life of young people.

The creative interaction between the archetypal energy that comes from anima/animus and the archetype of the hero, searching for a new world to contain and express new possibilities, is added to the *Puer/Senex* dyad to tackle the new and the old; the past and the future; attachment and detachment. Thus, a new dynamic system of highly complex interactions is formed, where several archetypal possibilities interact.

It is during the transition from adolescence to maturity that the issue of adulthood often arises.

### Adulthood

The term adulthood is a very recent neologism. Although it is not possible to trace back its origin, no reference to the term has been found

before the 1990s, which leads us to suppose the concept is characteristic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The term adulthood is frequently used about a prolonged or late adolescence. Levisky (1998) defines it as “professional teenagers”, “individuals who are adults chronologically, but whose process of adolescence extends over time, keeping them emotionally and economically dependent”. (p. 31). In an article published in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, Gilberto Dimenstein (2006) wrote: “psychologists tell us that the adolescence expiry date has got older, it now extends to 32 years of age” – this period is known as “adulthood”. The term “adultercent” is also used for adults who want to look or behave younger as an attempt to return to adolescence. In some contexts, the term can have a pejorative connotation when applied to supposedly mature people “who, after 40, behave like someone going through puberty typically would” (BRITO, 2007); “men and women between 30 and 40 with typically adolescent habits and customs” (MARAFON, 2005).

The term adulthood is used here in the sense of a prolonged adolescence, in other words, a stage before maturity and after adolescence. It is a phenomenon that points to an alleged difficulty to reach psychological maturity and transition into adulthood. Some authors speak of a difficulty or refusal to take on the responsibilities of adult life (CALLIGARIS, 1998; DIMENSTEIN 2006). In adulthood, the central conflict is exclusively psychological, with implications on the social, professional and relational life of young adults, whereas in adolescence and senescence, biological factors play a significantly influential role.

Young people who suffer with this transition frequently go through conflicts when acquiring autonomy, in the sense of being able to manage their lives, and that can manifest it both in their professional and socio-affective lives. They are often insecure about their strengths and weaknesses as well as the real possibility of feeling in charge of an adult life.

These considerations regarding the difficulties of settling into adulthood have been observed in a significant number of young people and are substantiated by a bibliographical study on the subject, clinical experience in private practices and psychotherapy sessions conducted with young patients at the Ana Maria Popovic practice from 2003 to 2010. A total of 85 people from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds were seen at this practice during that period, ranging from inner-city community dwellers in São Paulo with meager economic resources to undergraduate and graduate students and professionals with a university degree. Their ages ranged from 18 to 35 and their main characteristic were conflicts revolving around the transition to adult life. These young people have issues when seeking to achieve a productive future and struggle to fit into their social circles and attain autonomy, whether it is professionally or when establishing stable and long-lasting socio-affective relationships. Therefore, their most frequent complaints can be pooled into two main groups: vocational and/or professional; and emotional and/or relational.

Vocational/professional complaints relate to not being sure about what profession to choose, changing university degrees or field of work, and/or finding it difficult to enter the labor market. Dimenstein (2006) mentions “a legion of disorientated students who have dropped out the university without knowing their vocation”. Student life can also be prolonged through constant undergraduate course changes, an endless search for graduate courses and multiple study trips.

Yvette Piha Lehman, coordinator of Guidance Services at the Psychology Institute of the University of São Paulo, quoted by Dimenstein (2006), states that every year increasingly more immature students “are made to choose their profession by force”, suggesting that young people do not feel ready to fully take charge of their professional lives. Lehman’s assessment agrees with Apter’s (2004) view that society

should rethink the demands it makes on the qualification of young people, and suggests that professional choices and decisions should be postponed. It would appear that the adult population should grant adolescents more time to mature without pressuring them. This discourse hastily assumes that adults should be the ones to make concessions without reflecting on the responsibility that befalls the young, in addition to disregarding several emotional conflicts that underlie the issue.

The main difficulty reported in emotional/relational complaints regards finding or keeping a stable and long-lasting intimate, loving relationship, whatever the format of choice given the breadth, diversity and plasticity of relationships offered by contemporary cultural circumstances. From a psychological point of view, this desire can be analyzed as the entry into the dynamics of Alterity, which is ruled by *anima/animus*. The desire for a loving relationship can also be seen as a possibility to build a new relationship model, one that differs from the bonds experienced with one’s own family.

Feeling alone is a common complaint. Young people have been left without a place of belonging. They no longer fit the expectations of adolescence and still don’t feel mature enough to cope with the demands of the next stage – the adult life. They don’t fit into adolescence and haven’t been able to enter into a new psychic configuration that can help them to face new challenges in a new way. Groups of friends that played an important role in providing emotional support to young people during the previous stage lose their intensity somewhat. Relationships with friends are reconfigured. Even their parents, who still provided financial support, can no longer protect or guide them as they did during their adolescence. Even the role of being a child becomes clumsy, prolonged and old-fashioned. Few express a desire to leave their parents’ home because they don’t feel emotionally ready to do so – hence this is a rare complaint among young people in this sit-



uation. Living with their parents can seem less scary; it causes less uncertainty regarding their ability to cope with a life of their own and provides a place of belonging through the prolongation of the adolescent child locus.

Many authors tend to emphasize sociocultural aspects as the main contributing factors to leaving childhood early and entering adulthood late, thereby prolonging adolescence.

Apter (2004) says that 40 to 50% of young people who leave home, go back soon afterwards. The author justifies the fact with current socioeconomic circumstances and recommends that adults (parents, teachers and bosses) consider this reality. The justification that young people don't leave their parents' home due to economic difficulties does not seem to be the main reason why they remain there. The hypothesis that they are not psychologically ready for it yet seems more plausible.

The Spanish Pediatrics Association congress, held in June 2006, discussed and defined adulthood as "a new phenomenon through which men and women in their 30s refuse to leave their parents' home" and considers it a social factor that is increasingly more evident and to which parents must adapt. Records found in the annals of said congress repeatedly state that this is neither a syndrome nor a physical or psychic disease, but a social phenomenon associated with new social customs and education.

César (2008) points to the weakness of institutions (schools and families) as one of the main contributing factors to the phenomenon of adulthood. The behavior of young people and adults are becoming increasingly closer to each other, with the latter being "contaminated" by traces of instability of the first, according to the author. In other words, it would seem that the ambiguity of adults, as well as their insecurities, is contributing factors to the immaturity of the young. Calligaris (2000) highlights the fact that contemporary culture idealizing youth as an eminently happy and healthy time is a relevant factor to the prolongation of adolescence.

It is true that the notion of maturity and its parameters appear to be much more elastic and ambivalent in our culture, and that exposes the ambiguity and disorientation that may also be at the heart of the adultescent crisis experienced by some young people. When maturity parameters are confusing in a culture, adolescent goals are also disturbed. In a culture where the main ideal is to remain young forever, being an adult may not be the main goal of human development. Therefore, we must stress that psychological factors are always intertwined with the sociocultural factors that make up the collective consciousness, just as individual psyches are immersed in the collective psyche at both the conscious (culture) and unconscious (archetypal) levels. To derive individual issues exclusively from the sociocultural environment would be to deny individuality and the archetypal plane. Culture is shaped by individuals and their conflicts. The cultural historical context is relevant and plays a significant role in the process of individuation, although it shouldn't be understood separately from the psychic dynamics.

When considering the psychic dynamics that underlies the issue of adulthood, we should contemplate understanding the interaction among the forces of the Alterity archetype as well as those of equally important archetypes that are active during this period. There is a highly complex system of dynamic interactions at play, where these many archetypal possibilities interface. In the case of young people moving towards maturity, we would highlight the interactions between the archetypal forces of the Hero, *Puer/Senex*, Eros and the archetypes that rule individuation (Great Mother, Father and *anima/animus*). The attributes of the Great Mother and Father archetypes and how they work when active in consciousness have already been discussed.

### The Hero

Although the archetypal energy of the Hero is always present and available to the ego

throughout the Individuation Process, it is mainly activated while the patriarchal dynamics is in effect. According to Penna (1994), heroic action structures the ego. Enthusiasm and the willingness to fight are inevitable in decisive moments of crisis of the Individuation Process, when the hero enters the stage accepting the call to the adventure of growing up. The figure of the hero instills the ego with the strength and determination to fight the battle of development; the courage of the hero is vital to the fight against the vicissitudes of the journey of life. The hero's goal is to promote a differentiation between the unconscious consciousness; inner life and relational life. The heroic fight necessarily implies victories and defeats. Hence, thanks to the hero's archetypal power, a safe way is paved for the ego towards building a solid and whole individuality. Divinity is embodied through the hero, in other words, parts of the self becomes the ego. The hero promotes the ego's embodiment of archetypal energies that forge body and spirit. The hero does not surrender to difficulties and that, in turn, strengthens the ego, so it can face the frustrations it will inevitably encounter along the way.

Campbell (1992) described three stages of the hero's journey: 1. Separation and departure; 2. Initiation; 3. Return or Reintegration. Death or the weakening of the ego can happen through the refusal of the call or the refusal of the return. The ego's health is guaranteed and made nobler by the individual's possibility to depart, to go towards the unknown, to accept the call to individuation and to return to the world and ordinary life renewed, changed and empowered. The departure with no return to regions of the unconsciousness leads to inflation, self-aggrandizement and a tendency to strong unconscious projections that delude the ego. The ego's fear and the ensuing refusal of the call to continue toward individuation is paralyzing, it petrifies egoic action before life. At each stage of life, the call to adventure and the saga to be undertaken is different and requires a different type of Hero.

Further below, we will see how the dynamics of the Hero archetype is combined with the other archetypal forces of adolescence.

### ***Puer/Senex***

The forces of *Puer* and *Senex* must be understood collectively as opposed to independently of one another. They work together and interact with other archetypal dynamics. *Puer* is the archetypal power that drives towards the future, the new, that wins over fear and dangers searching for change. Naturalness and spontaneity are also present as *Puer's* symbolic elements. According to Jung (2014), the child archetype theme prepares for future transformations. Its creative expression promotes hopeful and light movement towards renewal. In that out of tune form, *Puer's* force appears opportunistic, irresponsible and rash.

*Senex* is the archetypal power that supports settles and ensures; it looks to the past for support and summons previous experiences to validate transformation; it provides certainty, solidness and stability as well as durability and weight. *Senex* promotes the establishment of a framework of values that favors integrity and the sustainable growth of the personality. In its inharmonious form, the power of *Senex* leads to dryness, stiffness, insensitivity and becomes old-fashioned.

Staying on in adolescence and the ensuing inability to transition to psychological maturity is associated to the inability to leave the "adolescent child" locus – whinging, demanding rights, but exempt from any responsibilities – whether it is relating patriarchal issues or matriarchal demands. Staying on and the impossibility to advance towards the new is a disjointed and somewhat paradoxical dynamics between *Puer* and *Senex*.

### **Eros**

The *Puer/Senex* dyad can be added to the influence of Eros' archetypal force. Eros was the god of love in Greek and Roman mythology.

Guggenbühl-Graig (1980) suggests that Eros should be seen as an emotional bond that encompasses a broad spectrum of forms of attachment – from sexuality and friendship to the engagement in a profession, hobbies and art. Eros is responsible for connecting the many spheres of life. The degree and intensity of value with which a relationship is forged, or a friendship develops, depends on Eros. According to Guggenbühl-Graig (1980), Eros provides movement to the archetypes and promotes the connection between the ego and the archetypes. “Only when combined (the archetypes) with Eros do we feel their emotion, and do they create intimate, stimulating and creative movement” (p. 27). Eros humanizes the archetypes in their relationship with consciousness and acts, as a moderator of their characteristics of positive and negative, creative and destructive. It acts as a link not only among the archetypes, but above all between the ego and the archetypal experience. Eros instills the symbols that reach consciousness with quality, value and intensity.

Let’s not forget that symbols are the means and the form through which archetypes make themselves present in consciousness. The relationship that is established by the ego with the symbols that come into contact with it makes a fundamental difference to the possibility of assimilating content that is significant to its process of development. Like Hillman (1999), Guggenbühl-Graig (1980) also highlights the importance of the interaction among the archetypes and their influence on consciousness.

If we accept Guggenbühl-Graig’s (1980) suggestion and consider Eros as an element of union, vitality and temperance that instills archetypal powers with value, then we could say that, without Eros, polarities are in disharmony and can even neutralize one another in consciousness. On the other hand, the exacerbation of Eros will ignite the spirit and favors projections. The unconscious is projected onto others, instead of making a connection with others. Empathy, which can benefit from the right measure of

Eros, is considerably impaired by excess or lack of Eros. The ability to feel empathy is especially needed when the dynamics of Alterity are in effect, which usually happens in adulthood.

### **Adulthood and maturity – dilemmas and impasses**

The passage from adolescence to adulthood relies on the help of momentum, ambition, hope and *puer’s* dreams towards the new challenges of adult life, as well as caution, security and the preservation and maintenance of *Senex*. The entry into adult life also relies on assertiveness and strength to endure the difficulties and frustrations that are inherent to the process; they stem from the archetypal energies of the Hero and should be combined with Eros’ love, empathy and desire. The enthusiasm (Eros) and tenacity (Hero) required turning dreams and ideals (*Puer*) into achievable and consistent plans and goals (*Senex*) are a good example of the *Puer/Senex*, Eros and Hero association. A harmonious interaction among these archetypal themes tends to promote a flow of energy towards maturity as an auspicious future to be pursued (*Puer*); built through personal effort and a willingness to fight (Hero) and based on ethical values (Eros and *Senex*).

In addition to considering adulthood as a stage of contemporary life that is perhaps typical of post-modern and post-patriarchal culture, when this period is marked by a paralysis in the individuation process, an intricate dynamics of these aspects can be observed, combined with an ambivalence of the matriarchal and patriarchal dynamics, thereby significantly influencing the progress of the individuation process.

The greatest anxiety that afflicts adolescents concerns future prospects. In that regard, the teleological perspective of the Jungian view provides us with insights to understand this issue in which the greatest challenge concerns decisions and choices that, to them, seem to be definitive and, therefore, terrifying. These young people remain in a state of “preparation” for life, con-



stantly trying things out, but never committing, testing without really trying, expecting that the ideal way of being or doing is yet to come. Remaining young or even a child is a reflection of Senex elements that are out of tune with *Puer*. An attempt or desire not to mature and age denotes a dilemma between the *Puer-Senex* polarities.

A vicious cycle of paralyzing fear and irresponsible boldness stemming from the inability to face the risks that are inherent to anything new owing to low tolerance to frustrations, are the main elements that paralyze the process of individuation at this stage of life. The definitive and decisive entry into maturity is experienced with great anxiety; however, being a prisoner of the past and unable to move towards the future is also distressing. In this scenario, the dilemma becomes an impasse.

Adolescents who seek psychological help are stuck between being and not being adults. They want a relationship and a job but don't feel capable of paying the price of entering adult life. They expect miracles or seek guarantees of unconditional success in the endeavor. Furthermore, they try to hold their parents, society or misfortune responsible for their failures. In this psychic scenario, we see powerful projections of the unconscious that tend to delude the ego as to the path to be taken to achieve the goal of individuation which is, at that moment, the entry into maturity.

A destructive element of *Puer* places adolescents in a state of puerile tantrum, which promotes a senile stagnation and leads to a paradoxical situation of the *Puer/Senex* polarities. An exacerbated Eros, which blinds and confuses, or a weakened Eros, that doesn't help the interconnection among the many possibilities of the personality and the outer connection of self – other. Result in powerful projections that push the heroic energy, *Puer's* enthusiasm and Eros' connectivity and spirit, out of the ego. In this scenario, the Hero appears to be neutralized. The paralysis of the Hero and the experience of surrendering in the face of life's demands denote a paradoxically surrendered and/or defeated Hero.

## Individuation and culture

From the point of view of individuation, the energies arising from the Great Mother, Father and *animus/anima* are exercised naturally and spontaneously and seek interaction in existential life. Individuality is gradually shaped by the meeting of archetypal possibilities and the opportunities posed by sociocultural life.

In a predominantly patriarchal environment, matriarchal elements tend to be repressed, suppressed or sacrificed. A predominantly matriarchal environment makes it more difficult for patriarchal elements to become established and structured. The dynamics of Alterity tends to foster an environment where matriarchal and patriarchal elements can interact and coexist. In Western cultures, to date, children have been trained and educated in a way that has generally exposed them to patriarchal demands during childhood and, to them, the adult world has seemed to be shaped by the archetype of the Father. During adolescence, the influences of *animus/anima* called for patriarchal values to be contested, demanded that they be made more flexible, and that matriarchal aspects that had previously been excluded from consciousness be restored. That, in turn, would trigger a need for new alliances to be forged between duty and pleasure, body and spirit and for polarities that had previously been separate to reunite – reconnect – with the purpose of structuring an undivided individuality that, more encompassing and more complex.

Nowadays, however, the ambiguity, the diversity and the flexibility of post-modern life creates gaps in both matriarchal and patriarchal demands. An excessive appreciation of the ideal of youth at the expense of anything that is long-lasting or stable makes maturity seem unattractive, and makes becoming an adult extremely difficult for a significant part of the young population. It is not a matter of trying to find the causes for the issue, but of understanding the significance and the meaning of adolescence as a current phenomenon.

It is also worth reflecting on the matter of the impasse. The experience of an impasse elicits a situation of paralysis that is different from the conscious experience of a conflict, in which the ego is faced with an ethical dilemma that pushes it towards a change in attitude to life. When adolescence becomes a crisis in the process of individuation, a peculiar constellation of archetypal polarities is formed and, due to the impasse among the many psychic possibilities, one polarity neutralizes the other. It might be said that these young people are 'stuck' in the process of individuation due to an inability to articulate in

their consciousness the many aspects involved in the conflict of whether "to grow up or not to grow up – to be or not to be an adult".

The impasse between *Puer/Senex*, Eros and Hero; the matriarchal and patriarchal ambivalence, in individuals and cultures, may be a sign of a dynamics that runs the risk of paralysis both at the cultural and individual levels, and requires reflection and awareness of the courses suggested by this situation. ■

Received: 03/31/2021

Revised: 12/06/2021

## Resumo

### *Adullescência: a caminho da maturidade no mundo contemporâneo*

*Este artigo dedica-se à reflexão a respeito da passagem da adolescência para vida adulta, que em alguns casos pode ser experimentada com muita dificuldade. O termo adullescência é um neologismo muito recente, usado para nomear o prolongamento da adolescência e a dificuldade na entrada na vida adulta. A reflexão sobre essa problemática conta com a discussão sobre as dinâmicas arquetípicas atuantes neste momento*

*do desenvolvimento e com a consideração de aspectos da cultura contemporânea influentes e relevantes na vida dos jovens na atualidade. A articulação entre as forças dos arquétipos Grande Mãe, Pai, Alteridade, Herói, puer-senex e Eros, se soma às influências dos aspectos da cultura contemporânea, formando uma trama complexa de interações, que podem favorecer ou atrasar a entrada na vida adulta. ■*

**Palavras-chave:** adullescência, adolescência, puer-senex, herói, eros, individuação.

## Resumen

### *Adultoscencia: en camino a la madurez en el mundo contemporáneo*

*Este artículo está dedicado a la reflexión sobre la transición de la adolescencia a la edad adulta, que en algunos casos se puede experimentar con gran dificultad. El término adultoscencia es un neologismo muy reciente, utilizado para nombrar la prolongación de la adolescencia y la dificultad para entrar en la vida adulta. La reflexión sobre este problema se basa en el debate sobre la dinámica arquetípica en este momento de*

*desarrollo y la consideración de aspectos influyentes y relevantes de la cultura contemporánea en la vida de los jóvenes de hoy. La articulación entre las fuerzas de los arquetipos Gran Madre, Padre, Alteridad, Hero, puer-senex y Eros, se suman a las influencias de aspectos de la cultura contemporánea, formando una compleja red de interacciones, que pueden favorecer o dificultar la entrada a la vida adulta. ■*

**Palabra clave:** adultoscencia, adolescencia, puer-senex, hero, eros, individuation.

## References

- APTER, T. *O mito da maturidade: o que os adolescentes precisam para se tornarem adultos*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Rocco, 2004.
- BRITO, L. M. T. Liberdade assistida no horizonte da doutrina de proteção integral. *Psicologia, Teoria e Pesquisa*, Brasília, v. 23, n. 2, p. 133-8, abr./jun. 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-37722007000200003>
- CALLIGARIS, C. *A adolescência*. São Paulo, SP: Publifolha, 2000.
- CAMPBELL, J. *O herói de mil faces*. São Paulo, SP: Cultrix, 1992.
- CÉSAR, M. R. A. *A invenção da adolescência no discurso psicopedagógico*. São Paulo, SP: Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2008.
- DIMENSTEIN, G. Talentos jogados no lixo. *Folha de S. Paulo*, 21 nov. 2006.
- GUGGENBÜHL-CRAIG, A. *Eros on crutches: reflections on amorality and psychopathy*. Washington, DC: Spring, 1980.
- HALL, G. S. *Adolescence: its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education*. New York, NY: Appleton and Company, 1904.
- HILLMAN, J. *O livro do puer: ensaios sobre o arquétipo do puer aeternus*. São Paulo, SP: Paulus, 1999.
- JUNG, C. G. *Arquétipos do inconsciente coletivo*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Vozes, 2014. (Obras Completas 9/1)
- LEVISKY, D. L. *Adolescência: reflexões psicanalíticas*. 2. ed. São Paulo, SP: Casa do Psicólogo, 1998.
- MARAFON, G. Por uma "lição de amor" na adolescência: função paterna e educação. In: SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL DO ADOLESCENTE, 2., 2005, São Paulo. *Anais...* São Paulo, SP: Universidade de São Paulo, 2005. Disponível em: <[http://www.proceedings.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=MSC0000000082005000200044&lng=en&nrm=abn](http://www.proceedings.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=MSC0000000082005000200044&lng=en&nrm=abn)>. Acesso: 5 jun. 2009.
- PENNA, E. *Quem somos e para onde vamos: uma leitura simbólica da identidade brasileira através do símbolo do herói patriarcal e do bode expiatório*. São Paulo, SP: Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia Analítica, 1994.