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Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self

by Sara Shandler

Review by Vincent J Felitti, MD

The editor of this book is a teenaged girl who conceived the idea of publishing a book of brief essays written by adolescent girls. She asked hundreds of girls from around the country and from a wide range of backgrounds to write about the most important of their life experiences. The result is an impressive piece of psychosocial journalism that will be important and useful to anyone wanting firsthand descriptions of the life-shaping experiences faced by teenage girls. Some of those experiences reflect contemporary issues; some go back to biblical times. *Ophelia Speaks* is thus relevant for physicians, both in their practices and in their homes; for parents who cannot understand what is happening to their daughters; and for adolescents themselves.

The book is divided into five sections: The Body Under Assault; Family Matters; The Best and Worst of Friends; Touched by Desire; and Overcoming Obstacles and Coming Into Our Own. Each section begins with a few pages of the author's remarkably frank descriptions of her own feelings and experiences in that area, followed by those of her contributors. Of the process of creating the book, she writes, "... most girls, but not all, opened the door on dark and disturbing times. Still others allowed light, instead of darkness, to glitter in their contributions."^{1-p.xvi}

Section One discusses sexual abuse, something we all tend to deny but which current news articles force us to acknowledge. The editor writes, "... I was asked, 'Would you use the [Wesleyan College] escort service?' I sighed, 'I don't want to recognize the possibility of my being raped at my new home. If I call the escort service, I'm admitting to myself I can't be safe here walking alone.' ... Yet the mere existence of sexual violence shapes me."^{1-p.54}

Family Matters addresses loss, especially the ongoing effects of divorce, but also death. "I can remember nights that I would yell and scream at my mother—but only in my head: Why did you abandon us? Do you know what you did when you left us?"^{1-p.100}

Eating disorders are common, although we generally do not recognize them in our medical practice. These disorders are described clearly in the book, sometimes along with other distressing techniques, such as self-cutting: "When blood starts to gush out of the newly opened veins, all the bad feelings fly out with it and I find release. I find my heaven. If only they would ever let me bleed long enough. They believe they are saving me, but only I know how to save myself."^{1-p.93} The remarkable editor observes, "Sadly, tragically, three abusive themes—incest, violence, and alcoholism—were mentioned more often than all others when girls wrote about their fathers."^{1-p.105}

Touched by Desire contains details, often counterintuitive, of adolescent love and affection. Some of the stories may induce personal remembrance of anguish and confusion or perhaps memories of emotional support and understanding. "No one wrote about feeling satisfied by first-time sexual relationships. Instead of feeling love and commitment, girls consistently reported disappointment and disillusionment."^{1-p.184-5} One girl writes, "I thought by having sex together we would become closer; instead it tore us apart."^{1-p.185} The book contains meaningful descriptions of manipulative and destructive relationships.

Its concept and firsthand descriptions make this a remarkable book. Its thematic material makes it an important book because it affects us all: as humans, as parents, and as physicians. We might wonder how these girls' emotions will later manifest in our offices decades later. Adolescence is not an easy time; we will remember that Shakespeare's Ophelia escapes into madness. Some of these girls will escape into illness. Will we be aware of its causality? Or will we merely respond to its physical symptoms while knowing nothing of our patients' unexpressed feelings? ♦

Reference

1. Shandler S. *Ophelia speaks: adolescent girls write about their search for self*. New York: HarperPerennial; 1999.

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Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self is a 1999 book written by Sara Shandler and published by HarperCollins.[1][2][3]. The book is an anthology of works by adolescent girls which spent eighteen weeks on The New York Times Best Seller List.[4] Salon's review singled out "Fight Girl Power" by Emily Carmichael as the best of the collection, praising the essay as a "sophisticated, painful, and amusing meditation on girl power." [5].[^] The United States of America, commonly known as the United States or America, is a country composed of 50 states, a federal district, five major self-governing territories, and various possessions. At 3.8 million square miles, the United States is the world's [^] Martone. Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls by Mary Pipher Paperback \$12.97. In Stock. Ships from and sold by Amazon.com.[^] Because she's a college student, Shandler considers herself a peer of these adolescent girls, able to tap into their collective consciousness. Shandler is as determined as she is a sharp reporter in chronicling the lives of these young women. To research the book, she sent out a mass mailing of 7,000 letters to high school and junior high school principals, counselors, and teachers explaining her book project and urging them to encourage teenage girls to contribute. The topics covered run the gamut, but they include parental expectations, racial relations, and faith, among others. Sadly, Books. Shandler, Sara. Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write about Their Search for Self New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Walker, Pamela. Everything You Need to Know about Body Dysmorphic Disorder: Dealing with a Distorted Body Image. Brookshire, TX: Rosen Publishing Group, 1999. Organization. Nemours Center for Children's Health Media, Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children, 1600 Rockland Road, Wilmington, DE 19803. This organization is dedicated to issues of children's health and produces the KidsHealth website.

Body under assault. Media-fed images ; Eating disorders ; Self-inflicted wounds ; Intoxication ; Rape and sexual abuse -- Family matters. Mothers ; Fathers ; Sisters and brothers ; Disintegrating foundations ; No safe place ; Pregnancy ; Death in the family -- The best and worst of friends. With the support of friends ; Friendship lost ; When friends die -- Touched by desire. Innocent attractions ; Seduced by sex ; Diverse sexualities ; Manipulated and controlled ; Broken-hearted independence -- Overcoming obstacles and coming into our own. The academic squeeze ; Depression and therapy ; Race, Written in their own words, twelve- to eighteen-year-old adolescents describe the many challenges facing young women today. Readers come to understand young women's perspectives on a variety of sensitive issues, including teenage pregnancy, drug use, eatin. Written in their own words, twelve- to eighteen-year-old adolescents describe the many challenges facing young women today. Readers come to understand young women's perspectives on a variety of sensitive issues, including teenage pregnancy, drug use, eatin. Save to list. Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self is a 1999 book written by Sara Shandler and published by HarperCollins.[1][2][3]. The book is an anthology of works by adolescent girls which spent eighteen weeks on The New York Times Best Seller List.[4] Salon's review singled out "Fight Girl Power" by Emily Carmichael as the best of the collection, praising the essay as a "sophisticated, painful, and amusing meditation on girl power." [5]. An unofficial sequel to the book was published in 2001, Ophelia's Mom written by Sara Shandler's mother