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***Identity and Faith in the In-Between:
The Power of Imagination in Adolescent Development***

Adolescents traverse many in-between diasporic spaces as they attempt to develop identity, faith, and meaning in their lives. This paper will explore how U.S. culture limits adolescent development by encouraging conformity and inhibiting imagination, primarily through media and educational systems. As an alternative, I suggest that religious education has the potential to foster imagination within identity formation and meaning-making and thus aid adolescents in their development toward adulthood and more whole and authentic lives.

Main Concepts/Issues

1. Adolescents are in a developmental space of diaspora
 - a. Opposing pulls
 - i. Children trying to understand the adult world—Budding adults trying to understand their childhoods
 - ii. A brain that urges them to take risks—A brain that does not allow them to understand consequences
 - iii. A desire to conform—A desire to rebel
 - iv. Attempting to construct their own faith—Highly influenced by the faith of their parents
 - b. Ideally they would be provided with a space for the emergence of identity and guidance in healthy development
2. Instead they are offered a small world
 - a. Developmental stage of conformity
 - i. Seek to fit in and be acceptable
 - b. Media and advertising provide a single acceptable image
 - c. Educational system provides a single acceptable image
 - i. These inhibit the development of the capacity to imagine and reinforce conformity
3. This doesn't serve adolescents well
 - a. The next stages of development involve individuation
 - i. Teenagers are not well equipped to do this
 - ii. Culture is not helping them, but rather reinforcing their tendency to conform
4. What do they need?
 - a. The capacity to see that the world is much larger, with many possibilities
 - b. A judgment free place where non-conformity is possible and accepted so that there is room for their authentic selves to emerge and belong
 - c. The courage to allow their true selves to be seen in the world
 - i. Each of these is undergirded by imagination and the capacity to imagine
 - ii. This is the work of religious education

Methodology

The methodology for this paper includes a literature-based review and analysis with some insights from a community of practice and the author's experience within that community.

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