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Identity
Youth and Crisis

BY ERIK H. ERIKSON
Childhood and Society (1950, 1963)
Young Man Luther (1958)
Insight and Responsibility (1964)
Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968)
Gandhi's Truth (1969)
Dimensions of a New Identity (1974)
Life History and the Historical Moment (1975)
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out-totalize the totalitarians.

To have the courage of one's diversity is a sign of wholeness in individuals and in civilization. But wholeness, too, must have defined boundaries. In the present state of our civilization, it is not yet possible to foresee whether or not a more universal identity promises to embrace all the diversities and dissonances, relativities and mortal dangers which emerge with technological and scientific progress.

Chapter III

The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity

Among the indispensable co-ordinates of identity is that of the life cycle, for we assume that not until adolescence does the individual develop the prerequisites in physiological growth, mental maturation, and social responsibility to experience and pass through the crisis of identity. We may, in fact, speak of the identity crisis as the psychosocial aspect of adolessence. Nor could this stage be passed without identity having found a form which will decisively determine later life.

Let us, once more, start out from Freud's far-reaching discovery that neurotic conflict is not very different in content from the "normative" conflicts which every child must live through in his childhood, and the residues of which every adult carries with him in the recesses of his personality. For man, in order to remain psychologically alive, constantly re-resolves these conflicts just as his body unceasingly combats the encroachment of physical deterioration. However, since I cannot accept the conclusion that just to be alive, or not to be sick, means to be healthy, or as I would prefer to say in matters of personality, *vital*, I must have recourse to a few concepts which are not part of the official terminology of my field.

I shall present human growth from the point of view of the
conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity “to do well” according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him. The use of the words “to do well” of course points up the whole question of cultural relativity. Those who are significant to a man may think he is doing well when he “does some good” or when he “does well” in the sense of acquiring possessions; when he is doing well in the sense of learning new skills and new knowledge or when he is not much more than just getting along; when he learns to conform all around or to rebel significantly; when he is merely free from neurotic symptoms or manages to contain within his vitality all manner of profound conflict.

There are many formulations of what constitutes a “healthy” personality in an adult. But if we take up only one—in this case, Marie Jahoda’s definition, according to which a healthy personality actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly—it is clear that all of these criteria are relative to the child’s cognitive and social development. In fact, we may say that childhood is defined by their initial absence and by the gradual development in complex steps of increasing differentiation. How, then, does a vital personality grow or, as it were, accrue from the successive stages of the increasing capacity to adapt to life’s necessities—with some vital enthusiasm to spare?

Whenever we try to understand growth, it is well to remember the epigenetic principle which is derived from the growth of organisms in utero. Somewhat generalized, this principle states that anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole. This, obviously, is true for fetal development where each part of the organism has its critical time of ascendance or danger of defect. At birth the baby leaves the chemical exchange of the womb for the social exchange system of his society, where his adulthood

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gradually increasing capacities meet the opportunities and limitations of his culture. How the maturing organism continues to unfold, not by developing new organs but by means of a prescribed sequence of locomotor, sensory, and social capacities, is described in the child-development literature. As pointed out, psychoanalysis has given us an understanding of the more idiosyncratic experiences, and especially the inner conflicts, which constitute the manner in which an individual becomes a distinct personality. But here, too, it is important to realize that in the sequence of his most personal experiences the healthy child, given a reasonable amount of proper guidance, can be trusted to obey inner laws of development, laws which create a succession of potentialities for significant interaction with those persons who tend and respond to him and those institutions which are ready for him. While such interaction varies from culture to culture, it must remain within “the proper rate and the proper sequence” which governs all epigenesis. Personality, therefore, can be said to develop according to steps predetermined in the human organism’s readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening radius of significant individuals and institutions.

It is for this reason that, in the presentation of stages in the development of the personality, we employ an epigenetic diagram analogous to the one employed in Childhood and Society for an analysis of Freud’s psychosexual stages. It is, in fact, an implicit purpose of this presentation to bridge the theory of infantile sexuality (without repeating it here in detail) and our knowledge of the child’s physical and social growth.

The diagram is presented on p. 94. The double-lined squares signify both a sequence of stages and a gradual development of component parts; in other words, the diagram formalizes a progression through time of a differentiation of parts. This indicates (1) that each item of the vital personality to be discussed is systematically related to all others, and that they all depend on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item; and (2) that each item exists in some form before “its” decisive
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and critical time normally arrives.

If I say, for example, that a sense of basic trust is the first component of mental vitality to develop in life, a sense of autonomous will the second, and a sense of initiative the third, the diagram expresses a number of fundamental relations that exist among the three components, as well as a few fundamental facts for each.

Each comes to its ascension, meets its crisis, and finds its lasting solution in ways to be described here, toward the end of the stages mentioned. All of them exist in the beginning in some form, although we do not make a point of this fact, and we shall not confuse things by calling these components different names at earlier or later stages. A baby may show something like “autonomy” from the beginning, for example, in the particular way in which he angrily tries to wriggle his hand free when tightly held. However, under normal conditions, it is not until the second year that he begins to experience the whole critical alternative between being an autonomous creature and being a dependent one, and it is not until then that he is ready for a specifically new encounter with his environment. The environment, in turn, now feels called upon to convey to him its particular ideas and concepts of autonomy in ways decisively contributing to his personal character, his relative efficiency, and the strength of his vitality.

It is this encounter, together with the resulting crisis, which is to be described for each stage. Each stage becomes a crisis because incipient growth and awareness in a new part function together with a shift in instinctual energy and yet also cause a specific vulnerability in that part. One of the most difficult questions to decide, therefore, is whether or not a child at a given stage is weak or strong. Perhaps it would be best to say that he is always vulnerable in some respects and completely oblivious and insensitive in others, but that at the same time he is unbelievably persistent in the same respects in which he is vulnerable. It must be added that the baby’s weakness gives him power; out of his very dependence and weakness he makes signs to which his en-
environment, if it is guided well by a responsiveness combining “instinctive” and traditional patterns, is peculiarly sensitive. A baby’s presence exerts a consistent and persistent domination over the outer and inner lives of every member of a household. Because these members must realign themselves to accommodate his presence, they must also grow as individuals and as a group. It is as true to say that babies control and bring up their families as it is to say the converse. A family can bring up a baby only by being brought up by him. His growth consists of a series of challenges to them to serve his newly developing potentialities for social interaction.

Each successive step, then, is a potential crisis because of a radical change in perspective. Crisis is used here in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential, and therefore, the ontogenetic source of generational strength and maladjustment. The most radical change of all, from intrauterine to extrauterine life, comes at the very beginning of life. But in postnatal existence, too, such radical adjustments of perspective as lying relaxed, sitting firmly, and running fast must all be accomplished in their own good time. With them, the interpersonal perspective also changes rapidly and often radically, as is testified by the proximity in time of such opposites as “not letting mother out of sight” and “wanting to be independent.” Thus, different capacities use different opportunities to become full-grown components of the ever-new configuration that is the growing personality.

I. INFANCY AND THE MUTUALITY OF RECOGNITION

For the most fundamental prerequisite of mental vitality, I have already nominated a sense of basic trust, which is a pervasive attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life. By “trust” I mean an essential trustworthiness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one’s own trustworthiness.

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In describing a development of a series of alternative basic attitudes, including identity, we take recourse to the term “a sense of.” It must be immediately obvious, however, that such “senses” as a sense of health or vitality, or a sense of the lack of either, pervades the surface and the depth, including what we experience as consciousness or what remains barely conscious or is altogether unconscious. As a conscious experience, trust is accessible to introspection. But it is also a way of being, observable by others, and it is, finally, an inner state verifiable only by testing and psychoanalytic interpretation. All three of these dimensions are to be inferred when we loosely speak of “a sense of.”

As is usual in psychoanalysis, we learned first of the “basic” nature of trust from adult psychopathology. In adults a radical impairment of basic trust and a prevalence of basic mistrust is expressed in a particular form of severe estrangement which characterizes individuals who withdraw into themselves when at odds with themselves and with others. Such withdrawal is most strikingly displayed by individuals who regress into psychotic states in which they sometimes close up, refusing food and comfort and becoming oblivious to companionship. What is most radically missing in them can be seen from the fact that as we attempt to assist them with psychotherapy, we must try to “reach” them with the specific intent of convincing them that they can trust us to trust them and that they can trust themselves.

Familiarity with such radical regressions as well as with the deepest and most infantile propensities in our not-so-sick patients has taught us to regard basic trust as the cornerstone of a vital personality. Let us see what justifies our placing the crisis and the ascendancy of this component at the beginning of life.

As the newborn infant is separated from his symbiosis with the mother’s body, his inborn and more or less co-ordinated ability to take in by mouth meets the mother’s more or less co-ordinated ability and intention to feed him and to welcome him. At this point he lives through, and loves with, his mouth, and the
mother lives through, and loves with, her breasts or whatever parts of her countenance and body convey eagerness to provide what he needs.

For the mother this is a late and complicated accomplishment, highly dependent on her development as a woman, on her unconscious attitude toward the child, on the way she has lived through pregnancy and delivery, on her and her community’s attitude toward the act of nursing and caring—and on the response of the newborn. To him the mouth is the focus of a general first approach to life—the incorporative approach. In psychoanalysis this stage is usually referred to as the oral stage.

Yet it is clear that in addition to the overwhelming need for food, a baby is, or soon becomes, receptive in many other respects. As he is willing and able to suck on appropriate objects and to swallow whatever appropriate fluids they emit, he is soon also willing and able to “take in” with his eyes whatever enters his visual field. His senses, too, seem to “take in” what feels good. In this sense, then, one can speak of an incorporative stage, in which he is, relatively speaking, receptive to what he is being offered. Yet babies are sensitive and vulnerable too. In order to insure that their first experiences in this world will not only keep them alive but will also help them to co-ordinate their sensitive breathing and their metabolic and circulatory rhythms, we must see to it that we deliver to their senses stimuli as well as food in the proper intensity and at the right time; otherwise their willingness to accept may change radically into diffuse defense or into lethargy.

Now, while it is quite clear what must happen to keep a baby alive—the minimum supply necessary—and what must not happen, lest he be physically damaged or chronically upset—the maximum of early frustration tolerable—there is a certain leeway in regard to what may happen, and different cultures make extensive use of the prerogatives to decide what they consider workable and insist upon calling necessary. Some people think that a baby, lest he scratch his own eyes out, must necessarily be swaddled completely for most of the day and throughout the greater part of the first year, and that he should be rocked or fed whenever he whimpers. Others think that he should feel the freedom of his kicking limbs as early as possible, but also that, as a matter of course, he should be forced to cry “please” for his meals until he literally gets blue in the face. All of this, more or less consciously, seems related to the culture’s general aim and system. I have known some old American Indians who bitterly decried the way in which we once let our small babies cry because we believed that it would “make their lungs strong.” No wonder, these Indians said, that the white man, after such an initial reception, seems to be so intent on getting to “heaven.” But the same Indians spoke proudly of the way their infants, breast fed into the second year, became blue in the face with fury when they were thumped on the head for “biting” their mother’s nipples; here the Indians, in turn, believed that it would “make good hunters of them.”

There is, then, some intrinsic wisdom, some unconscious planning, and much superstition in the seemingly arbitrary varieties of child training. But there is also a logic—however instinctive and prescientific—in the assumption that what is “good for the child,” what may happen to him, depends on what he is supposed to become and where.

At any rate, it is already in his earliest encounters that the human infant meets up with the principal modalities of his culture. The simplest and the earliest modality is to get, not in the sense of “go and get” but in that of receiving and accepting what is given. This is easy when it works and yet any disturbance shows how complicated the process really is. The groping and unstable newborn’s organism learns this modality only as he learns to regulate his readiness to “get” with the methods of a mother who, in turn, will permit him to co-ordinate his means of getting as she develops and co-ordinates her means of giving. But in thus getting what is given, and in learning to get somebody to do for him what he wishes to have done, the baby also develops the necessary groundwork “to get to be” the giver—that is, to identify with her and eventually to become a giving person.
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In some especially sensitive individuals, or in individuals whose early frustration was never compensated for, a weakness in such early mutual regulation can be at the root of a disturbance in their relationship to the world in general, and especially to significant people. But, of course, there are ways of maintaining mutuality through the satiation of other than oral receptors: the baby’s pleasure in being held, warmed, smiled at, talked to, rocked, and so forth. Besides such “horizontal” compensation (compensation during the same stage of development) there are many “longitudinal” compensations in life which emerge from later stages of the life cycle.8

During the “second oral” stage the capacities to pursue and take pleasure in a more active and more directed incorporative approach ripen. Teeth develop and with them the pleasure of biting on hard things, biting through things, and biting off things. This active-incorporative mode characterizes a variety of other activities, as did the first incorporative mode. The eyes, first seemingly passive in accepting impressions as they come along, have now learned to focus on, isolate, and “grasp” objects from the vaguer background and follow them. The organs of hearing similarly have learned to discern significant sounds, localize them, and guide appropriate changes in position, such as lifting and turning the head or lifting and turning the upper body. The arms have learned to reach out determinedly and the hands to grasp firmly. We are, then, more interested in the overall configuration of developing approaches to the world than we are in the first appearance of isolated abilities which are so well documented in the child-development literature. One can think of a stage as the time when a given capacity first appears (or appears in testable form) or as that period when a number of related items are so well established and integrated that the next step in development can safely be initiated.

During the second stage, interpersonal patterns are established which are united in the social modality of taking and holding on to things—things which are more or less freely offered and given and things which have more or less a tendency to slip away. As the baby learns to change positions, to roll over, and very gradually to establish himself on the throne of his sedentary kingdom, he must perfect the mechanisms of grasping, appropriating, and holding as well as chewing all that is within his reach.

The crisis of the second oral stage is difficult to assess and more difficult to verify. It seems to consist of the coincidence in time of three developments: (1) a more “violent” drive to incorporate, appropriate, and observe more actively, a tension associated with the discomfort of “teething” and other changes in the oral machinery; (2) the infant’s increasing awareness of himself as a distinct person; and (3) the mother’s gradual turning away from the baby toward pursuits which she had given up during late pregnancy and postnatal care. These pursuits include her full return to conjugal intimacy and perhaps to a new pregnancy.

Where breast feeding lasts into the biting stage, and, generally speaking, this has been the rule, it is now necessary to learn how to continue sucking without biting, so that the mother will not withdraw the nipple in pain or anger. Our clinical work indicates that this stage in the individual’s early history provides him with some sense of basic loss, leaving the general impression that once upon a time one’s unity with a maternal matrix was destroyed. Weaning, therefore, should not mean sudden loss of both the breast and the mother’s reassuring presence, unless, of course, other women can be depended upon to sound and feel much like the mother. A drastic loss of accustomed mother love without proper substitution at this time can lead, under otherwise aggravating conditions, to acute infantile depression 4 or to a mild but chronic state of mourning which may give a depressive undertone to the remainder of one’s life. But even under more favorable circumstances, this stage seems to introduce into the psychic life a sense of division and a dim but universal nostalgia for a lost paradise.

It is against the combination of these impressions of having been deprived, of having been divided, and of having been abandoned, all of which leave a residue of basic mistrust, that basic
trust must establish and maintain itself.

What we here call "trust" coincides with what Therese Benedek has called "confidence." If I prefer the word "trust," it is because there is more naïveté and more mutuality in it: an infant can be said to be trusting, but it would be assuming too much to say that he has confidence. The general state of trust, furthermore, implies not only that one has learned to rely on the same-ness and continuity of the outer providers but also that one may trust oneself and the capacity of one's own organs to cope with urges; that one is able to consider oneself trustworthy enough so that the providers will not need to be on guard or to leave.

In the psychiatric literature we find frequent references to an "oral character," which is an emphasis on traits representative of the unsolved conflicts of this stage. Wherever oral pessimism becomes dominant and exclusive, infantile fears such as that of "being left empty" or simply of "being left," and also of being "starved of stimulation," can be discerned in the depressive forms of "being empty" and of "being no good." Such fears, in turn, can give origin to that particular avaricious quality which in psychoanalysis is called oral sadism, that is, a cruel need to get and to take in ways harmful to others or to oneself. But there is an optimistic oral character, too, one who has learned to make giving and receiving the most important thing in life. And there is "orality" as a normal substratum in all individuals, a lasting residue of this first period of dependency on powerful providers. It normally expresses itself in our dependencies and nostalgias, and in our all too hopeful and all too hopeless states. The integration of the oral stage with all the following ones results, in adulthood, in a combination of faith and realism.

The pathology and irrationality of oral trends depend entirely on the degree to which they are integrated with the rest of the personality and the degree to which they fit into the general cultural pattern and use approved interpersonal techniques for their expression.

Here, as elsewhere, we must therefore consider as a topic for discussion the expression of infantile urges in cultural patterns which one may or may not consider a pathological deviation in the total economic or moral system of a culture or nation. One could speak, for example, of the invigorating belief in "chance," that traditional prerogative of American trust in one's own resourcefulness and in Fate's store of good intentions. This belief, at times, can be seen to degenerate in large-scale gambling, or in "taking chances" in the form of an arbitrary and often suicidal provocation of Fate or in the insistence that one has not only the right to an equal chance, but also the privilege of being preferred over all other "investors." In a similar way, all the pleasant reassurances which can be derived, especially in company, from old and new taste sensations, inhaling and sipping, munching and swallowing and digesting can turn into mass addictions neither expressive of nor conducing to the kind of basic trust we have in mind. Here we are obviously touching on phenomena calling for an epidemiological approach to the problem of the more or less malignant elaboration of infantile modalities in cultural excesses, as well as in mild forms of addiction, self-delusion, and avaricious appropriation, which are expressive of a certain weakness in oral reassurance.

It must be said, however, that the amount of trust derived from earliest infantile experience does not seem to depend on absolute quantities of food or demonstrations of love, but rather on the quality of the maternal relationship. Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their community's life style. This forms the very basis in the child for a component of the sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being "all right," of being oneself, and of becoming what other people trust one will become. Parents must not only have certain ways of guiding by prohibition and permission, they must also be able to represent to the child a deep, almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning in what they are doing. In this sense a traditional system of child care can be said to be a factor making for trust, even
where certain items of that tradition, taken singly, may seem arbitrary or unnecessarily cruel—or lenient. Here much depends on whether such items are inflicted on the child by the parent in the firm traditional belief that this is the only way to do things or whether the parent misuses his administration of the baby and the child in order to work off anger, alleviate fear, or win an argument, either with the child himself or with somebody else—mother-in-law, doctor, or priest.

In times of change—and what other times are there, in our memory?—one generation differs so much from another that items of tradition often become disturbances. Conflicts between mother’s ways and one’s own self-made style, conflicts between the expert’s advice and mother’s ways, and conflicts between the expert’s authority and one’s own style may disturb a young mother’s trust in herself. Furthermore, all the mass transformations in American life (immigration, migration, and Americanization; industrialization, urbanization, mechanization, and others) are apt to disturb young mothers in those tasks which are so simple yet so far-reaching. No wonder, then, that the first section of the first chapter of Benjamin Spock’s book is entitled “Trust Yourself.”

In a discussion of development, it is unavoidable that one must begin with the beginning. This is unfortunate because we know so little of the earliest and deepest strata of the human mind. But I would claim that we have now touched upon the major directions from which any of the emerging components of human vitality can be studied—from the beginning of life to the identity crisis and beyond. We will not be able to be equally expansive in regard to the other stages, although this chapter as a whole should complete an “inventory” such as we have now outlined for the first stage of life. In addition to the measurable aspects of growth, our implicit scheme should cover: (1) The expanding libidinal needs of the developing being and, with them, new possibilities of satisfaction, of frustration, and of “sublimation.” (2) The widening social radius, i.e., the number

and kinds of people to whom he can respond meaningfully on the basis of (3) his ever more highly differentiated capacities. (4) The developmental crisis evoked by the necessity to manage new encounters within a given time allowance. (5) A new sense of estrangement awakened along with the awareness of new dependences and new familiarities (e.g., in early infancy, the sense of abandonment). (6) A specifically new psychosocial strength (here a favorable ratio of trust over mistrust) which is a foundation for all future strengths.

This is a forbidding array of items and is too demanding for what is our immediate task, namely, a descriptive account of the early experiences which facilitate or endanger the future identity.

What would we consider to be the earliest and most undifferentiated “sense of identity”? I would suggest that it arises out of the encounter of maternal person and small infant, an encounter which is one of mutual trustworthiness and mutual recognition. This, in all its infantile simplicity, is the first experience of what in later reoccurrences in love and admiration can only be called a sense of “hallowed presence,” the need for which remains basic in man. Its absence or impairment can dangerously limit the capacity to feel “identical” when adolescent growth makes it incumbent on the person to abandon his childhood and to trust adulthood and, with it, the search for self-chosen loves and incentives.

At this point, I must add to the list already given one further dimension, the seventh—namely, the contribution of each stage to one major human endeavor which in adulthood takes over the guardianship of the particular strength originating in this stage and the ritual appeasement of its particular estrangement.

Each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic institutionalized endeavors of man for the simple reason that the human life cycle and human institutions have evolved together. The relation between them is twofold: each generation brings to these institutions the remnants of infantile needs and youthful fervor and receives from them—as long as they, in-
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toddler out to the bushes so that his compliance in this matter may coincide with his wish to imitate the bigger ones. Our Western civilization (as well as others—for example, Japan), and especially certain classes within it, have chosen to take the matter more seriously. It is here that the machine age has provided the ideal of a mechanically trained, faultlessly functioning, and always clean, punctual, and deodorized body. In addition, it has been more or less superstitiously assumed that early and rigorous training is absolutely necessary for the kind of personality which will function efficiently in a mechanized world in which time is money. Thus a child becomes a machine which must be set and tuned even as before it was an animal which must be broken—while, in fact, will power can develop only by steps. At any rate our clinical work suggests that the neurotics of our time include the compulsive type, who is stingy, retentive, and meticulous in matters of affection, time, and money as well as in the management of his bowels. Also, bowel and bladder training has become the most obviously disturbing item of child training in wide circles of our society.

What, then, makes the anal problem potentially important and difficult?

The anal zone lends itself more than any other to the expression of stubborn insistence on conflicting impulses because, for one thing, it is the model zone for two contradictory modes which must become alternating, namely, retention and elimination. Furthermore, the sphincters are only part of the muscle system with its general ambiguity of rigidity and relaxation, of flexion and extension. This whole stage, then, becomes a battle for autonomy. For as he gets ready to stand on his feet more firmly, the infant also learns to delineate his world as “I” and “you,” and “me” and “mine.” Every mother knows how astonishingly pliable a child may be at this stage, if and when he has made the decision that he wants to do what he is supposed to do. It is impossible, however, to find a reliable formula for making him want to do just that. Every mother knows how lovingly a child at this stage will snuggle close to her and how ruthlessly he

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will suddenly try to push her away. At the same time the child is apt both to hoard things and to discard them, to cling to treasured objects and to throw them out of the windows of houses and vehicles. All of these seemingly contradictory tendencies, then, we include under the formula of the retentive-eliminative modes. All basic modalities, in fact, lend themselves to both hostile and benign expectations and attitudes. Thus, “to hold” can become a destructive and cruel retaining or restraining, and it can become a pattern of care: “to have and to hold.” To “let go,” too, can turn into an inimical letting loose of destructive forces, or it can become a relaxed “to let pass” and “to let be.” Culturally speaking, these modalities are neither good nor bad; their value depends on how they are built into the patterns of affirmation and rejection demanded in the culture.

The matter of mutual regulation between adult and child now faces its severest test. If outer control by too rigid or too early training persists in robbing the child of his attempt gradually to control his bowels and other functions willingly and by his free choice, he will again be faced with a double rebellion and a double defeat. Powerless against his own anal instinctuality and sometimes afraid of his own bowel movements and powerless outside, he will be forced to seek satisfaction and control either by regression or by fake progression. In other words, he will return to an earlier, oral control; that is, he will suck his thumb and become doubly demanding; or he will become hostile and willful, often using his feces (as he will later the corresponding dirty words) as aggressive ammunition; or he will pretend an autonomy and an ability to do without anybody’s help which he has by no means really gained.

This stage, therefore, becomes decisive for the ratio between loving good will and hateful self-insistence, between co-operation and willfulness, and between self-expression and compulsive self-restraint or meek compliance. A sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem is the ontogenetic source of a sense of free will. From an unavoidable sense of loss of self-control and of parental overcontrol comes a lasting propensity for doubt and
shame.

For the growth of autonomy a firmly developed early trust is necessary. The infant must have come to be sure that his faith in himself and in the world will not be jeopardized by the violent wish to have his choice, to appropriate demandingly, and to eliminate stubbornly. Only parental firmness can protect him against the consequences of his as yet untrained discrimination and circumspection. But his environment must also back him up in his wish to “stand on his own feet,” while also protecting him against the now newly emerging pair of estrangements, namely, that sense of having exposed himself prematurely and foolishly which we call shame or that secondary mistrust, that “double take,” which we call doubt—doubt in himself and doubt in the firmness and perspicacity of his trainers.

Shame is an infantile emotion insufficiently studied because in our civilization it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt. Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at—in a word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible; that is why in dreams of shame we are stared at in a condition of incomplete dress, in night attire, “with one’s pants down.” Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one’s face or to sink, right then and there, into the ground. This potentiality is abundantly utilized in the educational method of “shaming” used so exclusively by some primitive peoples, where it supplants the often more destructive sense of guilt to be discussed later. The destructiveness of shaming is balanced in some civilizations by devices for “saving face.” Shaming exploits the increased sense of being small, which paradoxically develops as the child stands up and as his awareness permits him to note the relative measures of size and power.

Too much shaming does not result in a sense of propriety but in a secret determination to try to get away with things when unseen, if, indeed, it does not result in deliberate shamelessness. There is an impressive American ballad in which a murderer to be hanged on the gallows before the eyes of the community, instead of feeling mortally afraid or totally shamed, begins to be-
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maintain an autonomous sense of free will. As far as psycho-
analysis is concerned, it has focused primarily on excessively
early toilet training and on unreasonable shaming as causes of
the child's estrangement from his own body. It has attempted at
least to formulate what should not be done to children, and
there are, of course, any number of avoidances which can be
learned from the study of the life cycle. Many such formulat-
ions, however, are apt to arouse superstitious inhibitions in
those who are inclined to make anxious rules out of vague
warnings. We are gradually learning what exactly not to do to what
kind of children at what age; but then we must still learn what
to do, spontaneously and joyfully. The expert, to quote Frank
Fremont-Smith, can only "set the frame of reference within
which choice is permissible and desirable." In the last analysis, as
comparative studies in child training have convinced us, the kind
and degree of a sense of autonomy which parents are able to
grant their small children depends on the dignity and sense of
personal independence they derive from their own lives. We
have already suggested that the infant's sense of trust is a reflec-
tion of parental faith; similarly, the sense of autonomy is a reflec-
tion of the parents' dignity as autonomous beings. For no
matter what we do in detail, the child will primarily feel what it
is we live by as loving, co-operative, and firm beings, and what
makes us hateful, anxious, and divided in ourselves.

What social institution, then, guards the lasting gains of the
second stage of life? Man's basic need for a delineation of his au-
tonomy seems to have an institutional safeguard in the principle
of law and order, which in everyday life as well as in the courts
of law apportions to each his privileges and his limitations, his
obligations and his rights. Only a sense of rightfully delimited
autonomy in the parents fosters a handling of the small individ-
ual which expresses a suprapersonal indignation rather than an
arbitrary righteousness. It is important to dwell on this point be-
cause much of the lasting sense of doubt, and of the indignity of
punishment and restriction common to many children, is a con-
sequence of the parents' frustrations in marriage, in work, and in

finance of gangs. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter
VI.

Doubt is the brother of shame. Whereas shame is dependent
on the consciousness of being upright and exposed, doubt has
much to do with a consciousness of having a front and a back
—and especially a "behind." For this reverse area of the body,
with its aggressive and libidinal focus in the sphincters and but-
tocks, cannot be seen by the child, and yet it can be dominated
by the will of others. The "behind" is the small being's dark
continent, an area of the body which can be magically domi-
nated and effectively invaded by those who would attack one's
power of autonomy and who would designate as evil those
products of the bowels which were felt to be all right when they
were being passed. This basic sense of doubt in whatever one has
left behind is the model for the habitual "double take" or other
later and more verbal forms of compulsive doubting. It finds its
adult expression in paranoiac fears concerning hidden perse-
cutors and secret persecutions threatening from behind (and
from within the behind). Again, in adolescence, this may be ex-
pressed in a transitory total self-doubt, a feeling that all that is
now "behind" in time—the childhood family as well as the
earlier manifestations of one's personality—simply do not add up
to the prerequisites for a new beginning. All of this may then be
denied in a willful display of dirtiness and messiness, with all the
implications of "dirty" swearing at the world and at oneself.

As was the case with the "oral" personality, the compulsive or
"anal" personality has its normal aspects and its abnormal exag-
gerations. If eventually integrated with compensatory traits,
some impulsiveness releases expression even as some compul-
siveness is useful in matters in which order, punctuality, and clean-
liness are of the essence. The question is always whether we re-
main the masters of the modalities by which things become more
manageable or whether the rules master the ruler.

It takes stamina as well as flexibility to train a child's will so as
to help him to overcome too much willfulness, develop some
"good will," and (while learning to obey in some essential ways)
citizenship. Where large numbers of people have been prepared in childhood to expect from life a high degree of personal autonomy, pride, and opportunity, and then in later life find themselves ruled by impersonal organizations and machineries too intricate to understand, the result may be deep chronic disappointment that makes them unwilling to grant each other—or their children—a measure of autonomy. They may be possessed, instead, by irrational fears of losing what is left of their autonomy or of being sabotaged, restricted, and constricted in their free will by anonymous enemies and at the same time, paradoxically enough, of not being controlled enough, of not being told what to do.

We have, again at length, characterized the struggles and triumphs of a childhood stage. In what way does this stage contribute to the identity crisis, either by supporting the formation of identity or by contributing a particular kind of estrangement to its confusion? The stage of autonomy, of course, deserves particular attention, for in it is played out the first emancipation, namely, from the mother. There are clinical reasons (to be discussed in the chapter on identity confusion) to believe that the adolescent turning away from the whole childhood milieu in many ways repeats this first emancipation. For this reason the most rebellious youths can also regress partially (and sometimes wholly) to a demanding and plaintive search for a guidance which their cynical independence seems to disavow. Apart from such “clinical” evidence, however, the over-all contribution to an eventual identity formation is the very courage to be an independent individual who can choose and guide his own future.

We said that the earliest stage leaves a residue in the growing being which, on many hierarchic levels and especially in the individual's sense of identity, will echo something of the conviction "I am what hope I have and give." The analogous residue of the stage of autonomy appears to be "I am what I can will freely." ¹⁰

The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity

3. CHILDHOOD AND THE ANTICIPATION OF ROLES

Being firmly convinced that he is a person on his own, the child must now find out what kind of a person he may become. He is, of course, deeply and exclusively "identified" with his parents, who most of the time appear to him to be powerful and beautiful, although often quite unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous. Three developments support this stage, while also serving to bring about its crisis: (1) the child learns to move around more freely and more violently and therefore establishes a wider and, to him, unlimited radius of goals; (2) his sense of language becomes perfected to the point where he understands and can ask incessantly about innumerable things, often hearing just enough to misunderstand them thoroughly; and (3) both language and locomotion permit him to expand his imagination to so many roles that he cannot avoid frightening himself with what he himself has dreamed and thought up. Nevertheless, out of all this he must emerge with a sense of initiative as a basis for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose.

What, then, are the criteria for an unbroken sense of initiative? The criteria for the development of all the "senses" discussed here are the same: a crisis beset with some new estrangement is resolved in such a way that the child suddenly seems to be "more himself," more loving, more relaxed, and brighter in his judgment—in other words, vital in a new way. Most of all, he seems to be more activated and activating; he is in the free possession of a certain surplus of energy which permits him to forget many failures rather quickly and to approach new areas that seem desirable, even if they also seem dangerous, with undiminished zest and some increased sense of direction.

We are now approaching the end of the third year, when walking is getting to be a thing of ease, of vigor. The books tell us that a child can walk much before this, but walking and running become an item in his sphere of mastery when gravity is felt to be within, when he can forget that he is doing the walk-
ing and instead find out what he can do with it. Only then do his legs become part of him instead of being an ambulatory appendix. Only then will he find out with advantage what he now may do, along with what he can do, and now he is ready to visualize himself as being as big as the perambulating grumbly. He begins to make comparisons and is apt to develop untiring curiosity about differences in size and kind in general, and about sexual and age differences in particular. He tries to comprehend possible future roles or, at any rate, to understand what roles are worth imagining. More immediately, he can now associate with those of his own age. Under the guidance of older children or special women guardians, he gradually enters into the infantile politics of nursery school, street corner, and barnyard. His learning now is eminently intrusive and vigorous; it leads away from his own limitations and into future possibilities.

The intrusive mode, dominating much of the behavior of this stage, characterizes a variety of configurationally “similar” activities and fantasies. These include (1) the intrusion into space by vigorous locomotion; (2) the intrusion into the unknown by consuming curiosity; (3) the intrusion into other people’s ears and minds by the aggressive voice; (4) the intrusion upon or into other bodies by physical attack; (5) and, often most frighteningly, the thought of the phallus intruding the female body.

This, therefore, is called the phallic stage in the theory of infantile sexuality. It is the stage of infantile curiosity, of genital excitability, and of a varying preoccupation and overconcern with sexual matters, such as the apparent loss of the penis in girls. This “genitality” is, of course, rudimentary, a mere promise of things to come; often it is not even particularly noticeable. If not specifically provoked into precocious manifestation by especially seductive practices or by pointed prohibitions and threats of “cutting it off” or special customs such as sex play in groups of children, it is apt to lead to no more than a series of peculiarly fascinating experiences which soon become frightening and pointless enough to be repressed. This leads to the ascendancy of that human specialty which Freud called the “latency” period, that is, the long delay separating infantile sexuality (which in animals merges into maturity) and physical sexual maturation. It is accompanied by the recognition of the fact that in spite of all efforts to imagine oneself as being, in principle, as capable as mother and father, not even in the distant future is one ever going to be father in sexual relationship to mother, or mother in sexual relationship to father. The very deep emotional consequences of this insight and the magic fears associated with it make up what Freud has called the Oedipus complex. It is based on the logic of development which decrees that boys attach their first genital affection to the maternal adults who have otherwise given comfort to their bodies and that they develop their first sexual rivalry against the persons who are the sexual owners of those maternal persons. The little girl, in turn, becomes attached to her father and other important men and jealous of her mother, a development which may cause her much anxiety, for it seems to block her retreat to that selfsame mother, while it makes her mother’s disapproval much more magically dangerous because it is secretly “deserved.”

Girls often undergo a sobering change at this stage, because they observe sooner or later that although their locomotor, mental, and social intrusiveness is as vigorous as that of the boys’, thus permitting them to become perfectly good tomboys, they lack one item, the penis, and, with it, important prerogatives in most cultures and classes. While the boy has this visible, errectable, and comprehensible organ to which he can attach dreams of adult bigness, the girl’s clitoris only poorly sustains dreams of sexual equality, and she does not even have breasts as analogously tangible tokens of her future. The idea of her eventual inception of the intruding phallos is as yet too frightening, and her maternal drives are relegated to play fantasy or baby tending. On the other hand, where mothers dominate households the boy can develop a sense of inadequacy because he learns at this stage that while he can do well outside in play and work, he will never boss the house, his mother, or his older sisters. His mother and sisters may, in fact, get even with him for their doubts in
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themselves by making him feel that a boy is really a somewhat repulsive creature.

Where the necessities of economic life and the simplicity of its social plan make the male and female roles and their specific powers and rewards comprehensible, these early misgivings about sexual differences are, of course, more easily integrated into the culture's design for the differentiation of sexual roles. Both girl and boy are, therefore, extraordinarily appreciative of any convincing promise of the fact that someday they will be as good as mother or father—perhaps better; and they are grateful for sexual enlightenment, a little at a time and patiently repeated at intervals.

The ambulatory stage, that of play and infantile genitality, adds to the inventory of basic social modalities in both sexes that of "making," first in the childlike sense of "being on the make." There are no simpler, stronger words to match basic social modalities than those of Basic English. The words suggest enjoyment of competition, insistence on goal, pleasure of conquest. In the boy the emphasis remains on "making" by head-on attack; in the girl it may turn to "catching" either by aggressive snatching or by making herself attractive and endearing. The child thus develops the prerequisites for masculine or feminine initiative and, above all, some sexual self-images which will become essential ingredients in the positive and negative aspects of his future identity. On the way, however, the vastly increased imagination and, as it were, the intoxication of increased locomotor powers lead to secret fantasies of gigantic and terrifying proportions. A deep sense of guilt is awakened—a strange sense, for it seems forever to imply that the individual has committed crimes and deeds that were, after all, not only not committed but would have been biologically quite impossible. While the struggle for autonomy at its worst had concentrated on keeping rivals out, and was therefore more an expression of jealous rage most often directed against encroachments by younger siblings, initiative brings with it anticipatory rivalry with those who were there first and who may therefore occupy with their superior equipment the field toward which one's initiative is at first directed. Jealousy and rivalry, those often embittered and yet essentially futile attempts at demarcating a sphere of unquestioned privilege, now come to a climax in a final contest for a favored position with one of the parents: the inevitable and necessary failure leads to guilt and anxiety. The child indulges in fantasies of being a giant or a tiger, but in his dreams he runs in terror for dear life. This, then, is the stage of fear for life and limb, of the "castration complex"—the intensified fear of losing, or on the part of the girl the conviction that she has lost, the male genital as punishment for secret fantasies and deeds.

The great governor of initiative is conscience. The child, we said, now not only feels afraid of being found out, but he also hears the "inner voice" of self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment, which divides him radically within himself: a new and powerful estrangement. This is the ontogenetic cornerstone of morality. But from the point of view of human vitality, we must point out that if this great achievement is overburdened by all too eager adults, it can be bad for the spirit and for morality itself. For the conscience of the child can be primitive, cruel, and uncompromising, as may be observed in instances where children learn to constric themselves to the point of over-all inhibition; where they develop an obedience more literal than the one the parent wishes to exact; or where they develop deep regressions and lasting resentments because the parents themselves do not seem to live up to the conscience which they have fostered in the child. One of the deepest conflicts in life is caused by hate for a parent who served initially as the model and the executor of the conscience, but who was later found trying to "get away with" the very transgressions which the child could no longer tolerate in himself. Thus the child comes to feel that the whole matter is not one of universal goodness but of arbitrary power. The suspiciousness and evasiveness which is added to the all-or-nothing quality of the superego makes moralistic man a great potential danger to himself and to his fellow men. Morality can become synonymous with vindictiveness and with
the suppression of others.

All of this may seem strange to readers who have not suspected the potential powerhouse of destructive drives which can be aroused and temporarily buried at this stage, only to contribute later to the inner arsenal of a destructiveness so ready to be used when opportunity provokes it. By using the words “potential,” “provoke,” and “opportunity,” I mean to emphasize that there is little in these inner developments which cannot be harnessed to constructive and peaceful initiative if we learn to understand the conflicts and anxieties of childhood and the importance of childhood for mankind. But if we should choose to overlook or belittle the phenomena of childhood, along with the best and the worst of our childhood dreams, we shall have failed to recognize one of the eternal sources of human anxiety and strife. For again, the pathological consequences of this stage may not show until much later, when conflicts over initiative may find expression in hystericicl denial or in a self-restriction which keeps an individual from living up to his inner capacities or to the powers of his imagination and feeling, if not in relative sexual impotence or frigidity. All of this, in turn, may be “overcompensated” in a great show of tireless initiative, in a quality of “go-at-itiveness” at any cost. Many adults feel that their worth as people consists entirely in what they are “going at” in the future and not in what they are in the present. The strain consequently developed in their bodies, which are always “on the go,” with the engine racing even at moments of rest, is a powerful contribution to the much-discussed psychosomatic diseases of our time. It is as if the culture had made a man overadvertise himself and so identify with his own advertisement that only disease can designate the limit.

A comparative view of child training, however, suggests a fact most important for identity development, namely, that adults by their own example and by the stories they tell of the big life and of what to them is the great past, offer children of this age an eagerly absorbed ethos of action in the form of ideal types and techniques fascinating enough to replace the heroes of picture book and fairy tale. For this reason also the play age relies on the existence of some form of basic family, which teaches the child by patient example where play ends and irreversible purpose begins and where “don’ts” are superseded by sanctioned avenues of vigorous action. For the children now look for new identifications which seem to promise a field of initiative with less of the conflict and guilt which attach to the hopeless rivalry of the home. Also, in connection with comprehensible games and work activities, a companionship may develop between father and son, and between mother and daughter, an experience of essential equality in worth, in spite of the inequality in developmental schedule. Such companionship is a lasting treasure not only for parent and child, but for the community, as it is a counterforce to those hidden hatreds based on differences in mere size or age. Only thus are guilt feelings integrated in a strong but not severe conscience, only thus is language certified as a shared actuality. The “Oedipal” stage thus eventually results not only in a moral sense constricting the horizon of the permissible; it also sets the direction toward the possible and the tangible which attaches infantile dreams to the varied goals of technology and culture.

We may now see what induced Freud to place the Oedipus complex at the core of man’s conflicted existence, and this not only according to psychiatric evidence but also to the testimony of great fiction, drama, and history. For the fact that man began as a playing child leaves a residue of play-acting and role playing even in what he considers his highest purposes. These he projects on the glorified past as well as on a larger and always more perfect historical future; these he will dramatize in the ceremonial present with uniformed players in ritual arrangements which sanction aggressive initiative even as they assuage guilt by submission to a higher authority.

Among the group psychological consequences of the initiative stage, then, there is also a latent and often rageful readiness in the best and the most industrious to follow any leader who can make goals of conquest seem both impersonal and glorious enough to excite an intrinsically phallic enthusiasm in men (and
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a compliance in women) and thus to relieve their irrational guilt. It is obvious, then, that man's aggressive ideals are to a large extent anchored in the stage of initiative, a fact of importance for the conflict of identity formation—and confusion.

The indispensable contribution of the initiative stage to later identity development, then, obviously is that of freeing the child's initiative and sense of purpose for adult tasks which promise (but cannot guarantee) a fulfillment of one's range of capacities. This is prepared in the firmly established, steadily growing conviction, undaunted by guilt, that "I am what I can imagine I will be." It is equally obvious, however, that a widespread disappointment of this conviction by a discrepancy between infantile ideals and adolescent reality can only lead to an unleashing of the guilt-and-violence cycle so characteristic of man and yet so dangerous to his very existence.

4. SCHOOL AGE AND TASK IDENTIFICATION

Such is the wisdom of the ground plan that at no time is the child more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become big in the sense of sharing obligation, discipline, and performance than at the end of the period of expansive imagination. He is also eager to make things together, to share in constructing and planning, instead of trying to coerce other children or provoke restriction. Children now also attach themselves to teachers and the parents of other children, and they want to watch and imitate people representing occupations which they can grasp—firemen and policemen, gardeners, plumbers, and garbage men. If they are lucky they live at least part of their lives near barnyards or on safe streets around busy people and around many other children of all ages so that they can observe and participate as their capacities and their initiative grow in tentative spurts. But when they reach school age, children in all cultures receive some systematic instruction, although it is by no means always in the kind of school which literate people must organize around teachers who have learned how to teach literacy. In pre-literate people much is learned from adults who become teachers by acclamation rather than by appointment, and much is learned from older children, but the knowledge gained is related to the basic skills of simple technologies which can be understood the moment the child gets ready to handle the utensils, the tools, and the weapons (or facsimiles thereof) used by the big people. He enters the technology of his tribe very gradually but also very directly. More literate people, with more specialized careers, must prepare the child by teaching him things which first of all make him literate. He is then given the widest possible basic education for the greatest number of possible careers. The greater the specialization, the more insistent the goal of initiative becomes, the more complicated the social reality, and the vaguer the father's and mother's role in it. Between childhood and adulthood, then, our children go to school, and school skill seems to many to be a world all by itself, with its own goals and limitations, its achievements and disappointments.

At nursery-school age, playfulness reaches into the world shared with others. At first these others are treated as things; they are inspected, run into, or forced to "be horse." Such learning is necessary in order to discover what potential play content can be admitted only to fantasy or only to play by and with oneself; what content can be successfully represented only in the world of toys and small things; and what content can be shared with others and even forced upon them. It is not restricted to the technical mastery of toys and things, but also includes an infantile way of mastering social experience by experimenting, planning, and sharing.

While all children at times need to be left alone in solitary play or, later, in the company of books and radio, motion pictures and television, and while all children need their hours and days of make-believe in games, they all, sooner or later, become dissatisfied and disgruntled without a sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly: it is this that I have called the sense of industry. Without this, even the best-entertained child soon acts exploited. It is as if he knows and his society knows that now that he is psychologically already a
rudimentary parent, he must begin to be something of a worker and potential provider before becoming a biological parent. With the oncoming latency period, then, the advancing child forgets, or rather quietly "sublimates"—that is, applies to concrete pursuits and approved goals—the drives which have made him dream and play. He now learns to win recognition by producing things. He develops perseverance and adjusts himself to the inorganic laws of the tool world and can become an eager and absorbed unit of a productive situation.

The danger at this stage is the development of an estrangement from himself and from his tasks—the well-known sense of inferiority. This may be caused by an insufficient solution of the preceding conflict: the child may still want his mommy more than knowledge; he may still prefer to be the baby at home rather than the big child in school; he still compares himself with his father, and the comparison arouses a sense of guilt as well as a sense of inferiority. Family life may not have prepared him for school life, or school life may fail to sustain the promises of earlier stages in that nothing that he has learned to do well so far seems to count with his fellows or his teacher. And then again, he may be potentially able to excel in ways which are dormant and which, if not evoked now, may develop late or never.

It is at this point that wider society becomes significant to the child by admitting him to roles preparatory to the actuality of technology and economy. Where he finds out immediately, however, that the color of his skin or the background of his parents rather than his wish and will to learn are the factors that decide his worth as a pupil or apprentice, the human propensity for feeling unworthy may be fatefully aggravated as a determinant of character development.

Good teachers who feel trusted and respected by the community know how to alternate play and work, games and study. They know how to recognize special efforts, how to encourage special gifts. They also know how to give a child time and how to handle those children to whom school, for a while, is not important and is considered something to endure rather than enjoy,
merged rages resulting from their frustration. This stage differs from the earlier ones in that it is not a swing from an inner upheaval to a new mastery. Freud calls it the latency stage because violent drives are normally dormant. But it is only a lull before the storm of puberty, when all the earlier drives re-emerge in new combinations.

On the other hand, this is socially a most decisive stage. Since industry involves doing things beside and with others, a first sense of division of labor and of differential opportunity—that is, a sense of the technological ethos of a culture—develops at this time. Therefore, the configurations of culture and the manipulations basic to the prevailing technology must reach meaningfully into school life, supporting in every child a feeling of competence—that is, the free exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of serious tasks unimpaired by an infantile sense of inferiority. This is the lasting basis for co-operative participation in productive adult life.

Two poles in American grammar school education may serve to illustrate the contribution of the school age to the problem of identity. There is the traditional extreme of making early school life an extension of grim adulthood by emphasizing self-restraint and a strict sense of duty in doing what one is told to do, as opposed to the modern extreme of making it an extension of the natural tendency in childhood to find out by playing, to learn what one must do by doing what one likes to do. Both methods work for some children in some ways, but impose on others a special adjustment. The first trend, if carried to the extreme, exploits a tendency on the part of the preschool and grammar school child to become entirely dependent on prescribed duties. He thus may learn much that is absolutely necessary and he may develop an unshakable sense of duty. But he may never unlearn an unnecessary and costly self-restraint with which he may later make his own life and other people’s lives miserable, and in fact spoil, in turn, his own children’s natural desire to learn and to work. The second trend, when carried to an extreme, leads not only to the well-known popular objection that children do not learn anything any more but also to such feelings in children as those expressed in the by now famous question of a metropolitan child: “Teacher, must we do today what we want to do?” Nothing could better express the fact that children at this age do like to be mildly but firmly coerced into the adventure of finding out that one can learn to accomplish things which one would never have thought of by oneself, things which owe their attractiveness to the very fact that they are not the product of play and fantasy but the product of reality, practicality, and logic; things which thus provide a token sense of participation in the real world of adults. Between these extremes we have the many schools which have no styles at all except grim attendance to the fact that school must be. Social inequality and backwardness of method still create a hazardous gap between many children and the technology which needs them not only so that they may serve technological aims, but, more imperatively, so that technology may serve humanity.

But there is another danger to identity development. If the overly conforming child accepts work as the only criterion of worthwhileness, sacrificing imagination and playfulness too readily, he may become ready to submit to what Marx called “craft-idolcy,” i.e., become a slave of his technology and of its dominant role typology. Here we are already in the midst of identity problems, for with the establishment of a firm initial relation to the world of skills and tools and to those who teach and share them, and with the advent of puberty, childhood proper comes to an end. And since man is not only the learning but also the teaching and above all the working animal, the immediate contribution of the school age to a sense of identity can be expressed in the words “I am what I can learn to make work.” It is immediately obvious that for the vast majority of men, in all times, this has been not only the beginning but also the limitation of their identity; or better: the majority of men have always consolidated their identity needs around their technical and occupational capacities, leaving it to special groups (special by birth, by choice or election, and by giftedness) to es-
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establish and preserve those “higher” institutions without which man's daily work has always seemed an inadequate self-expression, if not a mere grind or even a kind of curse. It may be for that very reason that the identity problem in our time becomes both psychiatrically and historically relevant. For as man can leave some of the grind and curse to machines, he can visualize a greater freedom of identity for a larger segment of mankind.

5. ADOLESCENCE

As technological advances put more and more time between early school life and the young person's final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescence becomes an even more marked and conscious period and, as it has always been in some cultures in some periods, almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood. Thus in the later school years young people, beset with the physiological revolution of their genital maturation and the uncertainty of the adult roles ahead, seem much concerned with faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture with what looks like a final rather than a transitory or, in fact, initial identity formation. They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day. In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, which must now include sexual maturity, some adolescents have to come to grips again with crises of earlier years before they can install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity. They need, above all, a moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed in the foregoing to the childhood stages: only that now a larger unit, vague in its outline and yet immediate in its demands, replaces the childhood milieu—“society.” A review of these elements is also a list of adolescent problems.

If the earliest stage bequeathed to the identity crisis an important need for trust in oneself and in others, then clearly the adolescent looks most fervently for men and ideas to have faith in, which also means men and ideas in whose service it would seem worth while to prove oneself trustworthy. (This will be discussed further in the chapter on fidelity.) At the same time, however, the adolescent fears a foolish, all too trusting commitment, and will, paradoxically, express his need for faith in loud and cynical mistrust.

If the second stage established the necessity of being defined by what one can will freely, then the adolescent now looks for an opportunity to decide with free assent on one of the available or unavoidable avenues of duty and service, and at the same time is mortally afraid of being forced into activities in which he would feel exposed to ridicule or self-doubt. This, too, can lead to a paradox, namely, that he would rather act shamelessly in the eyes of his elders, out of free choice, than be forced into activities which would be shameful in his own eyes or in those of his peers.

If an unlimited imagination as to what one might become is the heritage of the play age, then the adolescent's willingness to put his trust in those peers and leading, or misleading, elders who will give imaginative, if not illusory, scope to his aspirations is only too obvious. By the same token, he objects violently to all “pedantic” limitations on his self-images and will be ready to settle by loud accusation all his guiltiness over the excessiveness of his ambition.

Finally, if the desire to make something work, and to make it work well, is the gain of the school age, then the choice of an occupation assumes a significance beyond the question of remuneration and status. It is for this reason that some adolescents prefer not to work at all for a while rather than be forced into an otherwise promising career which would offer success without the satisfaction of functioning with unique excellence.

In any given period in history, then, that part of youth will have the most affirmatively exciting time of it which finds itself in the wave of a technological, economic, or ideological trend seemingly promising all that youthful vitality could ask for.

Adolescence, therefore, is least “stormy” in that segment of
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Youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify with new roles of competency and invention and to accept a more implicit ideological outlook. Where this is not given, the adolescent mind becomes a more explicitly ideological one, by which we mean one searching for some inspiring unification of tradition or anticipated techniques, ideas, and ideals. And, indeed, it is the ideological potential of a society which speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is so eager to be affirmed by peers, to be confirmed by teachers, and to be inspired by worth-while "ways of life." On the other hand, should a young person feel that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permit him to develop and integrate the next step, he may resist with the wild strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives. For, indeed, in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.

Having come this far, I would like to give one example (and I consider it representative in structure) of the individual way in which a young person, given some leeway, may utilize a traditional way of life for dealing with a remnant of negative identity. I had known Jill before her puberty, when she was rather obese and showed many "oral" traits of voracity and dependency while she also was a tomboy and bitterly envious of her brothers and in rivalry with them. But she was intelligent and always had an air about her (as did her mother) which seemed to promise that things would turn out all right. And, indeed, she straightened out and up, became very attractive, an easy leader in any group, and, to many, a model of young girlhood. As a clinician, I watched and wondered what she would do with that voraciousness and with the rivalry which she had displayed earlier. Could it be that such things are simply absorbed in fortuitous growth?

Then one autumn in her late teens, Jill did not return to college from the ranch out West where she had spent the summer. She had asked her parents to let her stay. Simply out of liberality and confidence, they granted her this moratorium and returned East.

That winter Jill specialized in taking care of newborn colts, and would get up at any time during a winter night to bottle feed the most needy animals. Having apparently acquired a certain satisfaction within herself, as well as astonished recognition from the cowboys, she returned home and resumed her place. I felt that she had found and hung on to an opportunity to do actively and for others what she had always yearned to have done for her, as she had once demonstrated by overstating: she had learned to feed needy young mouths. But she did so in a context which, in turning passive into active, also turned a former symptom into a social act.

One might say that she turned "maternal" but it was a maternality such as cowboys must and do display; and, of course, she did it all in jeans. This brought recognition "from man to man" as well as from man to woman, and beyond that the confirmation of her optimism, that is, her feeling that something could be done that felt like her, was useful and worth while, and was in line with an ideological trend where it still made immediate practical sense.

Such self-chosen "therapies" depend, of course, on the leeway given in the right spirit at the right time, and this depends on a great variety of circumstances. I intend to publish similar fragments from the lives of children in greater detail at some future date; let this example stand for the countless observations in everyday life, where the resourcefulness of young people proves itself when the conditions are right.

The estrangement of this stage is identity confusion, which will be elaborated in clinical and biographic detail in the next chapter. For the moment, we will accept Biff's formulation in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: "I just can't take hold, Mom, I can't take hold of some kind of a life." Where such a dilemma is based on a strong previous doubt of one's ethnic and sexual identity, or where role confusion joins a hopelessness of long standing, delinquent and "borderline" psychotic episodes
are not uncommon. Youth after youth, bewildered by the incapacity to assume a role forced on him by the inexorable standardization of American adolescence, runs away in one form or another, dropping out of school, leaving jobs, staying out all night, or withdrawing into bizarre and inaccessible moods. Once “delinquent,” his greatest need and often his only salvation is the refusal on the part of older friends, advisers, and judiciary personnel to type him further by pat diagnoses and social judgments which ignore the special dynamic conditions of adolescence. It is here, as we shall see in greater detail, that the concept of identity confusion is of practical clinical value, for if they are diagnosed and treated correctly, seemingly psychotic and criminal incidents do not have the same fatal significance which they may have at other ages.

In general it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which most disturbs young people. To keep themselves together they temporarily overidentify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point of an apparently complete loss of individuality. Yet in this stage not even “falling in love” is entirely, or even primarily, a sexual matter. To a considerable extent adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified. This is why so much of young love is conversation. On the other hand, clarification can also be sought by destructive means. Young people can become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are “different” in skin color or cultural background, in tastes and gifts, and often in entirely petty aspects of dress and gesture arbitrarily selected as the signs of an in-grouper or out-grouper. It is important to understand in principle (which does not mean to condone in all of its manifestations) that such intolerance may be, for a while, a necessary defense against a sense of identity loss. This is unavoidable at a time of life when the body changes its proportions radically, when genital puberty floods body and imagination with all manner of impulses, when intimacy with the other sex approaches and is,

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on occasion, forced on the young person, and when the immediate future confronts one with too many conflicting possibilities and choices. Adolescents not only help one another temporarily through such discomfort by forming cliques and stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their enemies; they also insistently test each other’s capacity for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable conflicts of values.

The readiness for such testing helps to explain (as pointed out in Chapter II) the appeal of simple and cruel totalitarian doctrines among the youth of such countries and classes as have lost or are losing their group identities—feudal, agrarian, tribal, or national. The democracies are faced with the job of winning these grim youths by convincingly demonstrating to them—that a democratic identity can be strong and yet tolerant, judicious and still determined. But industrial democracy poses special problems in that it insists on self-made identities ready to grasp many chances and ready to adjust to the changing necessities of booms and busts, of peace and war, of migration and determined sedentary life. Democracy, therefore, must present its adolescents with ideals which can be shared by young people of many backgrounds, and which emphasize autonomy in the form of independence and initiative in the form of constructive work. These promises, however, are not easy to fulfill in increasingly complex and centralized systems of industrial, economic and political organization, systems which increasingly neglect the “self-made” ideology still flaunted in oratory. This is hard on many young Americans because their whole upbringing has made the development of a self-reliant personality dependent on a certain degree of choice, a sustained hope for an individual chance, and a firm commitment to the freedom of self-realization.

We are speaking here not merely of high privileges and lofty ideals but of psychological necessities. For the social institution which is the guardian of identity is what we have called ideology. One may see in ideology also the imagery of an aristocracy in its widest possible sense, which connotes that within a defined
world image and a given course of history the best people will come to rule and rule will develop the best in people. In order not to become cynically or apathetically lost, young people must somehow be able to convince themselves that those who succeed in their anticipated adult world thereby shoulder the obligation of being best. For it is through their ideology that social systems enter into the fiber of the next generation and attempt to absorb into their lifeblood the rejuvenative power of youth. Adolescence is thus a vital regenerator in the process of social evolution, for youth can offer its loyalties and energies both to the conservation of that which continues to feel true and to the revolutionary correction of that which has lost its regenerative significance.

We can study the identity crisis also in the lives of creative individuals who could resolve it for themselves only by offering to their contemporaries a new model of resolution such as that expressed in works of art or in original deeds, and who furthermore are eager to tell us all about it in diaries, letters, and self-representations. And even as the neuroses of a given period reflect the ever-present inner chaos of man's existence in a new way, the creative crises point to the period's unique solutions.

We will in the next chapter present in greater detail what we have learned of these specialized individual crises. But there is a third manifestation of the remnants of infantilism and adolescence in man: it is the pooling of the individual crises in transitory upheavals amounting to collective "hysterias." Where there are voluble leaders their creative crises and the latent crises of their followers can be at least studied with the help of our assumptions—and of their writings. More elusive are spontaneous group developments not attributable to a leader. And it will, at any rate, not be helpful to call mass irrationalities by clinical names. It would be impossible to diagnose clinically how much hysteria is present in a young nun participating in an epidemic of convulsive spells or how much perverse "sadism" in a young Nazi commanded to participate in massive parades or in mass killings. So we can point only most tentatively to certain similar-

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ities between individual crises and group behavior in order to indicate that in a given period of history they are in an obscure contact with each other. But before we submerge ourselves in the clinical and biographic evidence for what we call identity confusion, we will take a look beyond the identity crisis. The words "beyond identity," of course, could be understood in two ways, both essential for the problem. They could mean that there is more to man's core than identity, that there is in fact in each individual an "I," an observing center of awareness and of volition, which can transcend and must survive the psychosocial identity which is our concern in this book. In some ways, as we will see, a sometimes precocious self-transcendence seems to be felt strongly in a transient manner in youth, as if a pure identity had to be kept free from psychosocial encroachment. And yet no man (except a man aflame and dying like Keats, who could speak of identity in words which secured him immediate fame) can transcend himself in youth. We will speak later of the transcendence of identity. In the following "beyond identity" means life after adolescence and the uses of identity and, indeed, the return of some forms of identity crisis in the later stages of the life cycle.

6. BEYOND IDENTITY

The first of these is the crisis of intimacy. It is only when identity formation is well on its way that true intimacy—which is really a counterpointing as well as a fusing of identities—is possible. Sexual intimacy is only part of what I have in mind, for it is obvious that sexual intimacies often precede the capacity to develop a true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with another person, be it in friendship, in erotic encounters, or in joint inspiration. The youth who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy or throws himself into acts of intimacy which are "promiscuous" without true fusion or real self-abandon.

Where a youth does not accomplish such intimate relationships with others—and, I would add, with his own inner re-
sources—in late adolescence or early adulthood, he may settle for highly stereotyped interpersonal relations and come to retain a deep sense of isolation. If the times favor an impersonal kind of interpersonal pattern, a man can go far, very far, in life and yet harbor a severe character problem doubly painful because he will never feel really himself, although everyone says he is "somebody."

The counterpart of intimacy is distanation: the readiness to repudiate, isolate, and, if necessary, destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one’s own. Thus, the lasting consequence of the need for distanation is the readiness to fortify one’s territory of intimacy and solidarity and to view all outsiders with a fanatic “overvaluation of small differences” between the familiar and the foreign. Such prejudices can be utilized and exploited in politics and in war and secure the loyal self-sacrifice and the readiness to kill from the strongest and the best. A remnant of adolescent danger is to be found where intimate, competitive, and combative relations are experienced with and against the selfsame people. But as the areas of adult responsibility are gradually delineated, as the competitive encounter, the erotic bond, and merciless enmity are differentiated from each other, they eventually become subject to that ethical sense which is the mark of the adult and which takes over from the ideological conviction of adolescence and the moralism of childhood.

Freud was once asked what he thought a normal person should be able to do well. The questioner probably expected a complicated, “deep” answer. But Freud simply said, “Lieben und arbeiten” (“to love and to work”). It pays to ponder on this simple formula; it grows deeper as you think about it. For when Freud said “love,” he meant the generosity of intimacy as well as genital love; when he said love and work, he meant a general work productiveness which would not preoccupy the individual to the extent that he might lose his right or capacity to be a sexual and a loving being.

Psychoanalysis has emphasized genitality as one of the develop-mental conditions for full maturity. Genitality consists in the capacity to develop organic potency which is more than the discharge of sex products in the sense of Kinsey’s “outlets.” It combines the ripening of intimate sexual mutuality with full genital sensitivity and with a capacity for discharge of tension from the whole body. This is a rather concrete way of saying something about a process which we really do not yet quite understand. But the experience of the climactic mutuality of orgasm clearly provides a supreme example of the mutual regulation of complicated patterns and in some way appeases the hostilities and the potential rages caused by the daily evidence of the oppositeness of male and female, of fact and fancy, of love and hate, of work and play. Such experience makes sexuality less obsessive and sadistic control of the partner superfluous.

Before such genital maturity is reached, much of sexual life is of the self-seeking, identity-hungry kind; each partner is really trying only to reach himself. Or it remains a kind of genital combat in which each tries to defeat the other. All this remains as part of adult sexuality, but it is gradually absorbed as the differences between the sexes become a full polarization within a joint life style. For the previously established vital strengths have helped to make the two sexes first become similar in consciousness, language, and ethics in order to then permit them to be maturely different.

Man, in addition to erotic attraction, has developed a selectivity of “love” which serves the need for a new and shared identity. If the estrangement typical for this stage is isolation, that is, the incapacity to take chances with one's identity by sharing true intimacy, such inhibition is often reinforced by a fear of the outcome of intimacy: offspring—and care. Love as mutual devotion, however, overcomes the antagonisms inherent in sexual and functional polarization, and is the vital strength of young adulthood. It is the guardian of that elusive and yet all-pervasive power of cultural and personal style which binds into a "way of life" the affiliations of competition and co-operation, production and procreation.
Identity

If we should continue the game of “I am” formulations “beyond identity” we should have to change the tune. For now the increment of identity is based on the formula “We are what we love.”

Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal, for dependency and maturity are reciprocal: mature man needs to be needed, and maturity is guided by the nature of that which must be cared for. Generativity, then, is primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. There are of course, people who, from misfortune or because of special and genuine gifts in other directions, do not apply this drive to offspring of their own, but to other forms of altruistic concern and creativity which many absorb their kind of parental drive. And indeed, the concept of generativity is meant to include productivity and creativity, neither of which, however, can replace it as designations of a crisis in development. For the ability to lose oneself in the meeting of bodies and minds leads to a gradual expansion of ego-interests and to a libidinal investment in that which is being generated. Where such enrichment fails altogether, regression to an obsessive need for pseudointimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation, boredom, and interpersonal impoverishment. Individuals, then, often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own— or one another’s— one and only child; and where conditions favor it, early invalidism, physical or psychological, becomes the vehicle of self-concern. On the other hand, the mere fact of having or even wanting children does not “achieve” generativity. Some young parents suffer, it seems, from a retardation in the ability to develop true care. The reasons are often to be found in early childhood impressions; in faulty identifications with parents; in excessive self-love based on a too strenuously self-made personality; and in the lack of some faith, some “belief in the species,” which would make a child appear to be a welcome trust. The very nature of generativity, however, suggests that its most circumscribed pathology must now be sought in the next generation,

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that is, in the form of those unavoidable estrangements which we have listed for childhood and youth and which may appear in aggravated form as a result of a generative failure on the part of the parents.

As to the institutions which reinforce generativity and safeguard it, one can only say that all institutions by their very nature codify the ethics of generative succession. Generativity is itself a driving power in human organization. And the stages of childhood and adulthood are a system of generation and regeneration to which institutions such as shared households and divided labor strive to give continuity. Thus the basic strengths enumerated here and the essentials of an organized human community have evolved together as an attempt to establish a set of proven methods and a fund of traditional reassurance which enables each generation to meet the needs of the next in relative independence from personal differences and changing conditions.

In the aging person who has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments of being, by necessity, the originator of others and the generator of things and ideas— only in him the fruit of the seven stages gradually ripens. I know no better word for it than integrity. Lacking a clear definition, I shall point to a few attributes of this stage of mind. It is the ego’s accrued assurance of its proclivity for order and meaning—an emotional integration faithful to the image-bearers of the past and ready to take, and eventually to renounce, leadership in the present. It is the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions. It thus means a new and different love of one’s parents, free of the wish that they should have been different, and an acceptance of the fact that one’s life is one’s own responsibility. It is a sense of comradeship with men and women of distant times and of different pursuits who have created orders and objects and sayings conveying human dignity and love. Although aware of the relativity of all the various life
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styles which have given meaning to human striving, the possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats. For he knows that an individual life is the accidental coincidence of but one life cycle with but one segment of history, and that for him all human integrity stands and falls with the one style of integrity of which he partakes.

Clinical and anthropological evidence suggest that the lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by disgust and by despair: fate is not accepted as the frame of life, death not as its finite boundary. Despair expresses the feeling that time is short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity. Such a despair is often hidden behind a show of disgust, a misanthropy, or a chronic contemptuous displeasure with particular institutions and particular people—a disgust and a displeasure which, where not allied with the vision of a superior life, only signify the individual's contempt of himself.

A meaningful old age, then, preceding a possible terminal senility, serves the need for that integrated heritage which gives indispensable perspective to the life cycle. Strength here takes the form of that detached yet active concern with life bounded by death, which we call wisdom in its many connotations from ripened "wits" to accumulated knowledge, mature judgment, and inclusive understanding. Not that each man can evolve wisdom for himself. For most, a living tradition provides the essence of it. But the end of the cycle also evokes "ultimate concerns" for what chance man may have to transcend the limitations of his identity and his often tragic or bitterly tragicomic engagement in his one and only life cycle within the sequence of generations. Yet great philosophical and religious systems dealing with ultimate individuation seem to have remained responsibly related to the cultures and civilizations of their times. Seeking transcendence by renunciation, they yet remain ethically concerned with the "maintenance of the world." By the same token, a civilization can be measured by the meaning which it gives to

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the full cycle of life, for such meaning, or the lack of it, cannot fail to reach into the beginnings of the next generation, and thus into the chances of others to meet ultimate questions with some clarity and strength.

To whatever abyss ultimate concerns may lead individual men, man as a psychosocial creature will face, toward the end of his life, a new edition of an identity crisis which we may state in the words "I am what survives of me." From the stages of life, then, such dispositions as faith, will, power, purposefulness, competence, fidelity, love, care, wisdom—all criteria of vital individual strength—also flow into the life of institutions. Without them, institutions wilt; but without the spirit of institutions pervading the patterns of care and love, instruction and training, no strength could emerge from the sequence of generations.

Psychosocial strength, we conclude, depends on a total process which regulates individual life cycles, the sequence of generations, and the structure of society simultaneously: for all three have evolved together.