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# ADOLESCENCE



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## Adolescence Defined

The term “adolescence” is ubiquitous; as a result its use creates confusion for the reader unless it is specifically defined in the context of the discussion offered. In this chapter the term “adolescence” is used to describe the psychological stage in personality and character development that follows the latency phase of childhood.<sup>[1]</sup>

Prior to latency the child has, through adaptive and defense mechanisms, achieved some integration of his internal needs, urges, and wishes within the relatively circumscribed reality provided by his primary love objects. During latency this integration pattern widens, with progressive adaptation to an expanded reality and a meaningful social milieu. The typical latency child is occupied primarily with external realities to which he responds with relative predictability and minimal disturbance over crises. It is not, as implied by the term “latency,” a dormant period, but rather a span of time during which, optimally, the child’s psychological gestalt is becoming enlarged and basically melded to provide a firm foundation for the next span of growth, adolescence.

During adolescence there is structured upon this foundation of latency

what will become the architecture of the adult personality and character, as well as the crystallized potentiality for neuroses or psychoses. The analogy of the architectural structure is not chosen lightly. No total foundation is sound unless the bricks and mortar that are the fundamental components of that foundation are sound and discreetly interrelated. Thus, latency is not optimally effective as a step toward maturation unless prelatency components have reached a constructive solution. Any seriously faulty solution of prelatency conflicts will result in the latency phase being poorly balanced; in addition, that lack of balance will distort what occurs as the superstructure develops and will effect the completion of the architectural design, adulthood. While adolescence is the preadult phase from which adulthood will evolve, adolescence is affected by the foundation upon which it is built. It is important to emphasize that as the significance of the adolescent phase becomes more and more understood, it is not to be evaluated as independent of the past but rather, for good or bad, a superstructure upon that past.

As many have pointed out, adolescence had not been studied with any intensity until approximately the last 30 years. Even with the evolution of thinking regarding psychological development from birth on, for a long time the adolescent phase was ignored by most students of human psychological development. Outstanding exceptions to this were Aichhorn, Bernfeld, Healy, Hall, and in her early work, Anna Freud." Prior to their writings there were

protests by some against youth and wonderment or despair about what the youth of that day would do to the future. For the most part it was presumed that if adolescence was ignored the idiosyncrasies would end. There was little attempt to understand why the phase existed and what it achieved.

## Adolescence as a Phase of Development

In recent years there has been increasing interest in exploring the manifestations and significance of adolescence. From this study has evolved two diametrically different points of view. There are those who describe typical adolescence as a period of turmoil and confusion. This has implied to others a degree of pathology that they do not believe exists. The latter group believe that normal adolescence is not full of turmoil; they argue that those who indicate otherwise base their conclusions upon their study of manifestly disturbed individuals and therefore attribute to all the troubles of relatively few.<sup>[2]</sup>

The disagreement concerning the dynamics of adolescence may be related to terminology and emphasis rather than a basic contradiction. Every phase of psychological maturation has inherent in it new conflicting desires to be harmonized. During the process of resolving the conflict, there are transient episodes of clinging to the old; at the same time the strongest force in the normal individual is to thrust forward. There are also brief false steps

toward the next phase.

Adolescence is a phase in development. No one would assume that the ten-year-old boy of today will be the same fifteen years from now; he will have “grown up.” He will have grown from childhood to adulthood, having reevaluated many facets of himself and the outer world during adolescence. As he strives during adolescence to attain a satisfactory adult role, he does not just seek it in playacting as he did earlier; rather he seeks for an internal realignment that will be effectively automatic, self- expressive, and predictable, a new self gestalt. It is this striving to abandon childhood and attain adulthood that is adolescence, an inherent phase in maturation.

## **The Cultural Impact**

These changes, while primarily self-initiated and the adolescent’s own psychological task, are affected by the particular culture’s definition of the adult’s role. Many cultures define sharply the child’s role and the adult’s role; the path from childhood to adulthood is well trodden and clearly marked. In contrast, in Western culture the child is only familiar with vague directions. His position is comparable to that of the pioneers who explored the West; they knew the way led west, but the miles between their familiar homes and the anticipated riches at the end of their trek were uncharted except for the vague guidelines of the sun and the stars. Children of Western culture know

that adulthood implies certain privileges, and certain obligations, among them the freedom to choose on their own, within broad limits. Before the individual makes his ultimate choices, he reevaluates many concepts that he previously had uncritically accepted.

### **Problems in Evaluating the Adolescent**

This reevaluation and ultimate mastery of an adaptation to a new internal and external reality may be manifested in a variety of ways. Many adolescents show no external evidence of psychological change. The process is gradual, and only when it is relatively completed do those who know him well realize that he is different from what he was as a child. Frequently the change is only apparent after a period of absence. A boy of this type goes away to college, and when vacations reunite the family he seems strange to his parents. He is, as the family vaguely describes it, more grown up. He also is aware of, and frequently uncomfortable about, the change, but he tolerates the stress until vacation ends.

Another group of adolescents cause concern for their parents and possibly their teachers. They are moody, at times manifesting a gratifying pleasure in living and at other times acting depressed, bored, or irritable. Any attempt to explore the latter difficulty frequently leads to the response, "I don't know, I just feel this way," or a curt, "Can't you let me alone?" School



achievement may be less than in the past, or it may manifest the same sporadic shifts as the mood swings, with successes and failures occurring unpredictably. This group in particular are frequently still diagnosed as “just adolescent”; family and teachers are assured that “it will pass.” This group is perhaps most secretive about its thoughts. For a variety of reasons the individual prefers to find his own solutions to the internal problems with which he struggles. Only when he feels overwhelmed by some aspect of his confusion does he suddenly confide in his parents or in an adult friend. When he does confide he may appear to be dramatizing and exaggerating his difficulties. This evaluation by another *may* be correct, but usually the normal adolescent is not dramatizing. He is actively aware of his discomfort and experiences transiently a sense of having entered a blind alley that suddenly appears to be sealed at both ends.

A third group of adolescents show the degree of their turmoil through their overt actions. It is this group that makes the news and arouses the apprehension of adult society. Its members seek to handle their own confusion by changing yesterday so that today will be the beginning of a future in utopia. They are inexperienced, naive, and have too many contradictory goals to outline a program that adults can grasp or apply. At times they do find pseudoadults who, as confused as they are, may become their mentors. On the other hand, most of them are soon disillusioned by these pseudoadults, will talk with them but will not, except for a shorter or

longer period of time, follow them. In the latter instance the adolescent has tried on for size the ideas the adult has expressed and finally, often after long consideration, decides those ideas do or do not fit.

There are adolescents that may or may not be a part of the third group mentioned above. Their behavior is grossly destructive. Whether an individual manifesting such behavior has a deep-seated core of faulty adaptation, and therefore a character defect or a serious psychological disturbance, only careful study over time will tell. They at least have a frustration tolerance that is too low for the frustrations they are experiencing. A certain number of them, either with help or by their own mastery of their inner turmoil, will leave this type of behavior behind them as they begin to resolve their phase-typical conflicts, and they will seek wiser ways to bring about constructive social, political, or personal change as adults. Others will undoubtedly become psychologically pathological adults.

The last paragraph illustrates the difficulty in evaluating "normal" adolescence. The behavior of adolescents, their verbalization, and often their developmental history does not give a means of quick diagnosis of the syndrome they present." The first group described above may have among its members those who are preschizophrenic or actually schizophrenic, the symptoms masked by their slow, plodding attempts to deal with phase-characteristic adolescence. The second group may have among its members

hysterical characters, incipient hysterics, or a manic-depressive constellation that will become manifest in adulthood. The third group may include those who in adulthood will still be psychologically young adolescents, remaining impulsive, intolerant of frustration, and unpredictable, or who will be sociopaths, schizophrenics, or delinquents. Any individual, irrespective of which group he appears to represent now, may develop later a mental illness that would appear more characteristic of a different adolescent type. Probably the soundest tentative diagnosis of normal adolescence is when, after a period of real communication with the individual, the adult becomes aware that the young person he is studying does not consistently fall into any of the above groups; rather he is shifting from one to the other and is at times immature, at other times strikingly mature, and, by adult standards, rational. This would suggest that the diagnosis “normal” is most valid when a diagnostician who knows adolescents, and who knows the prodromal symptoms of mental illness or of character defects, is confused about the proper diagnosis, the diagnosis being difficult because of the shifts that occur so readily in the constellation of behavior patterns and verbalizations—signs that the adolescent is seeking to find himself.

### **Psychosomatic Nature of the Adolescent Emotional State**

From one viewpoint the psychosomatic implications of adolescence are very clear. The onset of psychological adolescence is closely related to the

increased function of the glands of internal secretion, particularly the reproductive glands. (The significance of those glands in relation to the spurt of growth prior to puberty will be discussed later.) The impact of the reproductive glands upon the emotional state of the individual is well illustrated in adults by various studies, such as those of Benedek concerning the menstrual cycle in women. The young adolescent of either sex, about the time that he attains physical puberty, becomes sensitive to things he either previously ignored, took for granted, or let pass. He is more easily hurt, more easily elated, more readily depressed, and more quickly angered over minor frustrations. His sensitivity also expresses itself in less egocentric ways. He reacts intensely to what is beautiful and to what is ugly, the former typically gratifying, the latter typically very painful.

He loves intensely and hates intensely. It is difficult for him to tolerate his ambivalent feelings. As a result he may love something or someone intensely until a minor defect becomes apparent; then, particularly in interpersonal relationships, he may hate as intensely as he loved. Similarly, if he finds a positive element in the person or object that he has hated, he may reverse his attitude and abandon his hostility and temporarily only feel love. He is not completely unaware of this shift from positive to negative feelings. He often, particularly with people he cares for a great deal, finds his inability to handle his love and his anger, or his inability to accept imperfections, very confusing. This is especially so when he is aware that those toward whom he

is reacting in this way do not understand and respond to each of his opposing feelings as if each erased the other. If others cannot harmonize his feelings, how can he? This is readily observed in an adolescent who has a basically sound relationship with his parents. At times he feels hostility toward them and can't understand why they are not the people he would love. Then later he loves them and can't understand why they don't believe that love.

It is important to bear in mind that the adolescent will not always manifest this confusion in feelings or indicate the intensity of either positive or negative responses to the beautiful or the ugly. Some adolescents deny positive feelings for people or for experiences that one would anticipate they would enjoy. Such denial, if indicative of an established attitude, would suggest pathology. While an apparently insensitive adolescent may be a disturbed adolescent, this evaluation is not necessarily true, particularly among boys. In our present culture the all-American boy, by adult standards, is supposed to be above expression of tender feelings, intense investment in beauty, and other emotional reactions that are experienced by young adolescents. Boys therefore put up a veneer of indifference that is not necessarily how they really feel within themselves. One boy—who seemed in every aspect of his life to present a picture of a psychologically healthy adolescent—broke down crying after many hours of discussing his remoteness from his parents, “Gee, don't they realize I love them. I can't show it.” If one accepted only his overt behavior of indifference to his parents, it

was easy to see why they felt that he didn't love them.

This sensitivity in the adolescent is often the secret that they carefully shelter from the invasion of others. As disturbing as today's drug culture is to all adults, one thing can be learned from certain participants. Their underlying sensitivity to the meaning of interpersonal relationships and beauty, which is usually a well-kept secret, is revealed under the influence of drugs.

The psychological sensitivity that the adolescent is experiencing is new and therefore unfamiliar; he does not know how to channel it adequately into his future life. This sensitivity to his internal feelings explains in part why he works so hard to find a way to bring conflicting sensations into some sort of working order. Since such a process cannot be mastered by intellectualization alone, he is confused. As he recapitulates aspects of his early childhood, attempting to find new solutions, this sensitivity to his own confusion is always intermingled with his techniques for trying to attain a new self-image.

In his confusion society does not offer him a great deal of help; modern civilization offers very little sharply defined structure as a framework for the adolescent. Most of the advanced cultures of today are oriented to the importance of progress, not to a static society. This is particularly true of those societies based upon a democratic philosophy. Today a typical

adolescent is confused by the teachings of democracy that stress the rights of the individual. While the adult recognizes there is a difference between freedom and license, many adolescents consider the differentiation quite hazy. It is difficult for them to understand why a statesman can make a statement that, if used in a school theme, would result in a threat of suspension from school! They cannot see the interrelationship of the total forest because they are able to grasp only one tree at a time.

### **The Ego Ideal and Superego during Adolescence**

If adolescence is a normal step in maturation, what are the goals and conflicts characteristic of that developmental stage? Many explorers of this question have stressed the identity crisis as the chief characteristic. Prior to adolescence the child had found his identity, but it was his identity as a child. During normal latency he lived and enriched that identity. With the advent of psychological adolescence that childhood identity begins to lose its effectiveness as a source of security that it once provided. Because of the pressure for maturation, a pressure that originates from an internal source as well as from the external world, a new identity must be sought. Self-identity is an internal experience, the result of the interlocking of multiple aspects of living with external and internal reality. Important components of self-identity are the ego ideal and the superego. Together they assure a certain degree of self-predictability based upon the individual's own values. While

the ego ideal and superego are typically so interrelated it is often difficult to tell them apart; during adolescence the demarcation between the two is frequently apparent and the source of confusion for the adolescent (as well as others).

The theoretical differentiation used in this discussion is based on Piers's delineation of the difference between shame and guilt. Shame is related to a failure to live up to the individual's self-concept of what he wishes to be; guilt is the response to failure to live up to what is expected by those meaningful in interpersonal relationships, primarily the parents and the established social mores. The ego ideal defines the healthily narcissistic value system that assures self-appreciation. It is the formulation of a gestalt that indicates, "This is the kind of me *I* can love." The superego, when artificially separated from this, defines, "This is the kind of person who will not be punished, but will be loved by others." The reason for the typical interrelatedness of these two in a psychologically healthy individual is apparent. There is not much love for the self if punishment, including loss of love, by others is not avoided.

During adolescence the childhood ego ideal, which was based upon being a self-loving and lovable child, is partly abandoned. The lovable self must attain an identity as an adult, not only in a social, economic, and parental role, but as an integrated internal self-concept. The adolescent strives to find an ego ideal that will, as it becomes crystallized, result in



respect for the self as an adult, not as a child.

During his latency the adolescent achieved a meaningful relationship with his peer group, he learned the rules of the game for living in the world of his peers; his earlier ego ideal had become enriched by including the requirement of being a good player in that game. His self-image thus had incorporated social standards as well as the standards of his family. Discarding this social ego ideal and alienating himself from his peer group threatens a basic component of what he seeks, a new ego ideal. As a result he is ashamed if he does not protest a parental demand as his peer group does, or claims they do. He is ashamed if he dresses differently from his companions and if he does not join them in violating a school dress code. He probably would not mind not wearing ragged blue jeans, and even would not object to wearing a necktie to school, except that to do so would be to abandon the self-confidence that has resulted from social acceptance by that world of which he had become a part during latency.

On the other hand, often the code of his peer group violates an aspect of a family- rooted superego. The superego that developed during childhood was primarily the result of an internalization of parentally imposed standards. As the superego takes charge, the responses become autonomous, providing guidelines not only to assure avoidance of punishment but, more importantly, to assure a continuity of the needed primary love of parental

figures. If these internalized guidelines are not followed, guilt results.

Some of the values of the childhood superego relate to wise prohibitions relevant only to childhood; others relate to values applicable at all ages. It is not always an easy task for the adolescent to differentiate them. A simple example of a significant component of the childhood superego that must be modified if adulthood is to be attained is the child's internalization of the attitude that parents must be obeyed. There are cultures in which that aspect of the superego remains intact in adult life. On the whole, however, in our current culture the normal adult's attitude is based upon the concept of self-determination.

To attain mature status the individual must learn to differentiate between those superego standards that are universally applicable to society and those that are a remnant of a childhood role. While parents are often aware of the necessity for this shift and give verbal sanction to the change, the childhood superego has become so much a part of the individual that its origin in parental standards has become vague. While the parents' assurance that modifications are correct, because what applied in childhood no longer applies, does aid the adolescent in his attempt to attain a more mature superego, it does not automatically bring about the shift.

Helen, a college student, who was reared in an academically oriented

family, had (except for one episode of serious illness), an unbroken record of class attendance through high school. This record was highly praised by the parents; any deflection from it because of a cold or a headache (she had migraines) would have been seriously criticized. She became a student at a college dedicated to independent study, where class attendance was determined by the student's own desire to learn what the professor was discussing at the time. In spite of her parents' enthusiasm for this educational approach, she could not fail to attend daily every class in which she was enrolled; she indicated she would feel too guilty if she didn't. As a result she could not find the time to pursue her independent study. Finally she solved the problem by transferring to a college that required class attendance and repressed any student initiative!

The typical adolescent, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, handles the conflict between his childhood superego and the pressure to modify it to comply with his image of an adult value system by rebelling, sometimes seriously, more typically in a token fashion, against his own superego. In doing so he frequently first projects that superego, using its original source as the object against which to rebel—namely, his parents or those he sees as rigid and authoritative people. (This may at times be a realistic technique!) He may reveal some behavior that he has tried to keep hidden from his parents, insisting they would not let him do it if they knew. A discussion with the parents may indicate that they would not condemn the act; rather they had

wondered why he was not doing it. Pointing this out to the young person may relieve him; in some instances, however, it makes him uncomfortable. He has been deprived of a token enemy, the projection onto another of an internally established but inappropriate value system that he wishes but fears to abandon.

To the adolescent, rebellion against an internalized value system is at times frightening. The superego provides security, assuring him that his behavior will not be unpredictable. As a consequence the rebellion against the superego often may be abandoned temporarily and the early standards held more rigidly than previously. At such times there is a possibility of the evolvment of a strict, crippling superego in adulthood. In the typical individual this possibility results in a reactivation of the rebellion against the earlier value system and, usually through verbalization rather than action, a flaunting of imposed standards.

Currently there may be an interesting manifestation of this. Young people, and many adults, talk about the change in sexual mores among the young. Yet statistical studies of college students during the 1960's did not confirm this modification.'> Why does this contradiction exist? It is possible that one aspect of the contradiction represents a wish and the other represents an actuality. Maybe the mores arc not changing as much as the young people indicate they are. On the other hand, it is equally possible that

the mores have changed. If so, to what extent does the acceptance of the change provide an opportunity for a wish to be expressed unconsciously through interest in the behavior of others rather than to be acted upon secretly and guiltily? Perhaps when the present generation are in their fifties we will know whether statistics or impressions were correct during this time span.

As alarming as the rebellion against the superego may appear both to adults and to the adolescent himself at times, it usually does not take a serious form. A well-structured superego developed during childhood results in the major aspects of the value system remaining intact. Those aspects that succumb to the adolescent rebellion are more typically relatively minor changes as far as social living or individual maturity is concerned. He may rebel against wearing socks to keep his feet clean, but he doesn't steal or murder!

As indicated previously, differentiation between the ego ideal and the superego is usually difficult because the two, which during childhood and hopefully when adulthood is attained are melded and interrelated, are frequently in conflict during adolescence. A patient described his conflict succinctly in one situation. He and a group of friends planned a trip to Europe that would involve a minimal expenditure for living expenses. Each individual of the group had earned the money for the limited budget they projected. His

parents, not wishing him to be stranded in a foreign country, gave him traveler's checks to be used in an emergency. At first he was happy to have the extra security, but then he experienced an overwhelming sense of shame. His friends were acting as independent, mature individuals; he was secretly more secure because, under a veneer of independence, he was a child being taken care of by his parents. He became so uncomfortable under this burden that he returned the traveler's checks to his parents. When the parents' attempt to persuade and cajole him to accept the checks failed, they became angry, pointing out they would worry about him and their summer would be ruined. This created intolerable guilt in him; he almost abandoned the trip because of the discomfort resulting from the conflict between his ego ideal and his superego. Fortunately he solved the conflict by telling his friends about his "neurotic parents," and by plotting with his friends for a splurge with the traveler's checks during their last days in Europe.

Adults find it difficult to understand certain aspects of the adolescent's struggle to define an adult ego ideal and superego for himself; therefore, they are often unable to help him wisely in his psychological clumsiness. Part of what the adolescent seeks are an ego ideal and superego that will incorporate an occupational role he respects for himself and the training for and achievement of a work identity that will, through acceptance of obligations, achieve approval, not punishment, and a place in society for him. High school and college educators commonly indicate to parents that if their son or

daughter are planning to go to college, the parents should not be concerned if the young person frequently shifts his or her vocational goals, or appears to have none; he or she will find that in college. Regardless of the practical aspects of ability, a beginning college student who has not mapped out his occupational future is still confused about one aspect of his adult ego ideal and superego; he has not as yet determined who, vocationally and as a part of a social structure, he wants to become.

Regardless of the healthy effectiveness of his childhood ego ideal and superego, the adolescent, in order to reach relatively healthy adulthood, must abandon those values that were appropriate only during childhood, or that were necessary in his situation as a child, and selectively retain those of value for all ages. While his selection is facilitated through the wise, not rigid, counseling of others, the selection must be *his* if he is to experience a true self-identity, not just one that is an image in a mirror, the image of someone else.

## Adolescence as Rebirth

The ego ideal and superego do not develop independent of other steps in psychological growth. They are both the result of, and the stimulus for, that growth. This suggests another facet to explore in regard to the adolescent period. Bios has referred to adolescence as a time of the second individuation

process, which for brevity could be termed “rebirth.” This conceptualization would seem the most broadly descriptive term of adolescent psychology. In seeking a new identity, the individual recapitulates the process of development that resulted in the integration achieved in his childhood. Although it would be simple if the repetition compulsion described by Freud were not a part of human psychology, clinical evidence suggests that at least the human species does not abandon the past to start anew, but rather repeats the old in order, if possible, to find a new answer. During adolescence the individual seeking a new identity recapitulates the phases of development that resulted in his childhood identity. In contrast, however, to the clinically typical repetition compulsion, he does so with new tools and with new goals. To the extent that he mastered any earlier phase, the recapitulation during adolescence will be more easily handled, other things being equal, than if his mastery was incomplete or dealt with by the utilization of unfortunate defenses. It is because of this tendency to relive the past, and reevaluate it in terms of the future, that adolescence cannot be understood as either isolated from the past or as the beginning of attainment of the goals for the future. It is a rebirth in which neither the first birth can be ignored nor the future of the reborn person be assumed to be alien to the initial growth process.

## **Body Image in Adolescence**

According to the concepts of this article, psychological adolescence



typically begins at the time of the spurt in growth and the body changes associated with prepuberty and puberty. This physical change results in the young adolescent experiencing an unfamiliarity with himself. We know a piece of glass is a mirror because when we look into it we see a body that is ours. Imagine what the experience of seeing his reflection would be for a thirteen-year-old boy, who had not seen himself in a mirror for a year, during which time he had grown several inches and his body contour had changed. Actually, in a less dramatic way, the adolescent's body, because of the typical body changes, is less familiar to him than in the past. As one boy who had grown quite rapidly half-humorously commented, "I wonder if I am farsighted; my feet are so far away when I stand up, but I can still see them."

Because children and adolescents have been encouraged to engage in physical activities that require good body coordination, the body awkwardness of 50 years ago is not as universally observed among the adolescents of today; during the period of rapid growth the young person is sufficiently involved in physical activity to coordinate more effectively on the whole. If an adolescent does show the physical awkwardness that used to be considered so typical of adolescence, and if his history indicates that prior to his spurt of growth he appeared well coordinated, it is possible to observe how an adolescent actually does, as a result of physical changes, feel unfamiliar with his body. His self-identity through body familiarity is undermined.

If adolescence is conceptualized as a rebirth, this manifestation resembles what occurred in the past as the infant began to become aware of his body. The infant lacked the development that enabled him to handle his body as he would later. In contrast to the adolescent, the infant did not know from where he came; he could not recall his fetal state before he had hands, arms, and legs. The adolescent, discovering a new encasement of himself, does know his physical past; he is often proud of the changes he sees in himself. But he does not necessarily feel at home in this new encasement.

As a consequence of the changes that have occurred, an adolescent is very conscious of his body, both its beauty and its malfunctioning. He is aware of body sensations that are often alarming to him because he doesn't understand them; he is fearful that abnormalities are developing that will make him an inadequate adult in the framework of his own sex. An example of this is the temporary development of a deposit of adipose tissue in the breasts of a boy, particularly if he is obese; he fears his body will be effeminate. The girl may be concerned because her breasts are not developing rapidly enough, and she fears she will have a masculine body while she is striving to see her body as indicative of her femininity. These responses to confusing patterns of physical development are significant in evaluating the "normal" adolescent. Thus, the boy who has a feminine identification may value his breast development; the girl may value her "boyish" figure because it denies her biological femininity. But concern about body development does

not always indicate pathology.

Awareness of the possibility that his body encasement might not be perfect should make the adolescent very careful of his body. Although he will be careful at times, at other times he will act alarmingly to the contrary. He then may manifest many of the characteristics of the oral phase of development. When feeling lost in his interpersonal relationships and in his world, he may revert to the same comfort source that he found gratifying during infancy. He may overeat in spite of gaining too much weight, or he may eat foods that he knows the doctors believe cause acne. Food represents to him comforting that in infancy was provided by others but that he can now provide for himself.

The problem of differentiating between a normal conflict, for which a temporary solution is sought, and a serious conflict, which the adolescent cannot handle, becomes apparent in the case of adolescent eating patterns. As indicated above, if transiently insecure he may handle his longing for the support found during infancy by eating. He may also be obese or deny the doctor's recommendations about acne because being unattractive is protection against the gratification, particularly sexual, that he fears he would be tempted to achieve were he not physically unattractive.

Kate illustrated rather dramatically the interlocking between a transient

and a deeper, more sustained conflict. With a lifelong history of a tendency toward overweight, she became a compulsive eater and rapidly gained weight during early adolescence. She was quite insecure during this period, an insecurity that appeared related to her confusion about her goals and to parental criticism of the lack of future plans. A rather sudden spurt in academic achievement resulted in increased self-confidence and adherence to a reducing diet. The latter was very effective, and in about two months she became an attractive, feminine adolescent. Then her compulsive eating patterns returned and with them her obesity. Her self-confidence appeared to remain intact. It became clear, however, that her compulsive eating returned at the time boys in her class changed their response to her. Previously she had been an asexual friend to them; after she lost weight they sought her as a “girl friend.” She finally recognized that she had been frightened by this change in the boys’ attitude. Her sexual conflict, which had aspects of a conflict deeper than her original insecurity, only then became clear.

## **Dependency during Adolescence**

This reliving of early infancy becomes manifest in other broader psychological responses. Although it is often stressed that adolescence is a time of striving for independence—which it certainly is—the great dependency needs of the adolescent may be overlooked. As he attempts to become more independent and strives to find his own self in a new form, he

may overextend himself, or fear that he has.

This creates anxiety; he then appears to regress to a dependent state characteristic of a period when he really was helpless. He loses all confidence in his own ability to make decisions and seeks advice from parents or parent surrogates. He usually does not seek advice on deep philosophical questions, which adults would probably willingly give at great length. The advice frequently sought is whether to ask a certain girl for a date, what courses to take the next semester or, by the girl, what dress to wear, or whether her lipstick is really a good color for her. The normal adolescent, when he seeks such advice, may become angry with the advice that is given. From the standpoint of adolescent psychology this is easy to understand. If the advice is asked because of anxiety, the fact that advice is given relieves some of the anxiety; then a new discontent arises. The adolescent does not want to be dependent upon parents or even parent surrogates; he wants to have respect for himself as an individual. The only way he can achieve that, in his mind, is to refuse the advice given. He therefore says the advice is stupid and does the opposite. Fortunately, if the earlier child-parent relationship was positively meaningful, the adolescent is more apt to confuse his parents by seeking advice as if he wanted it primarily to do the opposite only in regard to relatively minor, token aspects of his living; the color of lipstick is really not that important.

There is another factor in his seeking advice on minor events in his life. If the advice is given it assures him that in times of real stress he can still depend on his parents for guidance, even if he is attempting to be independent. The mature adult does not wish to be independent to the extent that he will not utilize the expertise of others. It is not surprising then that the adolescent, while striving for his naive concept of independence is frightened at times and seeks in a real or token way people to whom he can turn who are more experienced and who will offer a helping hand if it is needed.

In areas related to long-time, meaningful goals, the adolescent is more willing to listen to the adult because he does want external help in sorting out his confusion; the long-time goals are aspects of his life that he is mulling over but about which he does not have to make an immediate decision as he would if he had to decide whether to take a girl on a certain date. On important issues the normal adolescent listens and often stores away what he hears to think it over in his own secret way, even though on the surface he may seem to resent the advice and imply that he will do the opposite. Adults who say to the adolescent asking for advice, “Don’t ask me because you will do as you please anyway,” may lock a door that should be left open, irrespective of whether the adolescent walks through it at that point.

## **Redefining of Self-Object during Adolescence**

Another manifestation of adolescence as a rebirth is the negativism observable in many psychologically healthy adolescents. Just as it does with a two year old, negativism plays a significant role in the maturation of the adolescent. The two year old, as he becomes aware of the strength inherent in being an individual instead of a compliant extension of another, gains increasing confidence in his separateness by saying “no.” “Yes” is as if he were putty; “no” indicates a strength of a solid form. The infant, as he becomes aware of his separateness from others, assures himself of a new-found identity by being negativistic. Childrearing practices of any culture lead to a gradual remission of negativism paralleling a growing assurance of self-identity within socially imposed and reality limitations.

The young adolescent, since he senses that the identity he established as a child is not the adult identity that he now is seeking, utilizes again the mechanisms that first established his own self-concept. He also, in a different form, is negativistic. If society decreed that all men should have long hair, it could be anticipated that many long-haired adolescent boys of today would shear off their locks. When miniskirts became acceptable high school attire, the maxi skirt became the vogue. It is the new style accepted by the extremists but questioned by the greater majority of adults that often, if the protest of the latter is strong enough, provides an immovable object against which to assert the valued, irresistible force of negativism, becoming the adolescent *cause celebre*. It is the way to be “different,” not different from the

peer group, but different in the eyes of those who established the childhood code the adolescent had accepted in the past.

The psychologically healthy adolescent does not intentionally carry his negativism beyond a point of no return unless he is driven to do so by the counterneгатivism of adults. Unfortunately the point of no return cannot always be delineated and can at times be evaluated only by a longitudinal study. Will an intelligent boy, who is negativistic in his rejection of education beyond high school and apparently deaf to all advice concerning the advantages of further education, ultimately invest himself in further education after he has effectively established his own self-realized identity, or will he cling to the identity his negativism provided him with? The answer may become apparent retrospectively after his adult configuration has become solidified. Fortunately most psychologically healthy adolescents do not go beyond the point of no return.

## **The Sexual Drive in Adolescence**

With the advent of adolescence the sexual drive becomes intensified, partly because of the increased secretions of the reproductive glands. Less sexual confusion exists in simpler societies in which the increased drive can, within the framework of the mores of the social structure, find more readily a permitted pathway of expression with the opposite sex. For many reasons



Western culture does not sanction such a pathway; instead, it complicates the early discharge of sexual tensions by fostering the ideal that mature sexuality represents a fusion of a biological urge and the emotional desire to love and be loved.

In Western civilization being loved and loving, at least consciously asexually, are freely expressed, optimal emotional experiences during childhood. Many theories of psychological growth patterns consider the preadolescent experience with love as the roots from which the ultimate heterosexual fusion of sexuality and love grows. The masturbatory fantasies of the child prior to adolescence indicate that the fusion, in an immature form, begins prior to the onset of adolescence. The intensified sexual feelings of the young adolescent are not yet directed solely toward an heterosexual goal. They readily become a part of any emotionally invested experience. They contribute to the intensity with which the young person responds to both pleasure and disappointment. These modes of discharge are often experienced without conflict.

In a desirable family milieu the child's primary love objects are his parents; the clearest pathway for expression of fused sexual response and love is thus the familiar one of love for the parents. Because of the increased intensity of sexual feelings, this leads to a reactivation of the oedipal conflict. The incest taboo became well imbedded in the psychological format of the

individual as he struggled for a solution to the oedipal conflict in childhood. The prohibition is reinforced during adolescence because in addition to the incestuous implication, love for the parent represents remaining immature and a child in his own eyes and those of his parents. He thus must deny and repress the reactivated oedipal wish. He frequently denies it in his emphatic refusal to tolerate physical contact or any suggestion of seductive behavior by the parent of the opposite sex. Repression of the wish is not as easily achieved. Dreams of the adolescent often have a poorly disguised or undisguised incestuous nature. To add to the confusion, the most apparently rejecting son or daughter will have moments of being pleasantly and harmlessly seductive with the parent of the opposite sex.

Frequently the adolescent attempts to solve the oedipal conflict by a denial of affection for the parent of the opposite sex, and he experiences an intensification of positive feelings for the parent of the same sex. This offers a dual conflict again. To relate in this fashion to a parent of the same sex again represents a threat of returning to childhood. It also frightens the adolescent because he recognizes the possible implications of a homosexual orientation. Consequently he denies, or attempts to repress, his affection for the parent of the same sex and resents any implication of a strong emotional tie. The adolescent vacillates between this and a “man-to-man” or a “woman-to-woman” relationship with the parent of the same sex.

Parents contribute to the intensity of the reactivated oedipal conflict. The mother finds her son in his good moments a delightful male, and she utilizes her flirtatious manners that may have become ineffectual with her long-time mate. She avoids the conflict inherent in such a response to her son by being “motherly.” When, for example, she kisses him and he protests, her answer is, “Why won’t you let *your mother* kiss you?” He probably doesn’t know why, but he does know that he is uncomfortable. A father likewise, when the son is in a good mood in which he feels free to express his affection in a manner that he cannot express it to his male friends, finds with him a gratifying relationship. The reverse situation exists with a girl; her father finds her budding femininity stimulating, and he, under the guise of being “after all her father,” responds warmly to her. She, if needing to deny her affection for her father, is often quite resistant to his overtures. When she is not fighting any expression of her affection for her mother, she again provides the mother with a closeness that the mother does not know with friends.

These responses by parents, while increasing the young person’s conflicts, are not, unless excessive because of the neurotic need of the parents or of the young person, an unfortunate response. A boy gains confidence in his own masculine attractiveness as a result of his mother’s response. He also gains strength from his closeness with his father if the struggle for self-identity becomes too overpowering and external support is needed. The girl likewise gains confidence in her femininity from her father’s response. At the

same time her closeness to her mother, when it is needed, provides her with an opportunity to discuss her own femininity and to model herself after a loved woman. Just as the oedipal conflict is an essential part of maturation in childhood, it is an essential part of the maturational phase of adolescence. If parents are not available to play this role, appear too threatening, or are unwilling, other surrogates are frequently sought, as indicated in the ambivalent relationship with a basically loved teacher, or other adult, expressed by the “crush.”

During the adolescent phase many solutions may be tried to resolve the oedipal tie, solutions that if they were to become a permanent part of the adult character structure would have unfortunate repercussions. For example, a boy, instead of turning toward his mother, may transiently seek a girl who will mother him; he may seek a girl who represents only a sexual object; he may deny any interest in any girl; or he may choose a girl who does not have a psychologically feminine orientation. He may turn to an older man or to some male peer whom he can love as he fears to love his father. He may renounce his masculinity, rejecting any identification with his father or any masculine figure. These intense, frequently ambivalent relationships are often brief. While this brevity may be evaluated by the adult world as evidence of fickleness and a lack of investment in any relationship, it may be indicative of a wise rejection of possible solutions to the oedipal conflict.

One of the disquieting manifestations of this attempt to solve the oedipal conflict—disquieting to both the young person and to adults—is the implication that adolescent sexual attachment toward a person of the same sex is the harbinger of an ultimate homosexual adult life pattern. In some this type of behavior may represent a fixation at a homosexual level. In a psychologically normal adolescent this is not true; it may, however, become a fixation at an adolescent homosexual stage if unwisely handled. Many adolescents who at times appear to be homosexual are in reality trying to find a substitute relationship with someone who will serve in a surrogate parental role as the struggle to be free of the child-parent relationship is being waged in spite of the anxiety such a separation arouses. As mentioned above, because the goal of sexual feelings is not yet crystallized, such feelings may become a direct, unsublimated component of any internally meaningful experience.

While the reintensification of the oedipal conflict is an important part of the confusion of the adolescent as he deals with the increased intensity of his sexual aims, it is by no means the sole source of sexual conflict. In most cultures he faces many other major problems, as he tries to attain mature heterosexuality, which is both biological and social. Particularly if his relationship with a parent figure (during childhood) has led to an identification with a mature person of his own sex, he sees adulthood as attained sexually by emulating the person of the same sex. In the past this

adult had appeared to be a giant, he himself a pygmy. As a consequence his identification with the older person has not assured him that he is the same, particularly in sexual potential. He wishes to attain sameness; he is not confident he can.

The adolescent feels unsure of his sexual competence. Because he has doubts about his own sexual adequacy, he fears it will be seen by others; because of his tie to a person of the same sex he worries about homosexuality. To deny these concerns, he may talk or act out a genital sexual pattern compatible with heterosexuality. If he only talks it, he often is masking a deep fear that he can't act it out. If he acts out a pseudoheterosexual role, he either finds it unsatisfactory or is vaguely aware that the sexual act itself is a mutual masturbatory experience, far short of what he believed a true, mature heterosexual experience would be. The latter is particularly disturbing to the young adolescent girl, for she is often frigid. She interprets this as evidence of her failure in her feminine sexual identity. The fact that the reproductive glands do not reach full maturity with the increased functioning at puberty probably contributes to some adolescent confusion. There has not been sufficient study of this to state it as more than an hypothesis, but it may be that part of the difficulty in fulfilling the sexual goals of the young adolescent is related to this immaturity.

In today's culture sexual fulfillment is not evaluated only by the capacity

for genital discharge of sexual tension with anyone of the opposite sex. It is considered to be attained when love for the sexual partner and sexual discharge are one. Often the love an adolescent experiences for another person of the opposite sex is an expression of a need of the young girl or boy that is not readily melded with sexuality. Possibly such melding cannot occur until the sexual glands have attained a stable maturity, and emotional needs and responses have also attained relative maturity.

### **Social Meanings during Adolescence**

Fortunately for parents, as well as for the adolescent, the normal adolescent has days or months in which he is reliving the latency period. He is interested in his school work, but now he orients it to the reality of his future, not just to the present. He works out in fantasy many possible roles that he can play in the social and economic structure when he becomes an adult. He is interested in sports, either as a participant or as an observer, and formalizes into a social philosophy for the future the standards of fair play and sportsmanship that he learned during his latency. Temporarily the mountain toward maturity that he has been struggling to climb has become a restful plateau, both for himself and for his parents.

There is one exception, however, to this plateau concept. During this period he often translates his philosophy into thinking about social issues, the

status of minority groups or of others less fortunate than himself, political formulations or international relations. These ideas have intense affective meaning, but inevitably reflect a limited grasp of all the reality implications. His protest becomes verbal, and he may join with those who with similar idealistic goals verbalize their feelings, often expressing hostility toward those whom they consider barriers to the fulfillment of their goals, for example, the Establishment. The reliving and reevaluation of latency temporarily becomes a source of concern to others and may lead the young adolescent into activities that are basically incompatible with the philosophy he is expressing.

This behavior has many components. The social formulations of latency provide a way to escape complete self-absorption; the social structure, not the self, must find new rules by which to live. Lack of life experience leads often to naive, but sincere concepts. At the same time, however, it is not only inexperience and the resultant naiveté that energizes the drive toward these social goals. The drive may be intensified by: the wish to find an area of adequacy; the need to find a securely dependent relationship in a group that provides a familylike unity that is obviously not the primary family; the need to rebel against the symbol of a childhood relationship with his family (at present the Establishment) in order to establish a confident respect for the self; or a wish to discharge sexual tension through love for a cause and for individuals who are abstractions and thus do not threaten intimacy.



## “Regression” during Adolescence

The recapitulation during adolescence of childhood patterns of adaption and defense, and the firm establishment of defenses and adaption against ego-alien impulses, is described by many as regression in response to the intensification of inherent needs and drives. This concept would imply a temporary ego failure. In some cases even in relatively normal adolescents this is probably a valid assumption. An example of such regression would be when overeating to the extent of causing obesity occurs because food represents love (as experienced in infancy). In the normal adolescent, however, the way in which childhood is relived is not characteristic of the past, but rather is an attempt to correct the child-oriented solutions of psychological conflicts, thereby attaining, hopefully, an adult identity.

In many ways it parallels the latter part of a successful psychoanalysis; the patient, after regressing and coming to recognize the infantile manner in which problems have been handled, reconstitutes himself to attain in an adult fashion those goals that were sought in childhood in a childlike way. The normal adolescent does not have to uncover the unconscious use of childhood tools; he is experimenting with new tools that may more adequately serve his needs. Many of the former tools prove of value with or without some modification; even though at times he casts them aside, he ultimately uses them again. Other and new tools appear at times to be the only answer to

reconstituting himself as an adult. Gradually he recognizes the importance of multiple and functionally interrelated approaches. As a consequence he interlaces his multiple needs, wishes, and drives, binding them together with adaptive and defense mechanisms that finally represent an identity that is himself as an adult.

## **Resolution of Adolescence**

This process occurs throughout adolescence, but during the early phase there is a chaotic pattern that gradually becomes a discernible design in later adolescence. He achieves that ultimate design by finding, not always optimally, a solution to each recapitulated phase of early development.

He becomes at home in his new body and with his new physiology. This is facilitated by the completion of the physical and biological growth that has been initiated by prepuberty and puberty. He has a body image of himself that represents his external self-concept.

He learns by experimentation, evaluation, and from the behavior of others the wise limits of independence. He also, as he feels safer in his achievement of wise independence, finds that to be dependent on others is not necessarily to be a child. Dependence is childish only when it is sought as a child would. He becomes aware or unconsciously accepts that society is based upon the interdependence of its members—an adult form of

dependency in the human species.

As he becomes increasingly familiar with, and secure in, his nonchild self-identity, he does not have to protest so emphatically that he is a person in his own right. What was negativism earlier becomes a capacity to think rationally about those issues that previously aroused his negativism. Hopefully he does not completely abandon his earlier naive attitudes, but rather exposes them to a rational evaluation that enables him to see their weaknesses and potentials, and to outline a course toward fulfillment of their positive potentials.

He resolves the reactivated oedipal conflict by turning to a member of the opposite sex for sexual gratification, a nonincestuous object acceptable to himself. His sexual feelings, lacking goal direction in early adolescence, has become goal oriented; he has attained a mature heterosexual level of sexual maturation. With this forward step he can experience his nonsexual love for his parents without anxiety, accepting them and hopefully being accepted by them as an adult with virtues and shortcomings. A tie to his parents persists, well-established through the years of childhood. The tie does not bind, it only enriches. It contributes to the capacity of the young adult to be a parent.

Experience and biological maturation brings confidence in his (or her) sexual identity as a male (or female). A sense of sexual adequacy relieves the

anxiety experienced earlier and frees the individual to enjoy that adequacy. At the same time there is a relief from the strain of multiple sexual goals, and gratification in meaningful relationships such as friendships that have now become asexual is found.

Whereas previously he had vacillated, he incorporates defined role patterns for himself with the development of familiarity and the acceptance of his own identity. He clarifies his role in his family of the past and, if married, his new family; he finds secure employment; and he accepts responsibilities in accordance with the society of which, as he now accepts, he is an integral part. He has become an adult. Later he may modify or change the roles, but he will not do so impulsively or confusedly, but only after careful exploration of the multiple facets of his familiar role and the new one by which he is tempted.

Obviously the preceding recapitulation of the resolution of adolescence formulates a theoretical termination that in reality is possibly never completely achieved by any individual. One of the frequent unfortunate consequences of failure to achieve an adequate resolution of adolescence is the loss of the emotional sensitivity and responsiveness of adolescence. As their naiveté is confronted with the negating aspects of reality, too many resolve the conflict by repressing the sensitivity and responsiveness rather than incorporating it into an approach to reality. Unfortunately this is not

usually considered as pathology, but rather as evidence of growing up. To the extent that repression instead of maturation of this aspect of adolescence occurs, to that extent any cultural growth is retarded. That sensitivity and responsiveness, if it matures, results in the individual's capacity to care for, to be involved in, and to offer wise participation and leadership in areas beyond his immediate interpersonal relationships. That widened capacity protects society from his use of any unusual creativeness he may have solely egocentrically; instead, the creativeness will also be beneficial to those who are represented to him only through the abstractions of "society."

To summarize, during infancy and early childhood the individual struggles with the basic maturational conflicts that appear to be characteristic of the psychological development of at least the human species. With the attainment of adolescence these conflicts are reactivated, and the individual is "reborn" to face the psychological task of formulating an adult identity. What he ultimately formulates, or fails to formulate, will be significantly affected by his infancy and early childhood experiences, but not necessarily irrevocably determined by them. To the extent childhood conflicts are resolved constructively, to that extent adolescent conflicts will have a greater possibility of a constructive resolution. Irrespective of the childhood past, however, adolescence is a phase of rebirth that, if relatively achieved, brings forth an adult.

The preceding article is a description of the manifest behavior of the normal adolescent. To probe deeper into the psychodynamics of the adolescent phase, the following publications are suggested:

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### Notes

[1] Editor's Note: Some authors distinguish also a juvenile and preadolescent period.

[2] These apparently opposing points of view are summarized in Wiener's *Psychological Disturbance in Adolescence*