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The Person

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From *The Person* by Theodore Lidz

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The arrival of the first child transforms spouses into parents and turns a marriage into a family. The endless drama has curved around to face again the beginning of life; but now the players are taking the parents' nurturant and supportive roles that they learned while they were ingénues playing the children's parts; but the old lines do not quite fit and constant improvisation is required.[1]

In becoming parents, the marital partners enter into a new developmental phase (Benedek, 1959). The tasks with which the parents must cope, the roles they occupy, their orientation toward the future alter profoundly. They are offered opportunities for new satisfactions, to achieve a greater sense of completion, and to live through experiences which had been fantasied but frustrated since early childhood. They need no longer play at being "mommy and daddy"—they are. However, this simple step into parenthood, so often taken as an inadvertent misstep, provides a severe test of all preceding developmental stages and the consequent integration of the individual parents as well as of their marriage. The inevitable changes in the husband and wife will, in turn, alter the marital relationship and place strains upon it until a new equilibrium can be established.

The birth of a child, perhaps actually the awareness of conception, changes the marital partnership by the need to make room—emotional room—for a third person. The product of their unity can be a strong bond, a source of common interest and shared identification, but children are also a divisive influence—in varying proportions in each marriage, a unifying and separating force. The spouses who properly have transferred their major object relationships to one another, and each of whom wishes to be the focal point of the partner's emotional and affectional investment, now find the other intensely investing a newcomer. Further, a family unit is not as plastic as a marital union. A childless couple can relate to one another in a great variety of ways and the marriage remain adequate if both partners are satisfied or even if they simply believe it more satisfactory than separating would be. The preservation of the equilibrium of a family, however, and even more clearly the adequate rearing of children, requires the achievement and maintenance of a dynamic structuring of the family in which each spouse fills definitive responsibilities. Deficiencies of the marital partners in filling the tasks and roles they have

accepted or agreed upon lead to conflict and family imbalance. On the other hand, the increases in structure and shared responsibilities which are an inherent part of family life can provide greater security to the spouses and greater stability to the marriage.

Let us first consider the capacities of the individual spouses to move into the phase of parenthood, because it is the immaturities, fixations, and regressions uncovered by the need to be a parent that usually interfere with a spouse's acceptance of his or her respective parental functions or with the capacity to fill them adequately.

PARENTHOOD AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Speaking of the ideal which reality occasionally approaches, the partners who married have both achieved individual identities, shown themselves capable of intimacy, and have given up their independence for the benefits of interdependence with its security of knowing that the welfare of each is extremely important to the other. They have found the completion that could not be gained within their own natal families where sexual union could not be permitted and in which they remained children. The spouses seek resolution of their particular version of their frustrated and incompleted family romances. The incompleteness of the male and female roles and skills is balanced by those of the partner. The task of self-creation is more or less over for most. The energies that went into sexual repression or in seeking ways of satisfying sexual drives, and into the search for the partner who could bring completion to the imbalance of being a man or a woman, are released for investment in a creativity that transcends the self. while the child does not always oblige and wait, persons properly become parents only after they are reasonably launched as adults, when they are at the height of their physical and intellectual capacities and well settled in their marital relationship. They can feel themselves adults because the incompleted oedipal strivings which indicated their junior status—their membership in the childhood generation—have now found indirect expression and fulfillment. The spouses have been freed from the basic restrictions of childhood, and are ready to become parents themselves.

The conception of the child is an act of mutual creativity during which the boundaries between the self and another were temporarily obliterated more completely than at any time since infancy. One can grasp the symbolic validity of the common but erroneous notion that a woman must have an orgasm in

order to conceive. The infant is a physical fusion of the parents, and their personalities unite within the child they raise. As their common product, the child can become a continuing bond forged by that creativity, a focus of mutual hopes, interests, and responsibilities. Whereas each parent grew up a product of different family lines with differing customs and identifying with different parents, they are now united by a child whose experiences they will share and with whom they both identify. We must also recognize that whether they have willingly or unwillingly been turned into parents, here as in other spheres of life many persons grow through finding the abilities to meet responsibilities thrust upon them.[2]

THE WOMAN AND PROCREATION

Although some women will prefer to remain unmarried, and some who marry recognize that having a baby will interfere with their careers or marriages and remain childless, most married women wish for the sense of fulfillment that comes with the creation of a new life. Strong sociocultural directives have added impetus to a woman's feelings—which may or may not be correct—that she possesses an innate drive that requires satisfaction through conceiving, bearing, and nurturing children. Her generative organs seem meaningless unless her womb has been filled and her breasts have been engorged, if not suckled. Women's sexuality is more complex than men's, more closely tied to nature through the menstrual cycle and with a monthly uncertainty about fertility or reminder of infertility; and it encompasses conception, the incorporation of a fetus within her, childbirth, and nursing as well as sexual passion and copulation. Only recently have the sexual act and childbearing become disconnected for those who so wish, and the decision made available concerning whether to have children.[3] Fewer babies need now be born because of the parents' recreational rather than procreational desires. With the choice given them, perhaps fewer women will wish to disrupt their careers, or take the risk of becoming a single parent through divorce, or overcome various residual fears of pregnancy and parturition; but for many women, creativity as a mother becomes a central matter that provides meaning and balance to their lives. Any sense of incompletion or deprivation because they had been born girls has been offset by the realization of their innate capacities for creativity, but the realization has required actualization. Vestiges of envy of the man lead some women to desire strongly to have a son through whom they can unconsciously live out a life closed to them because they are women. Childhood fantasies of displacing

mother and providing a child for father are now symbolically realized. The birth of a child turns a wife into a woman by setting her on a par with her mother. Her love for the husband who has made such completion possible deepens. She does not wish the child just for herself but as a meaningful outcome of her relatedness to her husband, pleasing him with a gift that is something of him that he has placed in her to nurture but also something of herself that the husband will cherish. To some extent, the baby is herself loved by a benevolent father. The process carries residue of the little girl's envy of the mother who could produce a child with and for the father. The husband who is loving permits the woman to complete an old but very important fantasy.

The strength of some women's drive to procreate is shown most clearly by those who prefer to risk death rather than remain barren. A physician who observes such situations gains the impression that the desire to produce a new life forms a drive that takes precedence over self-preservation. A woman in the days prior to antitubercular chemotherapy became ill with tuberculosis pneumonia shortly after her marriage and verged on dying for several months. The disease was finally arrested after several years of sanatorium care but a threat of breakdown of the healed lesions remained. After continuing in good health for several years after resuming married life, she insisted the time had come for her to have a child. Her physician sought to dissuade her lest the pregnancy and delivery reactivate the disease, and her husband reassured her that she was more important to him than a child. Eventually both husband and physician realized that she would never be content without a child. Perhaps the strong maternal desires were a good omen, for she blossomed during her pregnancy and neither the delivery of the child nor caring for it affected her tuberculosis.[4]

In the past, at least, most women who decided that they were better off without children, or that children were better off without having them as mothers, experienced some regrets, some sense of lack of fulfillment as women. The compunctions have been fostered, at least in part, by cultural pressures and values. Alice Rossi (1968) notes, "On the level of cultural values, men have no freedom of choice where work is concerned; they must work to secure their status as adult men. The equivalent for women has been maternity." 'The young woman has been under considerable sociocultural pressure to consider that her fulfillment as well as her status as a woman depends on having children. With marriage and sexuality open to her without maternity, and with greater opportunities for fulfillment through a career, such pressures seem to be diminishing, and as pronatalism diminishes because of overpopulation,

perhaps fewer babies will be born for prestige reasons rather than because they are deeply desired.

THE MAN AND PATERNITY

The husband usually also has strong desires for an offspring and can be transformed by it. The child provides a continuity into the future that mobilizes ambitions. An offspring forms an important sign of virility—even though it does not require much virility to impregnate a wife (one father replied on being congratulated, "Don't congratulate me, it was the easiest thing I ever did—and besides I wasn't even trying"). Among some ethnic groups, in particular, the ability to father children is an essential indication of masculinity, and "machismo" can be a major impediment to birth control. Paradoxically, even as paternity secures and heightens a father's masculine self-esteem and permits realization of his instrumental functions of protecting and providing, it also affords him with an opportunity to express the nurturant qualities derived from his early identification with his mother that previously had few acceptable outlets and required repression. The child's admiration and adulation of him will provide him with narcissistic supplies, and he now gains the position and status of "father" that he had envied and desired to attain since his earliest childhood.

There are also forces that promote jealousy of a child, and antagonisms to a child, particularly a son, that are held before us in myth.[5] The husband may resent his wife's attention to the child, and old sibling rivalries may thus be rekindled. There may exist more deeply buried fears that his son will grow up and wish to get rid of him, just as, in the oedipal phase of his childhood, he had fantasies of killing his father. Such fears are less frequent in societies and families in which the father fills a more nurturant and less dominating role in the family.

THE REORIENTATION OF PARENTS' LIVES AND MARRIAGES

A young wife's readiness to become pregnant is often marked by "nesting procedures" which signal that she feels settled in the marriage and is ready for the next major event of her life. If the couple have been living with parents, or in some transient manner, she wishes a home of her own. If she is employed, the job begins to pall. There may be a flurry of interest in fixing up the home with thoughts of preparing a room and play space for the baby. Sexual intercourse now carries a context beyond love and passion. Her

thoughts may focus more on the possibility of conceiving than on the mutuality with her husband. The husband, noting the change, may feel hurt, believing that he is no longer sufficient for his wife. Menstrual periods bring disappointment and feelings of emptiness. If the woman has difficulty in becoming pregnant, she may stop work and focus her interest on the home, believing that it will help her conceive —and it may.

The knowledge that she is pregnant changes the woman's life, for she now feels free to indulge her fantasies about a tangible future with the child. She daydreams of the baby, plans her future in terms of the child, and makes provision for his or her care. Her life has found a new center which is within her and she enjoys feelings of self-sufficiency. For many years to come the center of her existence will be her children. She requires the capacity to include both husband and children as her major investment rather than dividing her interest and affection between them.

The mother, as discussed in Chapter 4, forms a bond to the baby as it develops within her. The father's tie to the infant differs but he, too, can develop strong nurturant feelings through sharing with his wife and providing emotional support for her.

When the spouses are both emotionally ready for parenthood, the arrival of an offspring stabilizes and deepens their relationship, and different ideas about family and parental roles, or of child-rearing techniques, are not likely to become disruptive. The child provides new sources of interest which both share, and which no one else will find as absorbing. Any slack in their lives that permitted boredom now disappears; and doubts about the marriage, which may have arisen after the initial ardor had passed, vanish. They are aware of the deepening of their commitment. Marriages can be undone, but parenthood is irrevocable as long as the child lives.[6]

Some young married couples are surprised to find that the birth of the first child changes their lives even more than did their marriage. There are many satisfactions in watching the baby change from day to day, and in having such a tangible focus to one's life, but there are also tribulations. The carefree days of early married life are gone, and the young mother spends most of her time at home. As much as she loves her baby, the need to care for it constantly becomes wearisome as a steady regimen. The daily routine is arduous, and can require real management skills when there are two or more small children. She

experiences frustration as she does not know how to cope with some developmental problem that inevitably arises. Her self-esteem suffers when a child is not responsive to her efforts.[7] There are days of anxious concern when a baby is ill. The mother who had worked misses adult companionship. She begins to count the days until the weekend when her husband can share the duties, and she begins to await the time when a child can be off to nursery school or kindergarten. It may not be a good omen when a mother feels too guilt}-to admit that she feels burdened at times and would like an occasional respite from the household chores and care of children.

Whereas the wife who has been working primarily to provide additional income will usually give up her work gladly and devote herself to the baby and her home, the woman who is pursuing a career can find her situation difficult. Some will have selected the time to have a baby and suspended their careers for several years, but others will wish to return to their studies or work after a few weeks or months. Unless a grandmother assumes the care of the baby or a good nursery is available—the two common solutions in the USSR but both infrequent in the USA—or unless a reliable, full-time nurse and housekeeper can be obtained, combining the care of very young children and a career becomes very hard, and life for the parents extremely difficult. Both husband and wife may attempt to work half-time, or one —usually the wife—will work part-time, relying on domestic help and her husband to enable her to be a way part of the day and also to find time to study or work at home. The husband s way of life, which changes considerably even if his wife does not work, must change markedly as he assumes major responsibilities for the child and home rather than simply act as a helper. Unfortunately, but realistically, most of those men who have supported their wives' careers have done so—at least in the past—only when it does not disrupt their own careers and lives too profoundly. Even when the wife and mother manages to make satisfactory arrangements for the care of the baby while she is at work, she is likely to feel guilty whenever something goes wrong, or simply because she is not at home with the baby. There have been strong pressures for mothers to devote themselves to the full-time care of their small children, even though there is little, if any, evidence that such care is better for the child than a few hours of undivided parental attention each day. Nursery schools are more available than nurseries, and many mothers will feel free to return to their career activities away from home only when the child, or the youngest child, can attend nursery school.

Even when the mother does not work away from the home, the presence of a child also requires

reorganization of the marriage and can upset the equilibrium that the spouses had established as a couple. In a marital relationship harmony depends essentially upon the couple's finding reciprocally interrelating roles, but roles usually must shift to care for the child properly. The wife may now be tied down to the home and its care more than formerly; the husband may need to find ways of earning more money to make up for the loss of his wife's income as well as to provide for the baby. One or both may not recognize the added strain upon the partner. Wives may expect their husbands to share the nurturant care of the child and the housework, and husbands may willingly do so. However, even though a wife has had little, if any, more experience with child rearing than her husband, the man does not usually develop the same bond to the small baby, nor is he likely to feel as much at ease in caring for a baby because of the way in which lie had been brought up (see Chapter 14). As the child grows a little older, even if a father is able to fill most of the nurturant functions, there is reason to believe that it will influence the child's developing gender identity. There are many unanswered questions, and it may be a matter of what sorts of persons the parents and the society wish to raise. Usually, a couple, as described in Chapter 2, will continue to differentiate to some degree between what the father and the mother do, and each will establish a somewhat different relationship with the child that complements rather than interferes with the other. The mutuality of parenthood thus fosters a supportive interdependence between the spouses.

Still, the unexpressed but essential demands for parents to carry out role-bound functions can cause serious strains on the individuals and the marriage. The stresses can be particularly insidious as the spouses may be only dimly aware of the functions and obligations of their roles, and that the acquisition of a child has imposed a need for more definite structuring of their relationship. Indeed, the need to fill these parental roles in which demands are made by the child and the spouse while the rewards of parenthood are still nebulous can set a stern test of the marriage and the stability of the parents. A child can almost as readily provoke conflict as promote greater closeness and sharing. Whereas the wife usually wishes to share the child with her husband and feels hurt if he does not share her enthusiasm, her essential preoccupation with the baby and her own feelings about the baby can leave the husband feeling excluded.

The Impact of Children on Parents' Personalities

While the parental influences on children seem obvious and the relationship of parents' difficulties to the children's personality problems have been discussed in various contexts, the child, in turn, can profoundly affect one or both parents. The influences are reciprocal—a child's needs or specific difficulties uncover a parent's inadequacies. A mother can lose her self-esteem when she finds herself unable to cope with her baby. A woman who had been highly successful in business and had helped her husband in his career by her perfectionistic attention to detailed problems, became frustrated when she could not seem to help her baby. The baby developed colic at three weeks of age, and as a sophisticated person she knew that some pediatricians attributed such difficulties to the mother's way of handling the baby. Intensity of effort could not help, and feeling herself a failure she became angered by the infant who unwittingly frustrated her and she began to suffer from episodes of incapacitating migraine. A rather common pattern has been noted in men who develop peptic ulcer soon after the birth of a child. They had always been anxious about the security of sources of food and support and they married women who worked and provided additional security against poverty and starvation. When the wife can no longer work and there is an additional family member to provide for, the anxiety becomes serious and chronic.

The woman's capacities to provide maternal nurturance to her infant are related to the quality of the nurturant care she herself received in her infancy and childhood. If her needs then were met with reasonable consistency and she did not experience chronic frustrations and rage, she now has confidence that she can properly satisfy her own child. We might hazard that her own feelings and responses were properly programmed in her childhood and she can now empathize with and understand the needs and feelings of her children. The mutuality established between herself and the child increases her self-esteem, her pride in her motherliness, and her assurance of her femininity. She can transcend the inevitable difficulties and periods of frustration without self-derogation or distorting defenses against loss of self-esteem. In contrast, the woman who was deprived in early childhood responds to a child's dissatisfactions and refusals to be placated with increased feelings of inadequacy. Regrets at having married and hostile feelings toward the child are disturbing and must be undone. A vicious cycle sets in between a frustrated child and frustrated mother. The mother's inadequacies and despair soon spill over into the marital relationship; she may become depressed, place unrealistic

demands upon her husband for support, or erect defenses, including projection of blame, that upset the family equilibrium.

A woman whose concerns about her capabilities as a wife were heightened by a long period of sterility, had her pleasure in having a baby turn into desperation when she found that she could not quiet her infant who would become rigid and shriek when she picked him up to try to comfort him. Her husband's attempts to be helpful were taken as criticism of her adequacy. Her mother had been an aloof woman who had avoided physical contact with her children and had never been able to convey a sense of warmth and protectiveness. The young wife now felt herself even more inadequate than her mother, whose attitudes she had resented. As becoming a more adequate wife and mother than her own mother had formed a major motif of her life, the foundations of her integration were being undermined. She turned the old hostilities toward her mother against herself—she had not rid herself of the resented internalized mother—and became convinced that her husband wished to be rid of her.

Although the topic cannot be discussed at this juncture, we must remember that the need for a parent to adjust and for the marriage to readjust is not confined to the time of the birth of the first child or to the first few years of its life. As we have noted in following the child's development, each transition into a new developmental phase requires an adaptation by the parents, and one or another of these required adaptations may disturb a parent's equilibrium. The child's going off to school may reawaken the fears the mother experienced in her own childhood when she was separated from her mother; a father's jealousies become aroused when his daughter starts dating; the parents have difficulty being left without children in the home, etc. A highly intelligent woman, who had been terrified in her own childhood that her mother would abandon her if her mother learned that she continued to masturbate despite warnings of The consequences, could not tolerate her son's playing with his penis in his bath and would frantically warn him that he would become an idiot if he continued, even though intellectually she knew differently. As her own childhood had been lonely and she had felt unwanted by her peers—largely because her parents never remained in one neighborhood for more than a year or two—she would become very upset whenever her son had a quarrel with playmates, or if he were not invited to a party. She would scold him for not being more affable and more popular, which made him self-conscious and less able to seek companionship.

We have been considering how the personality changes, emotional difficulties, and regressions of a spouse that occur in response to some phase of parenthood can upset the marriage. The manner in which either one of the parents relates to the child can in itself create problems. A wife, whose beaut}-flattered the husband's pride and whose vivaciousness delighted him, turns into an ogress to the husband who empathizes with the daughter, whom she treats as a nuisance and mistreats when she feels annoyed with the girl's need for attention. Ethnic or social class differences in role expectations which had been inconsequential in the marital partnership become more troublesome when they concern child-rearing practices. A woman of Irish descent accepted and even admired her Polish-American husband's domination of her and his decision making for both of them; but she could not tolerate his expectations that their three-year-old son would be strictly obedient or else receive a thrashing, or his insistence that she docilely accept his decisions concerning the child's upbringing.

THE CHILD CONCEIVED TO SAVE A MARRIAGE

The stresses of being parents are great enough to challenge the harmony of a fairly secure marriage, yet many children are born in an effort to salvage one that is threatening to disintegrate. The very immature young wife who married after her first fiancé had died in combat and spent most of her pregnancy fantasying about him (see page 429) remained intensely bound to her mother and spent many evenings with her and even slept with her mother one or two nights a week. She resented her husband's refusal to take her dancing two or three nights a week as he had during the courtship. When he threatened to leave because he could not tolerate her immaturity and inability to stay home, she decided to have a second child, even though she could not properly care for the first, believing that two children would keep her so busy that she would not have time or energy for dancing and would certainly be unable to leave her husband. Although a child can help a marriage that is not working well by producing a new interest for one or both partners, it is not likely to repair a really unhappy marriage. The baby then simply binds the partners in a relationship they cannot tolerate and the child can be severely resented for holding them together.[8] However, the baby often dissipates boredom in a wife and dispels the feelings of emptiness that may come after the initial phase of marriage has passed and expectations that marriage would profoundly change her life are unrealized. The husband may also gain new self-esteem that changes his behavior and even modifies his personality. The man who married only

after his girlfriend assured him that she did not expect great potency from him (see page 461) annoyed his wife by his lack of self-confidence and his desire for her to make the important decisions. The birth of a son set aside his insecurity, fired him with ambition to provide for his son better than he had been provided for, and he began to assert himself at work and with his wife—much to her satisfaction.

THE PARENTS' IDENTIFICATIONS WITH THEIR CHILD

Not only do children identify with parents, but parents also identify with their children. Babies are immediately part of their mothers' lives, for they have grown in them and only gradually separate from them. Some fathers will require time before they can spontaneously enjoy the baby, sometimes not until the child is old enough to be considered something of a person. The experience of parenthood makes possible a sharing of another life reciprocally to the way the parents as babies shared feelings with their mothers. Again, as in infancy and as in some fortunate marriages, there exists a type of unique closeness and pleasure that comes of being empathically related, with the boundaries between the self and another lowered in a positive rather than a pathological manner. The parents take pleasure in the child's joy and suffer with the child's pains more than in almost any other relationship. The child's development and achievements are experienced with pride and increase the parents' self-esteem. In certain respects the parent lives again in the child. The parent reexperiences many of the joys of childhood simply through observation and has permission to regress in time and behavior in playing with the child. The parents often live in the child, for whom they seek to establish more favorable situations than they experienced in childhood; such efforts are commonly overdone in an attempt to provide the child with what parents lacked in childhood, and usually fill the parents' needs rather than the child's. The son must have the carpentry set the father had wanted so badly and the father is usually so impatient that he gives it before the child is ready, which permits the father to indulge himself with the toy for a time, and the child to tire of it before he can use it properly. When overdone, such needs of a parent to live through a child interfere with the child's development, particularly when the child properly feels that he or she cannot become an individual but must live primarily to complete a parent's life. The converse also occurs. The parent who had been indulged in childhood and who resented the lack of direction and firmness may provide such restrictions for the child.

Through the process of identification the child can also provide one of the two parents with the

opportunity to experience intimately the way in which a person of the opposite gender grows up. The sharing of the vicissitudes in the life of a child of the opposite sex, almost as if they pertained to the self, provides a broadening perspective even if it is not needed to fill some residual childhood wishes. The use of a son by the mother and occasionally of a girl by the father to live out a life the parent would like to have lived as a member of the opposite sex has been noted by many as a source of potential difficulty for both child and parent. However, one cannot consider such patterns to be detrimental or useful in themselves, for it is rather a matter of balance: a mother's inability to empathize and enjoy the experiences of a son as a son interferes with the development of the necessary reciprocal identifications between them. Parenthood also provides the opportunity to be loved, admired, and needed simply because one is a parent and, as such, a central and necessary object in the young child's life. The many potentialities for emotional satisfactions from parenthood manage to outweigh the tribulations and sacrifices that are required. It is unfortunate when parents cannot gain deep gratification from being needed by others and giving to them, the essence of being parents, and instead find children's needs and dependence simply burdensome (Doi, 1973).

THE CHANGE IN THE COUPLE'S POSITION IN SOCIETY

Aside from directly influencing the parents and their marriage, the child exerts an indirect effect through changing the parents' position in the society. New sets of relationships are established as the parents are drawn to other couples with children of the same age. The mother seeks out other young mothers with whom she can compare notes and exchange advice and admiration of the children. They are also drawn together to share supervision in order to gain some free time. As the child grows older the parents are brought together with other families through interest in nursery schools, parent-teacher's organizations, cub scouts, and in gaining suitable recreational pursuits for the children. They join organizations and clubs and plan vacations for the benefit of the children. The way in which the parents conduct their lives alters and may include a change in residence to assure the proper advantages, physical and social, for the children. A new impetus toward economic and social mobility often possesses the parents. 'The family's position in society becomes more definite and includes a general pattern of how parents should live in order to raise children properly. Frequently the couple's relatedness to their own parents improves and grows firmer once again. They have achieved a new status in their parents'

eyes and in focusing upon their children have a new common interest and can bypass areas of friction which may have existed between the two generations.

THE CHANGING SATISFACTIONS AND TRIBULATIONS OF PARENTHOOD

Parenthood, the satisfactions it provides and the demands it makes, varies as life progresses; and changes with the parents' interests, needs, and age as well as with the children's maturation. There are phases in the child's life that the parents are reluctant to have pass, whereas they tolerate others largely through knowing that they will soon be over. The changing lives of the children provide many satisfactions that offset the tribulations, uncertainties, and regrets. The little girl that the mother nourished as a baby becomes a helper about the home, following the mother's model; she matures into adolescence and becomes a companion who shares and understands as well as requiring understanding; she becomes a wife and mother herself and has a new appreciation of her mother's life. The father finds his son experiencing many things that had long before absorbed the father, and he is fascinated to note how alike boys and their games remain over a generation. The children share interests in television, scouts, and sports with parents, but eventually they develop interests in matters that are more meaningful to the parents—hobbies, music, literature, careers. Although rivalries often pervade the father-son and the mother-daughter relationships, usually the parent can share with a child without rivalry, for children's achievements are regarded by parents very much as extensions of their own accomplishments.

The parents change. The young father, who was just starting on his career when his first child was born, settles into a life pattern. He becomes secure with increasing achievement and interacts differently with his youngest child and provides a different model for him than for his oldest. Or, he becomes resigned to falling short of his life goals, pursues them with less intensity, and focuses more attention on his children's future than on his own. The mother may have less time for a third or fourth child than for her first, but she may also be more assured in her handling of them. The birth of a baby when the parents are in their late thirties will find them less capable of physical exertion with the child and less tolerant of annoyances, but they are less apt to be annoyed. The parents become accustomed to the child's increasing independence; and though they are concerned because they provide less guidance, they are also relieved by the greater freedom from responsibility. Yet, according to an adage that is virtually a

platitude, a parent's concerns about a child never cease but only change. Eventually the children marry and leave home. The couple do not cease to be parents; but with their major responsibilities for their children over, a way of life to which they had become accustomed and which provided much of the meaning to their lives comes to an end. They pass through another major demarcation line in life which we will consider in the next chapter.

THE CHILD-CENTERED HOME

Parenthood is something of a career as well as a phase of life. The consciousness that the children's personalities, stability, and happiness are influenced profoundly by how they are nurtured and reared has altered the tasks of parenthood profoundly. Parents could once turn over their children to wet nurses for the first year or two of their lives and to "nannies" to raise, or send them off to a school at the age of seven or eight. They believed that children's characters were born into them through the bloodlines they inherited, much as with the horses they rode. Then, too, parents' emotional investments in children were often held in check, for death gathered many before they grew up. Now most parents have only two or three children, and their belief that what sorts of persons their children will become depends so greatly on how they are brought up has made parenthood a very self-conscious activity.

The emphasis on improving the children's opportunities has contributed to the child-centered home, which has been or, perhaps, had been considered one of the outstanding characteristics of twentieth-century America. The term properly implies a home in which the ultimate welfare of the children takes precedence over the convenience and comforts of the parents. The child-centered home, however, becomes a travesty when the wishes and whims of the children dominate the home; or when parents fear to carry out the parental functions of delimiting and guiding their children's behavior. Teachings and misunderstandings of teachings concerning dangers that arise from frustrating a child's self-expression or "instinctual drives" serve to suppress proper parental functioning. The insecurity thus engendered in parents often offsets the potential advantages of their being parents who seek to adjust to their child's needs. Few things are as important to children as parents' self-assurance and security. Self-assurance does not mean rigidity or dogmatism. Perhaps only parents with self-assurance can properly elicit children's opinions and foster children's self-expression before reaching some decision pertaining to them. However, a home in which the parents can find no calm because of their children's

"prerogatives," or in which the mother constantly feels harassed in her efforts to do the right thing without taking her own needs and desires into account, can be detrimental to the children through making the parents unhappy in their lot as parents. The parents require satisfaction if they are to be able to give of themselves to the child; and their happiness as individuals, and as a couple, is just as important as anything they may be able to do for a child or that they can give the child.

The American family may be becoming less child centered. Some young couples are more concerned with continued self-actualization through careers than through children, or with more hedonistic gratifications than those that come from having children depend upon them. Together with such reasons as overpopulation and the loss of faith in the future, they may also feel that their parents gained too little reward for their efforts, and, perhaps, that they are even less certain of how children should be raised than were their parents. It would seem as if in these precarious times parents are less willing to give hostages to the future than a decade or two ago. However, in such matters as elsewhere, trends are cyclic and it is difficult to foresee how the next generation will regard the rewards and disadvantages of parenthood.

Many things are required from persons to be competent parents and from a marriage to be suited for family life. Some of the most salient considerations hare been discussed in the chapter on the family when we considered the requisites of the milieu in which the child develops. If one reviews these desiderata a central theme can be noted. The parents need to be persons in their own right with lives and satisfactions of their own, firmly related in marriage and gaining satisfaction from it, rather than having their individuality and the marriage become subordinated to their being parents. All too commonly child rearing is discussed in terms of techniques—of what parents do for a child and how it should be done; or in terms of the mother's nurturant capacities and emotional stability. Who the parents are and how they relate to one another, and the nature of the family they create are also fundamental influences upon the child. The parents as models for identification, their interaction as an example of mutuality, the importance of the family structure in integrating the children's personalities are among the topics that demand careful scrutiny if we are to learn what produces stable and unstable children. Perhaps, when parents learn that their behavior as individuals and as a married couple is of prime importance in determining their children's personality development, they will be less perplexed about how to raise children and in a better position to raise happy and stable children.

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Notes

1 Many aspects of parenthood have been discussed elsewhere in this book. The requisites that a couple must fill to provide a family proper for raising reasonably well-integrated children have been presented in Chapter 2; some of the changes that take place in the wife when she becomes a mother in Chapter 4. The parental tasks of coping with the child's changing needs have formed a major portion of the chapters on infancy through adolescence. This chapter does not attempt to repeat such material. It is concerned with how the transition to parenthood influences the personality of the parent.

2 We are, in this chapter, concerned primarily with the effects of parenthood on young adults when they become parents after achieving fairly firm integrations as adults and marry. Many young unmarried adolescents also become parents, but many if not most of these hand over much of the parenting to others. There are also many immature married adolescent parents who are still too preoccupied with their peer groups and their own pleasures to be parental, and some whose marriages are too chaotic to provide a setting in which they can be very parental.

3 Although the pill and intrauterine device are extremely effective contraceptive methods, studies in a family planning clinic clearly show that many women become depressed or anxious on virtually "fool-proof" contraception. Many women feel that intercourse makes no sense if they cannot conceive, and lose their sexual desire. Some women never feel as well and as satisfied with life as when pregnant. Being fertile not only raises their self-esteem but also increases the respect and attention they receive from their husbands. Women who crave to have "something alive inside" of them are unlikely to adhere to contraception even if they know that they cannot properly care for another child for reasons of health or finances. Some women also feel guilty about having sex without the risk of pregnancy; or feel it wrong to fool around with nature; or feel that they are not cleaned out properly because their menses are scanty when on the pill; or fear they are being unfair to their husbands who will not be able to impregnate them, etc. It becomes clear that many deeply held wishes and needs to become pregnant can interfere with rational decisions about fertility control (R. Lidz et al., 1976).

4 Even though a woman's desires to have a child are firm and decisive, they are often mixed with concerns, some conscious and many unconscious. Some are residual from early childhood fantasies about oral impregnation, fears of the baby's growing as a parasite in the stomach, fears of being mutilated when the baby is delivered, etc. Some derive from her having observed the martyr-like suffering of her pregnant mother, or from listening to old wives' tales from her grandmother or from not so old wives of her own generation.

5 Some of the earliest Greek myths concern this cycle of fathers seeking to be rid of their sons, and indicate impulsions or wishes that are subject to the strongest taboos. The myths serve as reminders of the hideous penalties that follow infractions of the taboo. Uranus, the primeval Greek deity, having married his mother, Earth, banished his sons, the Titans, to Tartarus, but the youngest, Kronos, aided by his mother Gaia, eventually castrated Uranus. Kronos ate his first two sons, but the third, Zeus, saved by his mother Rhea, eventually overthrew him and started the era of the Olympian gods. 'The legend of the accursed House of Tantalus which eventually led to Agamemnon's death and then to the slaying of Aegisthis and Clytemnestra by Orestes who became mad after the matricide, started when Tantalus fed one of his children to the Gods. The myth of Oedipus also unfolds from the same theme. Laius in seeking to save himself from the prophecy that his infant son would grow up and slay him, ordered the infant Oedipus exposed on a mountain side. Such fears and antagonisms can perpetuate themselves from generation to generation, and removing such dangers to family life required the emergence of myths that emphasized the penalties—the myths serving as something akin to a cultural superego.

6 Even when the infant is given for adoption, the existence of the child and concerns over what has happened to the child usually continue to haunt the parents.

7 Even though many parents have had little, if any, training, experience, or education in the care of infants and children, they are supposed to be competent—perhaps through reading a book. The mother's self-esteem, in particular, as well as the baby's future, rests heavily on their child-rearing capabilities. We have in earlier chapters noted various ways in which help can be provided to the parents.

8 A situation which can lead to a mother's phobia that she might hurt or kill the child if left alone with it—and, at times, to child abuse or infanticide.