EFFECTS OF CHILDREN ON THEIR PARENTS: PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

By

Beverly T. Purrington

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology

1980

ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF CHILDREN ON THEIR PARENTS:
PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

By

Beverly T. Purrington

Social scientists have traditionally assumed that socialization is a process that flows from parent to child and so have sought to understand the contributions of parental practices and personalities to the development of children. This point of view is reflected in research in socialization, in the family, and in education. There is, however, increasing awareness that socialization may be a reciprocal influence process in which strong influences may flow in the opposite direction as well. The study of these reciprocal processes may enlarge our understanding of both the family and the socialization process.

This study focuses on parents' perceptions of the effect of their children on the parents' own growth and development. In-depth interviews with parents of preschoolers were conducted to generate grounded substantive theory concerning the kinds of influence processes that parents perceive themselves to have experienced. Results indicate that middle class parents do perceive significant influences from their children.

The analysis begins with the observation that parenthood provides (indeed requires) participation in situations that adults without children can generally avoid. The non-elective nature of parents' participation in such situations results in a change process quite different from that usually considered typical of change in adult life. The

general situations that children provide for parents fall into three broad categories. First, as a parent one is exposed to being around a naive member of society who is both like one once was and becoming like one is now. In this sense, being a parent involves having access to the world of childhood, access to memories, and a chance to see close-up mirrors of the self. Second, being responsible for the care and protection of a child both enlarges the range of permissible and required emotions, and also requires parents to take concrete stands on a wide variety of issues. Third, parents are held responsible for the growth of children and for producing an "acceptable child" (Ruddick, 1980). As teachers, parents decide what's worth teaching; they provide a setting and a cast of characters; they try to set a good example; and they are faced with explaining things to, and answering the questions of, a naive member of the society. This process changes the teacher as well as the taught.

My research suggests that models which posit large differences in the socialization of adults as compared to children are not applicable to the special case of the socialization of parents by their children. In particular, several common assumptions seem unwarranted, at least in this type of adult socialization. The interviews with parents contradicted the following assumptions: that adult socialization tends to focus on behavior and knowledge rather than on values and motivation; that it is specific rather than general; that it rarely involves core identity issues; and that it takes place in situations of low power differential and low affectivity which adults can leave with relative

freedom. In many ways, the socialization of parents by their children has much more in common with processes considered typical of childhood than adulthood.

Dedicated to my parents

Ruth Elizabeth Turner
and
David Hall Turner

and my children

Teal Purrington
and
Colin Purrington

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks go to my doctoral guidance committee. Marilyn Aronoff provided spirited encouragement and critical suggestions when I was uncertain or discouraged. Jim McKee's human concern and attention to social problems were an inspiration for me from my earliest days in graduate school. Bill Ewens gave me the room and the criticism I needed to learn to be a teacher. Finally, Barrie Thorne, as my chairperson and friend, encouraged me to tackle a project that had no easy answers. She was a tireless editor, and provided unflagging support and encouragement over the four-year period of this research.

I had the benefit of help from many people outside the field of sociology. My selection of a topic was crystallized during discussions with Clark Moustakas (of the Merrill Palmer Institute) who encouraged me to think about the questions that really mattered to me and Richard Burleigh (former head of the Mechanical Engineering Division of the Lawrence-Berkeley Laboratory) who talked with me about how his own life had been irrevocably altered by being the father of articulate teenagers. Ruth Danon and Joel Aronoff read early drafts and provided helpful suggestions. Georgia Brown offered a critique from the perspective of a clinical psychologist. Imogene Bowers taught me to take myself seriously and lightly at the same time. Her encouragement and advice throughout the early parts of the project were invaluable. Richard White, my closest friend and toughest critic, shares much of the credit

for the final completion of this project. Scholarships from the P.E.O. and the Mildred B. Erikson Fund provided financial support for one semester.

My children, Teal and Colin, read early drafts, left poems of encouragement by my typewriter at night, and ate hastily prepared meals (though not without complaining, and reminding me of the proper role of mothers). They gave me a sense of what the process I was describing looked like to young teenagers. In addition, they helped me play when I was too absorbed in my work, reminded me about what's important, and provided the initial insights and experiences that led me to write a dissertation on this topic in the first place.

Many thanks go to the 70 parents I interviewd. Their candor, insight, enthusiasm, and generous cooperation reaffirmed my commitment to the use of qualitative data such as this in generating theory. They told me things I would never have predicted, let me hold their babies, and gave me wine and ice cream. They shared with me very personal insights about being a parent and talked frankly about the misgivings many of them had about social science as means of getting at the truth. In many ways, those parents will be the best judges of the success of this venture.

Marilyn Louval, executive secretary of the Michigan State University Sociology Department, has provided encouragement and invaluable assistance over the last ten years. Elaine Hensley, secretary of the Deparment of Sociology/Anthropology at Denison University, typed portions of an early draft and made it possible for me to work without interruptions Tuesday mornings--no minor accomplishment in a small

liberal arts college. To Lois Pierson, I am especially grateful for making the last phases of the process go smoothly. Her patience and accuracy, coupled with her interest in the content of the manuscript made the last few days of work more enjoyable for me than they would have been otherwise.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

PART I

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND THE FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Socialization has traditionally referred to a process that flows downward: from the older to the younger, from the more powerful to the less powerful--in sum, a process by which the initiated introduce the uninitiated to the rules of the game. Further, many theories of socialization suggest a purposeful process and presuppose a relatively predetermined end product. This point of view is reflected in research on socialization processes in general, in the family, and in education. In research on the family, social scientists have assumed that socialization is a process that flows from parent to child and so have sought to understand the effects of parental personalities and practices on the development of children. Likewise, in educational research, the focus has been on the effects of teachers on their students. Research in the last twenty years shows an increasing awareness that socialization may be a reciprocal process in which strong influences may also flow in the opposite direction. Contemporary analysis focuses on reciprocal interaction patterns and recognizes that the adult as well as the child, the teacher as well as the student, and the therapist as well as the client are simultaneously socializing and being socialized.

In the field of family research the question of reciprocal processes has been addressed primarily in studies of mother/infant interaction. A number of studies have sought to demonstrate the multiple

ways in which infants shape the caretaking behavior they receive. In addition, researchers have studied the contributions of children to marital satisfaction and to the mental health of their parents. Psychoanalytic theory has long cited both the positive and the difficult psychic consequences of parenthood. While such studies do enlarge our understanding of reciprocal influence processes, each has limitations. The focus is usually upon neonates; on clinical populations rather than on random samples; and on narrow sorts of behavioral changes.

The present study explores adult perceptions of the ways they as parents have been influenced by their own children. I interviewed 70 parents (most of them selected from day care and nursery school families) in order to generate grounded substantive theory about parental perceptions of the influence of children on adults. This study, by focusing on parents' perceptions, uncovered effects little treated in previous studies which have tended to rely on categories of influence selected a priori by the researcher. This approach provides the basis for developing a more gounded theory of the everyday experience of parenting in contrast to exaggerated ideological or sentimentalized portrayals of "parenthood-as-bliss" versus "parenthood-as-hell." Non-clinical populations of parents were interviewed, which strengthens the generalizability of the results.

The interviews focused on the ways parents felt their own growth and development had been influenced by their children. The results indicate that middle class parents do perceive significant influences from their children--influences that fall into two broad, complementary categories: first, parents felt that having children necessitated commitment and decision making and made them feel more "adult," and second,

children allowed parents to be more childlike through legitimizing more open experience and precipitating more heightened emotional response. For analytic purposes, I have framed the interview data in such a way as to illuminate and highlight those aspects of the socialization of parents by their children that are most unlike other kinds of adult socialization. Thus the chapters that follow show how the socialization of parents by their children differs from both socialization during childhood and from other kinds of adult socialization.

The analysis begins with the observation that parenthood provides (indeed requires) participation in situations that adults without children can generally avoid. It is the situations in which parents find themselves because of their children, rather than background variables or their personality characteristics, that forms the core of my analysis. The non-elective nature of parents' participation in such situations results in a change process quite different from that usually considered typical of change in adult life. The general situations that children provide for parents fall into two broad categories. First, as a parent one is exposed to being around a naive member of society who is both like one once was and becoming like one is now. Second, as a parent one is both responsible for the care of a dependent member of society and expected to act as a teacher for that member--fostering her or his growth and acceptability (Ruddick, 1980). This framework provides the basis for the organization of the substantive chapters.

Part I provides the framework of the study and outlines the methodological approach.

Part II explores the effects on parents of simply being around a naive member of society on a day-to-day basis. It focuses on the ways in which being around a child legitimizes access to the world of childhood, both by allowing parents to do things adults usually don't (and normatively shouldn't) do, and by allowing parents to remember their own past as they watch their children grow. Such access allows parents to revisit earlier developmental stages and to resolve in new ways the crises first encountered in their own childhoods. In addition, by providing access to the trans-schematic perceptions characteristic of children, such experiences may contribute to creativity in adults. This chapter also looks at the effects on parents of seeing themselves reflected in their children. Children remind parents of the child they once were in addition to providing reflections of themselves now. Both processes allow parents to see themselves in a new light.

Part III examines ways in which being responsible for the care and protection of a child (what Sara Ruddick [1980] refers to as the interest in preserving the child) also changes parents. First it explores parental perceptions of the contributions of children to changes in both the kinds and intensity of emotional experience. Children place adults in situations where the range of permissible and required emotions is enlarged, their intensity increased, and one's ability to understand them decreased. Thus parents are exposed to a range of powerful emotions in a way quite different from the exposure of adults without children. Children, by their actions as well as by their very existence, place adults in situations where they must make decisions or take action. Such decisions may be practical ones (e.g. place of residence, diet) or moral and philosophical ones (e.g. What is the

meaning of life? How does one explain death to a three-year-old?).

Part IV concerns the effects on parents of serving as teachers for their children. Parents are held responsible for shaping the growth of children and for producing an acceptable child (Ruddick, 1980). As teachers, parents decide what's worth teaching; they provide a setting and a cast of characters; they usually seek to set a good example; and they are faced with explaining things to, and answering the questions of a naive member of the society. This process changes the teacher as well as the taught.

Part V summarizes the findings and explores their implications.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Socialization

Certain problems arise in using the concept of socialization as a research framework. Clausen (1968) alerts us to several of these problems: Is all learning socialization? Must the process be purposive to be considered socialization? Are unwitting influences also socialization? No clear agreement exists on the answers to such questions, as any survey of the socialization literature will affirm. My intention here is to offer some examples of current and historical usages of the notion of socialization and to speculate on its usefulness for understanding the effects of children on their parents.[1]

Although the subject of socialization captured the interest of the earliest philosophers, social scientists began to use the term only in the 1920's. Before that time social scientists used a different vocabulary to discuss similar ideas. C. H. Cooley, a close observer of his own children, was centrally concerned with the social nature of humans. "Self and society," he writes (1925; 1959: 5) "are twin-born, we know one as immediately as we know the other, and the notion of a separate and independent ego is an illusion." Cooley's interest in how the self was shaped did not prevent him from recognizing the reciprocal nature

---

[1] For detailed reviews of the literature see Goslin (1969), Clausen (1968), Aberle (1961), and Singer (1961).

of all interaction. In writing about institutions he observed:

> The individual is always cause as well as effect of the institution: he receives the impress of the state whose traditions have enveloped him from childhood, but at the same time impresses his own character, formed by other forces as well as this, upon the state, which thus in him and others undergoes change. (1925; 1959: 314)

The concerns of W. I. Thomas were specifically related to the process of socialization. G. H. Mead, as the formulator of symbolic interactionism, drew attention to the importance of language and meanings in the development of the self. Clausen (1969) also notes that both early studies of delinquency and research on "culture and personality" presumed a socialization framework but used a different vocabulary. During the latter part of the 1920's, social scientists began to use the term more frequently and to agree somewhat on its meaning.

Yet, despite increasing agreement on the definition of socialization, conflicting usages remain today. DiRenzo (1977: 263) writes:

> Whatever its original denotation, it seems quite clear from a survey of the current literature that this term has not had the fortune of conceptual refinement. Indeed, such an expectation has become all the more acute since the problem of conceptual ambiguity has been exacerbated in that "socialization" has assumed an ever-expanding, generic meaning, and its fundamental reference seems to be any aspect of human learning or human development. The use of the term "socialization" as a catch-all construct can be seen quite dramatically in the rather comprehensive reviews of the field that have appeared in recently published handbooks . . . . one need not elaborate on the obstacles that this confusing kind of analytical situation presents for the development of sociological theory on socialization.

Social scientists have often noted the problems posed by the broad inclusiveness of the term "socialization." They have less often proposed useful solutions. DiRenzo (1977: 267) suggests that "[w]hile, on the one hand, the distinct subprocesses of socialization (humanization) need to be kept separate, we need at the same time to adopt a more synthetic

perspective. What is required, therefore, are resolute efforts toward the theoretical integration of these concepts and distinctive processes, and such attempts demand a much more complex perspective than has been characteristic of sociological analysis for the most part.[2]

Yet, despite DiRenzo's suggestions there is little agreement among social scientists (or even among sociologists) regarding usage of the term "socialization." Many definitions exist and individual researchers pick and choose the ones that suit their own purposes. By some definitions, the influence of children on their parents would not qualify as socialization. By others it clearly does.

If by "socialization" we mean the inculcation of a new generation into the culture, the concept may be inappropriate for use in understanding the effects of children on parents. To a large degree, the concept of socialization was developed in the context of a stable culture which was to be learned by newcomers. Yet, the effects of children on their parents often result in cultural discontinuities rather than in stability. Harper (1975), for example, observes that both human and nonhuman offspring contribute to change in their parents: to the acquisition of new habits, to the exploitation of new niches and (in the case

---

[2]DiRenzo (1977: 265) finds the use of "the term 'humanization' rather than 'socialization' as a more appropriately generic label for the several process of social learning and development. Not only is this new term conceptually convenient in heuristic respects, but also it is more appropriate for revealing the commonality of the several specific processes that are the respective concerns of the individual disciplines. The fundamental problem, nevertheless, is not resolved. It still remains to specify the complex nature of this process of humanization or socialization and to delimit its analytical and empirical components for any adequate understanding of both the simplicity and the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation . . . . The generic process of humanization is comprised of at least four distinct, sometimes separate, subprocesses . . . maturation, culturation, socialization, and personality development."

of humans) to the adoption of new attitudes. If "socialization is the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained" (Clausen, 1968: 5), then a large part of the influence of children on their parents cannot be considered socialization at all.

Yet even definitions which emphasize cultural continuity over generations might be stretched to include child effects on parents. For example, my own study points to ways that children do have conservative effects on their parents. In the process of setting a good example for their children, parents tend to become more conventional in their own behavior.

Other definitions of socialization, especially those used by sociologists, tend to emphasize role preparation as central to the process. Clausen (1968: 7) whose view is typical, defines socialization as being concerned with,

> Those kinds of social learning that lead the individual to acquire the personal and group loyalties, the knowledge, skills, feelings, and desires that are regarded as appropriate to a person of his age, sex, and particular social status, especially as those have relevance for adult role performance. (emphasis mine)

To a certain degree, children do train their parents for adult role performance. Rheingold emphasizes the socializing nature of the human infant, which "fashions caretakers into parents." The infant, she writes,

> Socializes them . . . teaches them to assume the role of parents . . . evokes in them the disposition to behave as society expects parents to behave . . . helps them acquire the skill and knowledge that enable them to become effective members of a family and of the community, thus fulfilling their roles as protectors and educators of the young. (1969: 783)

Yet not all of the effects of children on their parents fall into the realm of preparation for adult role performance. For example, when

children provide access to the world of childhood or activate powerful emotions in their parents, they are not precipitating or teaching role performance per se, although these experiences may have bearing on the performance of roles. Are we to conclude that such influences are not socialization?

The answer to this question is complicated by the existence of still broader definitions of socialization which encompass virtually all influence processes. For example, DiRenzo (1977: 263) observes that socialization's "fundamental reference seems to be any aspect of human learning or human development." Using this definition, one would have to conclude that all child effects are socialization.

The questions raised at the outset of this chapter remain: Is all influence socialization? Is all learning socialization? Must the process be purposive in order to be considered socialization? The bulk of the literature on the effects of children on their parents takes no stand on whether such processes are usefully understood within the framework of socialization. Others who have written about child influences on adults (Rheingold, 1969, is an example) clearly opt for a socialization framework. More general works on socialization (e.g. Stollak, 1978) increasingly contain a proviso noting the importance of the effects of children on their parents and call for research in this area. Such works do little to suggest how this fits into a more general framework of socialization and, in fact, rarely elaborate at all on the issue.

My own view is that a socialization framework is applicable primarily to understanding ways in which children induct their parents into the role of caregivers. In addition, the notion of socialization

may be useful in highlighting the particular ways in which the socialization of children by their parents differs from other kinds of adult socialization (see Chapter Nine for an elaboration). Beyond this, socialization frameworks (especially to the extent that they emphasize preparation for role performance and deliberate intent) seem ill-suited to understanding most of the sorts of influences parents perceive as coming from their children. The following review of the literature, therefore, does not deal primarily with socialization theory since such a conceptualization applies only to a small part of the influence process I have studied.

The Uni-Directional Emphasis in Socialization Research and Theory

Socialization is often characterized as a one-way process, going always in the same direction: from the top-down, from the more powerful to the less powerful, from the older to the younger. While some theories do stress an interactive approach to the process, or do look at varieties of adult socialization, there has been little explicit attention to socialization that flows in the opposite direction: from down-up, from the less powerful to the more powerful, from the student to the teacher or from the child to the parent. This skewed emphasis persists not only in the general area of socialization but also in research and theorizing on the family and the schools. Parents and teachers are held responsible for the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development of the child--the assumption being that children are almost infinitely plastic. No such assumption is generally made about adults[3] and the influence of children on their parents and

---

[3]DiRenzo (1977: 271), in his review of socialization and personality research notes that: "There has been, up to very recent times,

teachers is mentioned, if at all, only in passing.

Origins of the Skewed Emphasis

Curiously, even the authors who question the uni-directionality of research have written little on reasons for its origin or perpetuation. Some find its origins in certain theories of child development, but fail to ask more probing questions about why such theories recurringly make the assumption that socialization flows one way. For example, Berberich (1971: 92), a behaviorist, ascribes this bias to the influence of:

> Two prominent contemporary theories of child development . . . Learning Theory and Freudian Theory . . . which emphasize the role of adults as primary socializing agents for the child and view infancy and early childhood as critical periods in which the basic structures of the child's emotional, social and intellectural behavior are acquired.

The others (Cf. Bell, 1968; and Korner, 1965) offer some variation of an analysis which emphasizes differences of power. In at least three ways, the less powerful and the younger are easier to study than the older and more powerful. First, powerful persons are more likely to have a monopoly on the skills and resources necessary for studying and publishing. Infants, children, and the poor--all have fewer such resources and skills. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, it has been considered "unseemly" for the powerless to interview the powerful, to theorize about them, or to write about them. Dexter (1970: 135), in discussing the difficulty of getting true information from elites, cites

---

comparatively little work on 'adult socialization.' Indeed, not only in the field of sociology, but in psychology, psychiatry, and other related fields, there has been a widespread neglect of human development and/or sociopsychological change in the period of life after the age of roughly 25. Social scientists frequently assume that human development goes on to about age 6, or even 18, and that then there is a long plateau until about 60 or 65, when aging begins."

Manning's problems in interviewing physicians who took a position of "evasiveness and implausibility, free to ignore the demands of the questioner who is stepping out of his deference role" (Manning, 1967: 307). The ability to control leakage of information about the self is often associated with positions of power. Behind this is a recognition that knowledge (especially about another person's life) is power (e.g. see Nancy Henley, 1977: 197). Finally, those who are younger or less powerful are generally unable to resist being studied. They are often part of captive populations in nurseries, schools, factories, or jails, where observation and control are relatively simple. In summary, it is easier to study infants and children (and the powerless in general)--they are accessible and compliant. Furthermore, it is easier to control for significant variables when dealing with children, something that is more difficult with adults who have long personal histories.

On another level, some researchers (Korner, 1965; Bell, 1968) suggest that the emphasis on how parents and teachers influence children was part of a more general emphasis on the improvability of the individual and constituted an attack on Old World emphases on hereditary factors as determinants of ability, behavior and privilege. Korner (1965: 48) proposes that this tendency in the U.S. to focus on the role of the parent as crucial in the development of the child:

> has deep roots in our cultural heritage . . . . The extensive migration to this country was motivated by the wish to leave behind all the Old World's inequalities of class and birth . . . . The idea that there might be basic genetic and biological differences among people has to be rejected as too close to Old World values, too close to being undemocratic and unequalitarian.

Similarly, Bell (1968: 81) argues:

> It is not too surprising to find that most research on parent-child interaction has been directed to the question of effects of parents on children. The historian Palmer (1964) maintains that our political and social philosophy emerged in a period when there were many revolutionary or protorevolutionary movements ranging from the Carolinas to Sweden, movements directed not just against monarchical abolutism but against all constituted bodies such as parliaments, councils, assemblies, and majistracies. These institutions tended to be hereditary, either in theory or through firmly established practice . . . Although scientific research on parents and children is a fairly recent phenomenon, it still shows the primary influence of this broad social philosophy by emphasizing parents and educational developments as determinants of human development.

Thus parental and educational influences were seen to have important equalizing functions and this efficacy was consequently held as evidence of the supremacy of nurture over nature. Ironically, this trend in research, in its attempts to underscore the malleability of the child, ignored to a large extent the possibility that adults too are more malleable than we may have imagined.[4]

Reasons for the Shift Toward a More Balanced Emphasis

Whatever the historical reasons for the tendency to overlook the influence of the young on the old or the powerless on the more powerful, this emphasis has persisted with few exceptions.[5] Even by the early

---

[4]At the same time, immigration did result in situations where foreign-born parents were clearly in a position to learn from their American-born children. Margaret Mead discusses this in Culture and Commitment (1970).

[5]Books such as Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (1957) Patterns of Child Rearing, did point to the existence of constitutional differences in children which affect adult behavior. Bell (1968: 82), in discussing that book, concludes that "the model of a uni-directional effect from the parent to child is overdrawn, a fiction of convenience rather than belief." In addition, studies of psychic disturbances related to pregnancy and childbirth constituted the great majority of early writings on the effects of children on parents (see the section on mental health).

1970's, the existing literature on the effects of children on their parents was slim. For example, Berberich (1971: 92) was "unable to find a single study in which a child's behavior had been systematically manipulated so that its effects on an adult could be specified." Those studies he could find share certain drawbacks:

> First many of them are of a correlational design. Therefore, the direction of influence (adult on child or child on adult) cannot be specified. Second, the measures used are often far removed from the behavior which is inferred . . . . Third, many investigations have dealt with broad, global variables. This has made it difficult to specify just what aspect of a particular independent variable contributed to the changes in the dependent variable (1971: 92).

In my own search of the literature, I found that over 90 percent of the literature on infant and child effects on parents (in humans) was published after 1965.

Why a shift occurred at that particular point in history is an interesting question which again (as in the reasons for the original bias) only a few of the writers have explored. Since this is only indirectly discussed in the literature on offspring effects or socialization (with the exception of Harper, 1975; Bell, 1968; and Korner, 1965), this section will of necessity be speculative and draw on writings outside the immediate field. Nine of the most likely explanations for this shift will be briefly outlined below.

1. Discordant Data. One of the more obvious reasons for the relatively sudden, more widespread awareness of children's effects on parents (although it fails to explain its occurrence at this particular point in history) is that a good deal of the socialization research data is discordant with a simple parent-effect model (Bell, 1968). For one thing, there is evidence that parents, including foster parents,

react differently to different children, as Bell (1968: 83) notes in the following discussion:

> Characteristics of the infants appeared to have evoked very different behavior in this foster mother and in other members of her family . . . in a parent-effect model, it is easy to explain differences between the behavior of two parents with the same child, but awkward to accommodate a difference in the behavior of one parent toward two children. The latter difficulty is due to the fact that the parent-effect model assumes a fixed and invariantly applied repertoire. The usual method of explaining differences in behavior of a parent with different children is to postulate effects associated with ordinal position or sex of siblings. The reports on infants in foster homes could not be explained this way.

Bell also cites work by others supporting

> Levy's contention that specific maternal behavior could be accounted for more by the infant's behavior than by the mother's general "maternal attitude" . . . . (1968: 83).

Similarly, Rheingold (1966: 12-13) notes that despite their helplessness, human infants manage to command an inordinate amount of attention in any human group. Thus, the simple fact that the data is discordant with a parent-effect model may account for the shift in theories regarding direction of effects.

2. Studies of Animal Behavior. The shortcomings of the parent-effect model became clear in studies of animal behavior long before they were apparent in studies of human behavior.[6]

> . . . students of animal behavior have been much more aware of offspring effects on parents than investigators of human parent-child interaction; this more comprehensive view of parent-offspring interaction may be a simple consequence of availability; all phases of development are accessible to direct observation and manipulation. It is also possible that our political and social philosophy has limited scientific outlook at the human more than the animal level. The

---

[6]Cf. Rheingold (1963) for a review of the literature and Lewis (1974) for additional bibliographies.

> animal mother is not seen as an agent of socialization, nor her offspring as a tabula rasa (Bell, 1968: 84).

Harper (1975: 784) too, points to the influence of animal studies on this shift noting that the neglect of the effects of human offspring on their parents is surprising for two reasons:

> First, from an evolutionary perspective, the adaptations of parent and child must be mutual (Mead, 1965) . . . . Second, ample evidence has been provided by comparative psychology for the reciprocity of parent-offspring stimulation in other mammals (Schneirla and Rosenblatt, 1961; Scott, 1967). Yet despite the fact that it has been over 20 years since Erikson wrote 'a family brings up a baby only by being brought up by him,' only a few attempts have been made to summarize the ways in which the human child affects his parents.

Beach and Jaynes (1956) identified classes of stimuli which control parent behavior in rats. "Visual, olfactory, tactile, thermal, and movement cues from rat pups were shown to be capable of inducing maternal retrieving, being effective individually and in combination" (Bell, 1968: 85). Studies by Noirot (1965) and Ressler (1962) confirm this direction of influence in mice. Rheingold showed that infant rhesus monkeys induce lactation in mothers. Other studies of monkeys, apes and chimpanzees point to the importance of infant characteristics and behavior in influencing the adult members of the group. The progression of Harry Harlow's work is of special interest here, particularly his revision of his earlier theories of the effects of isolation during infancy. His earlier work pointed to a "critical period for socialization," something for which his later work fails to find support.[7] If the results of studies of primate behavior can be generalized to an

---

[7] See Novak and Harlow "Social Recovery of Monkeys Isolated for the First Year of Life: 1. Rehabilitation and Therapy." In Developmental Psychology, 1975, Volume II, No. 4, pp. 453 ff.

analysis of human behavior, then our focus on the crucial importance of the adult's effects on the infant is out of proportion to its actual influence, making further inquiry into the actual nature of that relationship a priority item.

3. Studies of Evolution. One subarea of studies of animal behavior concerns the contribution of the young to the adaptive evolution of the species. Both Harper (1970) and Bruner (1972) discuss the implications for human populations, yet neither cites the work of the other, indicating that such notions were apparently "in the air" in the late 1960's, with a number of persons independently exploring the same ideas.

4. Studies in Psychology. Within the field of psychology various trends of the last twenty years seemed to favor the emergence of a focus on the child as a socializer. Rheingold (1969: 780) notes that "the emphasis in psychology today falls more on the behaving organism and less on the impressed organism, more on learning as the result of the organism's own action on the environment and less on learning as the action of the environment on him." Clinical psychoanalytic work too may have opened doors to revising notions about the direction of effect in two ways: by noting the implications of offspring effects for both the offspring themselves and for their parents. The striking effect (mostly negative) that parenthood could have on adults was noted by clinicians and explored by theorists.[8] In some cases the discovery of child effects on the adult emerges as a byproduct of studying the child itself, thus Korner (1965: 47) notes that the

> search for factors in the child that may jeopardize a mother's capacity to relate to him was largely stimulated

---

[8]See Anthony and Benedek (1970).

> by work with child-psychoses and infantile autism. From this concern with extreme deviations has sprung an interest in the individual differences among normal children. Research findings clearly demonstrate that individual differences in disposition and temperament do exist among newborn babies, but there is a lag in incorporating this fact in child-rearing practices.

5. Population Growth. Increasing interest in curbing the rate of population growth may also have contributed to the shift toward looking at how children influence parents, and has resulted in studies of the perceived costs and rewards of children[9] (Arnold, 1976).

6. Increasing Emphasis on the Marital Relationship. The last 15 years have evidenced increasing interest in the study of the family in general and the marital relationship in particular.[10] One focus of that research was the effects of children on a marriage as seen in the marital satisfaction literature as well as in studies of the "transition to parenthood."[11]

7. Antinatalist Literature. Related to 5 and 6, yet in some ways independent, are the contributions of the antinatalist literature (e.g. Peck, 1974), celebrating non-parenthood. Aimed at freeing people from the burden of enforced parenthood, this literature looks at alternatives and attempts to demolish stereotypes of non-parents as selfish, lonely unfortunates. In the process, this approach calls attention to effects (largely negative in this case) of children on parents. That such a

---

[9] See also Lamanna and Kurtz (1979).

[10] Andre Burgiere suggests we might understand the increased attention to the history of the family by noting that history is best able to deal with institutions that are breaking down (Carnuchan, n.d.: 4).

[11] Cf. Rossi (1968), LeMasters (1957), Hobbs (1965, 1968), Jacoby (1969).

movement should occur at this point in time is not surprising. The last 15 years mark the first time in history when not having children was a viable alternative. Effective (though not necessarily safe) birth control has become more widely available, coupled with acceptance of engaging careers for women and increased awareness of the need to limit population. Parents now feel they have more choice about having or not having children. The success of the book by Fabe and Wikler (1979) arises partly from parents' need for information on the effects of children on adults.

8. Increasing Emphasis on Children. At the same time, the increasing focus on children, evident in psychology and popular thinking may have simultaneously redirected attention to parents. Korner (1965) points to the need to reconsider theories which hold parents totally responsible for the growth and development of their children. Such theories result in overlooking the child "as a separate organism with his own propensities and vulnerabilities" (Korner, 1965: 47). In addition, such theories burden parents with a load of guilt that is hardly conducive to good parenting (Korner, 1965: 47-48).[12]

9. Increasing Emphasis on Development Over the Entire Life Cycle. Finally, the shift toward looking at the effects of infants and children on adults grows out of increasing attention to human growth and development throughout the life cycle with attention to stages of adult life. Beginning with Erikson and reaching popular audiences with the

---

[12]Cf. Edmund Bergler Parents, Not Guilty of Their Children's Neuroses (1964), and Skolnick (1978).

publication of Passages by Sheehy in 1977,[13] this focus has unmasked naive pictures of adulthood as a period of unchanging stability. This new emphasis may be due to increased longevity for men and women, expansion of leisure time, and the rapidity of change to which 20th century adults must adapt. Whatever its origins, this focus has led to an interest in sources of change in adult life. One of these sources is the influence of children.

More Recent Studies Which Do Look at the Influence of Children on Adults

In the last twenty years, a number of studies have appeared which focus on the long-neglected area of offspring effect on adults in human and nonhuman species. Many of these are outside the main stream of socialization literature. These pioneering studies provide rich grounds for beginning to take a look at the dynamics of a relationship long pictured as a one-way street,[14] and for undoing the consequent over-emphasis on the educative functions of parents. Harper (1975) suggests that the literature on children's influences on parents falls into three categories:

1. The effects of infants and children on the caregiving behavior of adults--including here both the motivations for, and the skills of, caregiving.

---

[13]Cf. also Levinson The Seasons of a Man's Life, 1978.

[14]DiRenzo (1977: 272) alerts us to another way in which the emphasis of socialization research is "unilateral":

> These kinds of concerns could contribute much to such timely questions as personality dynamics and change during adult life--a question that has become increasingly controversial of late as the heretofore rather widely accepted position of relatively permanent personality formation in childhood seems challenged more and more extensively. Yet, one major shortcoming of much of this work is that the emphasis is grossly unilateral. That is to say, the concern seems to be nearly exclusively with the effects of social situations . . . on the individual and his personality--rather than simultaneously as well on the effects that adult socialization and personality have on middle age and/or work roles and work systems.

2. The effects of infants and children on their parents as persons or as members of a marital dyad.

3. The effects of infants and children on the culture at large, either directly or on their parents as members of that culture.

While there exists literature in all three of the preceding areas, the first has been studied far more than the other three, as shown by the sheer volume of empirical studies, the sophistication of the theorizing, and the extent to which researchers have built on each other's work. Students of animal behavior and child development, and research by clinicians and medical doctors are largely responsible for the work in this first area. Very little of it has been done by sociologists. The bulk of the work in the second area has come from the marital relationship perspective (see LeMasters, 1957; Dyer, 1963; Hobbs, 1965, 1968, 1976, 1977; Jacoby, 1969; Rossi, 1968; and Wylie, 1979), and from life-cycle inquiry (see Brim, 1957 and 1968; Neugarten, 1976; Rosow, 1965; Erikson, 1963; Gould, 1972; Levinson, 1978; and Sheehy, 1977). The third area, the least studied, has been largely confined to theoretical speculation and a few empirical studies concerning animal behavior (see Lewis, 1974; Harper, 1970, 1971, 1975; Bell, 1968 and 1971; and Kawai, 1965), or human adolescence (see Eisenberg, 1970; and Falkman and Irish, 1974).

For ease of presentation, this literature on the contributions of children to the adult growth and development of their parents may be divided into nine categories, each of which will be very briefly discussed.

Transition to Parenthood

Several dozen studies have appeared which examine the degree of

difficulty (or "crisis") experienced by parents making the "transition-to-parenthood." Except in Jacoby's (1969) and Rossi's (1968) review articles (which explore application of small group and role theory), only scant attention has been paid to theoretical issues. Furthermore, partly because of a lack of theoretical sophistication, the results of these studies are inconclusive. Earlier studies report extreme crisis scores (LeMasters, 1957 and Dyer, 1963) while later ones suggest that the transition is made with relative ease (see especially Hobbs, 1965, 1968). Different methodologies and scoring procedures account for some, but by no means all, of the differences in degree of adjustment difficulty reported. Besides, no consensus (even across studies by the same researcher, e.g. those by Hobbs) emerges about the factors associated with varying degrees of difficulty in making the transition to parenthood, except that women report greater degrees of difficulty than do men. Finally, none of these studies gets at long-term or more global (beyond the initial crisis) influences of the child on the parents. Some representative studies of the transition to parenthood include Beauchamp (1968); Bogdanoff (1974); Cowan et al., forthcoming; Cronenwett and Newmark (1974); Dyer (1963); Fein (1976); Hobbs (1965, 1968); Hobbs and Peck (1976); Hobbs and Wimbish (1977); Jacoby (1969, 1970); LeMasters (1957); Meyerowitz and Feldman (1966); Russel (1974); Titus (1976); Tooke (1974); Uhlenberg (1970); Wente and Crockenberg (1976); and Wylie (1979).

Marital Satisfaction

Like the literature on the transition to parenthood, this area is beset with conceptual as well as methodological problems (for summaries of these problems see Hicks and Platt, 1970; Laws, 1971; Burr, 1970; and

Lively, 1969). The findings are inconclusive about the effects of the presence or absence of children or their number and spacing on marital satisfaction (or its equivalents: happiness or adjustment) or stability (usually defined as the absence of divorce). An additional problem is the failure of many studies to report wives' and husbands' scores separately. More generally, the work on marital satisfaction reveals a number of sexist biases (outlines in Laws' 1971 review). Studies representative of this field include Bossard and Boll (1955); Burgess and Cottrell (1939); Burr (1970); Chester (1972); Christensen (1968); Figley (1973); Feldman (1974); Heath et al., (1974); Hurley and Palonen (1967); Luckey (1966); Luckey and Bain (1970); Meyerowitz (1970); Nye et al., (1970); Orden and Bradburn (1969); Pohlman (1968); Renne (1970); Rollins and Feldman (1970); Thornton (1977).

Childlessness

This area includes writings on both the correlates of childlessness and those writings which are explicitly antinatalist. Again, results are often contradictory. More recent studies fail to confirm earlier findings that link childlessness to marital instability or personality problems in the parents. Jessie Bernard (1972), in fact, argues that childless couples are happier, a theme echoed in the work of Peck (1971). Other representative studies include Chester (1972); Gustavus and Henley (1971); Heath et al., (1974); Hollingsworth (1929); Houseknetch (1977); Keifert et al., (1968); Monahan (1955); Movius (1976); Peck and Senderowitz (1974); Pohlman (1970); Popenoe (1936); Rosenblatt et al., (1973); Silka and Kiesler (1977); Silverman and Silverman (1971); Veevers (1973, 1973a).

Loss of a Child

Some recent research (Roman, 1977; Brief, 1977; Keshet, 1978) suggests that after divorce non-custodial parents suffer depression and an acute sense of loss from being deprived of their children. Such studies have generally focused on fathers, since they are the most likely to be the non-custodial parent. There is also research on the effect of the death of a child on parents. By looking at the effects of the loss of a child, one can gain insight into the effects of their presence. Some relevant studies of the loss of children by death include Schiff (1977); Pincus (1974); and Schoenberg et al., (1975).

Parenthood and Mental Health

The work in this area tends to be heavily psychoanalytic and to fall into two broad categories--empirical or theoretical--with little overlap between the two. The empirical work is almost exclusively based on case study data[15] and documents the psychic consequences for parents of pregnancy, delivery and childrearing (see e.g. Freeman, 1951; Hilgard, 1953; Kaplan and Blackman, 1969; Lerner et al., 1967; Melges, 1968; Rettersol, 1968; Tod and Edin, 1964; Towne and Afterman, 1955; Zilborg, 1931). Virtually all of these studies look at negative, rather than positive, consequences of the experience of parenting.[16] In contrast to the detailed empirical evidence for the negative psychic consequences, the

---

[15]One exception to the clinical research tendency is Pugh et al.'s (1963) study of rates of mental disease related to childbearing.

[16]Recently there have been some studies on the positive consequences of parenthood (see e.g. Coley and James, 1976; Cronenwett and Newmark, 1974; and Greenberg, 1974). Unfortunately all these are about men only. There is also literature on prepared childbirth which suggests positive consequences for parents.

literature about the positive psychic consequences of pregnancy, delivery, and childrearing is almost totally theoretical and relatively devoid of concrete data (Anthony and Benedek, 1970; Benedek, 1959; Deutsch, 1945; Jessner et al., 1970). Such writings are general and lack some of the richness and depth of the writings about negative consequences. Both the theoretical and the empirical works grow largely out of the psychoanalytic tradition and provide us with the most sensitive and encompassing approaches to the question of child effects.

The Effects of Offspring on Parents in Nonhuman Species

This literature is important in establishing notions about the reciprocal nature of the parent-offspring relationship (see Rosenblatt et al. 1961; and Schneirla et al., 1963). The bulk of it documents the effects of the young on the caretaking behavior of adults, e.g. in stimulating retrieving and lactation (see Beach and Jaynes, 1956; Rosenblatt, 1967, on rates; Noirot, 1965, and Ressler, 1962 on mice). Some researchers have noted ways that offspring effects go beyond simply affecting the caretaking behavior of adults (see Itani, 1958, on offspring "teaching" adults to eat new foods; Kawai, 1965, on the transmission of sweet potato washing from the younger to the older members of a troup of Japanese macaques; and Harper, 1970, on the role of the young in the adaptive radiation of the species).

The Effects of Human Infants on Parents

Much of this work parallels that in the preceding section, and looks at ways in which infant cues (e.g. smiling) function as releasers for maternal behavior. See Harper (1970, 1972, 1975); Harper and Bell (1977); Bell (1968 and 1971); Lewis (1974); Korner (1965); and Rheingold (1969) for summaries and analysis of these effects.

General Works on Directions of Effects

Both Bell (1968, 1971) and Harper (1970, 1971, and 1975) have written extensively about the need to re-examine the direction of effect in studies of socialization. Harper (1970: 107) concludes "that emphasis on the 'educative' function has led to an underestimation of the role of offspring behavior in mammalian evolution and an exaggeration of the significance of parental tuition in mammalian behavioral development." Bell (1968) has suggested that biological differences in neonates are important determinants of the childrearing techniques used by adults, especially those differences normally attributed to social class membership. Rheingold (1969) proposes that human infants, far from being helpless, are social from the start and socialize their caretakers far more than caretakers socialize infants. Brim (1959: 68) notes that "[p]robably one of the most obvious controlling influences within the family upon the parent has been most neglected . . . . This is the influence of the child upon the parent . . . ." Skolnick (1978: 58) contends that the models used by both behaviorists and Freudians "greatly exaggerate the power of the parent and the passivity of the child." For additional discussions of these issues see Erikson (1950), Korner (1965), Devor (1970), Osofosky (1970), Wrong (1961), and Yarrow et al., (1971).

Life Cycle or Adult Growth and Development

Even in this rapidly growing field of research, there is scant mention of children. What mention there is often lacks grounding in concrete data. Cox (1970) and Gurin et al. (1960) do offer some empirical data on parental perception of the contribution of children to the quality of their lives, but, in neither case is this a major focus of the study. Some important works in this area include Neugarten (1976);

Levinson (1974 and 1978); Gould (1972); Sheehy (1977); and Erikson (1959, 1963, and 1968). A related, though separate, field of inquiry concerns what is usually called "the value of children." Some work in this area does address the concerns of this dissertation (e.g., Arnold, et al., 1976); Espenshade, 1977; Lamannana and Kurtz, 1979; and Hoffman, 1979).

Summary and Implications: The Need for Further Research

While the above literature is extensive, little of it addresses the questions which are guiding the current project. There has been little systematic attempt to document the range of influence of children on adult growth and development in non-clinical populations nor to consider parents' own perceptions. The literature on marital satisfaction and on the transition to parenthood is narrow in scope and often atheoretical, largely confining itself to correlating the presence or absence (or number and spacing) of children with some measure of happiness, stability, or adjustment difficulty. While such literature addresses the questions raised by this study (how children influence adults), it defines the areas of influence too narrowly. Studies in the area of mental health are overwhelmingly based on observation and analysis of pathological cases. The theoretical work on the positive psychic correlates of childbearing suffers from lack of concrete data. The research on human and nonhuman neonates, although rich in empirical data and methodologically sophisticated, contributes little to the understanding of adult growth and development since it focuses almost exclusively on the more narrow question of the influence of offspring on the caretaking behavior of mothers (and, less commonly, fathers). While the adult growth and development (or life cycle) literature comes the closest to dealing with the

issues of this proposed study, those parts of it concerned with the effects of children on parents are largely confined to theoretical speculation devoid of actual empirical data (see especially Erikson, 1963).

What is needed is research that looks specifically at adult development and experience as influenced by children and as seen by parents themselves. Given the strengths and shortcomings of the literature reviewed above, research is needed that will:

1. Use non-clinical populations;
2. Look at ways in which the influence of offspring goes beyond affecting only the caregiving behavior of parents;
3. Avoid narrow definitions of influence and probe the sorts of varied influences that parents themselves report as important, by concentrating on their constructions of the social reality of parenthood; and
4. Elucidate similarities and differences between socialization during and after childhood.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to generate theory on parents' perceptions of the influence of children on adults. My review of the literature led me to believe that hypothesis testing was premature at this point. Thus I decided against selecting hypotheses from some general theory of socialization and attempting to verify their applicability to child influences on parents. Additionally, given the difficulties I observed in other research in this area, I was reluctant to develop an extensive new theory (by logical deduction for example) prior to conducting the interviews. Such an investigation would have resulted in an attempt to make real life fit the categories of my theory, and might have neglected potentially significant aspects of the process as seen by parents.[1] Consequently, I chose what Glaser and Strauss (1967)

---

[1]Glaser and Strauss (1967: 238) discuss these problems:

> A sociologist often develops a theory that embodies, without his realizing it, his own ideals and the values of his occupation and social class, as well as popular views and myths, along with his deliberate efforts at making logical deductions from some formal theory to which he became committed as a graduate student . . . . These witting and unwitting strategies typically result in theories so divorced from the everyday realities of substantive areas that one does not quite know how to apply them, where they fit the data of the substantive area, or what the propositions mean in relation to the diverse problems of the area.

They further note (1967: 2) that what is often taken as grounded theory generation is actually grounded modifying of theory:

describe as "the constant comparative method" of deriving grounded theory, using the data to develop a theory closely related to the phenomena studied.

Although the use of an open-ended format may involve certain difficulties,[2] I chose it for several reasons. First, interviews are the best way to get at people's understanding of their own behavior, or their definitions of the situation. I was interested in elucidating parents' perceptions of the influence which their children had had on them, not in determining whether or not the influences had actually

---

> Merton never reached the notion of the discovery of grounded theory in discussing the 'theoretic functions of research.' The closest he came was with 'serendipity': that is, an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic finding gives rise to a new hypothesis. This concept does not catch the idea of purposefully discovering theory through social research. It puts the discovery of a single hypothesis on a surprise basis. Merton was preoccupied with how verifications through research feed back into and modify theory, thus, he was concerned with grounded modifying of theory, not grounded generation of theory.

Finally, Glaser and Strauss (1967: 238) suggest consulting Cicourel (1964)

> [f]or an analysis of how current sociological methods by their very nature often result in data and theory that do not fit the realities of the situation.

[2]See Nisbett (1977) for an excellent discussion of the pitfalls of introspection as a method of obtaining data in sociology, especially his observation that the "reasons" people offer for their behavior are less reasons than "plausible theories." His reasoning suggests that when parents say that they have been influenced in such and such a way by their children, we really know only that they have come up with this as a "plausible explanation" for behaviors and actions that may have very different "real" explanations. So, for example, it may be that all adults remember a lot about their childhoods--those with children simply think that being around kids has "caused" those memories. I am contending in this research, however, that whatever the relationship between the accounts and the reality, a consideration of these "plausible explanations" has merit in its own right. Wenar (1963: 703) in discussing the limitations of retrospective studies, points to another difficulty; "[t]hese present accounts of the past cannot qualify as antecedent conditions at all, but merely serve to create an illusion that the past has been evaluated. This is what we refer to as the illusion of time."

occurred. Neither observations nor laboratory experiments could get at this dimension. Secondly, a primarily open-ended interview format seemed appropriate, given the exploratory nature of this inquiry. Levinson's study (1978) is an excellent model of such research. Like the influences of children on parents, the notion of developmental stages in adult life is not a new idea. Yet, as Levinson notes (1978: ix), "despite its wide acceptance in the abstract it had remained 'curiously neglected'." One strength of Levinson's study (and also perhaps its major weakness) is its in-depth focus on a very small number of subjects, an approach that allows patterns to emerge that might be cancelled out in a survey format. When I was a research assistant with one of the "transition-to-parenthood" studies (Jacoby, 1970), I became sensitized to these dangers. In that study the two hundred parent interviews which I supervised contained enormous potential for elucidating the question of the effects of children on their parents. However, few significant findings emerged; the analytic approach which used only parents' responses to predetermined categories tended to cancel out nearly everything of interest. (For example, three "strongly agrees" and three "strongly disagrees" combined to produce a seeming "neutral" response, leading one to conclude that the transition to parenthood involved few strong feelings either way.) A major danger in conducting exploratory research is that of "premature closure . . . of supposing we know all the questions and are just looking for the answers" (Dexter, 1970: 134). Some of the failure of the "transition-to-parenthood" research may lie exactly here. By supposing that they knew the questions and simply needed to add up the number of "strongly agrees" in a given population, these researchers often let slip through

their fingers the very kinds of influence that parents themselves see as most significant.

A widespread assumption exists that survey research methods are applicable to most interview groups. Quite the contrary is true. As Dexter (1970) notes, one must use different guidelines in interviewing experts (or, as he calls them, "elites"). Yet, "the information we have is almost entirely about how to conduct interviews with random samples of some fairly general nonexpert populations by people who are not themselves experts" (Dexter, 1970: 89). In interviewing the parents, I used Dexter's guidelines for interviewing elites--methods which make the most of the possibility that the interviewee may know more than the interviewer knows how to ask. Among these guidelines are the avoidance of overly detailed explanations of the focus of the research,[3] phrasing the questions in the most general ways possible, and following up on leads that weren't part of the original focus (Dexter, 1970: 34-41 and 62).

The issues involved in selecting a sample for the study raised important theoretical and practical concerns. Given the paucity of research on this emerging topic, little theoretical basis existed for identifying significant variables (e.g. ethnicity, age and sex of parents and children, number of children, family size, religion, labor force participation, mental health of parents, or social class membership). I conducted a pilot study which failed to uncover significant

---

[3]Thus, for example, I told parents that my interest was in the way children influenced their parents' growth and development, leaving it to them to define "growth and development." In this way I hoped to avoid predisposing them to answer along certain lines and hoped that I would get their perceptions rather than their best attempt at filling in a sociologist's categories.

differences in the directions I expected: between mothers and fathers, between parents of older vs. younger children, between parents who wanted vs. those who did not want children, and between parents who were employed vs. those who were not. On a more practical level, problems emerged which complicated my sample choices. Gaining access to any given group of parents is a substantial problem which severely limits sampling decisions.[4]

With the preceeding in mind, I made some decisions which reflected both my practical and theoretical concerns. First I chose to focus on the parents of pre-first grade children, more specifically parents who had children in day cares and nursery schools, largely because of the relative ease of access compared with parents of school age children. Despite the even greater ease of locating parents of infants, I decided not to include them because I suspected (from my work with Jacoby) that the bulk of their responses would be in the category of influences resulting from accommodating themselves to the routine of having a baby around. I was more interested in the ways that parents changed as

---

[4]Parents of infants are the only group easily tracked down, since birth records are public information. Other groups, though they may be recorded on accurate, inclusive lists, are of limited use in research for several reasons. First, public schools will not give researchers access to their lists of students, making it impossible to get lists of parents with children of a particular age. Homeroom lists (available from the children themselves) are available, but I did not use these for ethical reasons. The schools are willing to send home a notice to parents advising them of the project and giving them a number to call, but they will not provide the researcher with the parents' names. Thus one gets only those parents who respond to a written notice, with no chance for a followup with non-respondents. Including only such volunteers in the study would have seriously biased the data. While other groups (Boy Scouts, church groups) are willing to provide lists, there are difficulties here as well. Despite the probability of a good response rate, the groups themselves would be so particular as to result in even more bias in the resultant data.

persons, not so much in how they rearranged their sleeping and eating schedules.

The questions of age settled, I decided to control for social class,[5] interviewing only middle and upper-middle class parents. Practically, this made sense. Travel time was substantially decreased by my interviewing parents living near the university, and I was able to use my existing contacts with local child care centers to ensure better cooperation and to save time in negotiations.

Beyond these two considerations of children's age and parents' class membership, I wanted to be broad in defining the sample in keeping with the theory-generating focus of the research. Thus, I hoped to make use of variations in sex, marital status, length of marriage, religion, family size, sex and number of children, ethnicity, and participation in the labor force

Study Sites

Parents for the study were selected from child care centers located in a Midwest university town with a population of about 54,000. The centers, located within a two mile radius of each other, drew families from the same predominantly middle to upper-middle class geographic area. The nursery school had been in operation for 17 years, day care #1 for eight years and day care #2 for six years. All three were

---

[5]While the literature on child effects on parents gives little suggestion of the importance of class (Bell, 1977, is an exception) the very considerable class differences noted in studies of the family (see e.g. Rubin, 1976; Stack, 1974; and Komorovsky, 1962) prompted my decision to limit the study by social class. I intend to extend this research later to include perceptions of working class parents, and I have begun to make contacts for those interviews.

housed in churches, although none required any religious affiliation of the parents. The nursery school, however, was used by more families associated with the church in which it was housed than was the case with either of the day cares. Parents in all three facilities were quite similar in terms of socioeconomic status, the only noticeable difference being that day care #2 tended to have more "non-traditional" (e.g. single-parent) families. A secondary sample of parents with teenage children was contacted through the leader of a youth group associated with the church housing the nursery school. Although this group differed from all three others in that it was more closely affiliated with the church, it was selected because of similarities (in geographic location, in social class, and in child rearing philosophies) with the nursery school group. The overall response rate was relatively high. Only five families directly refused. I contacted 83 families from the nursery school, day care centers, and high school group. Thirty-five of these had moved or were ineligible because of the oldest child's age. Another ten families did not respond indicating either refusal or that they had not received the note (due to illness or having left the child care center recently). Forty-three families agreed to participate resulting in 59 interviews.

Procedures for Contacting Parents

Having decided to interview middle class parents with preschool (not yet in first grade) children, and a secondary group of parents of teenagers, I explained my project to the directors of three child care centers and a teen youth group. In each case the directors granted permission to contact parents in their groups. Participation was solicited by placing notes requesting only a yes or no answer (see appendix)

in the "cubbies" or mail boxes of the children at the day care or nursery. A letter from my dissertation supervisor explaining the project was posted near the entrance at each facility (see appendix). Parents were asked to return the note to a box in the office. Those parents not returning their notes were given a second, and, if necessary, a third one. If these failed to bring a response, I telephoned the parent at home. This latter was necessary in only three cases. At the nursery, and to a lesser extent at the day care centers, I was able to talk directly to some parents who came by while I was delivering the notes. I contacted the high school parents directly by phone; none refused to be interviewed (see Table 1 for response rates).

Originally, the sample for this project was to include equal numbers of parents from one nursery school and two day care centers.[6] All three are within a two mile radius and draw children from roughly the same geographic area. My purpose in including both day care and nursery parents was to get a range of parental work patterns. I assumed that the nursery school group would include families where one parent stayed home and the day care group would consist primarily of single parent families or families with both parents employed. During the interviews I discovered that this was generally true, although the nursery group did have four families where both parents worked at least part-time, and some day care families had at least one parent at home nearly

---

[6]Day care and nursery schools in the town differ in several ways. Day care centers accept children for longer periods of time, and are generally seen as a place for children to be while parents work. Nurseries tend to accept children from 2-3 hours only per day, and are usually seen as being for "children's sake" rather than as a babysitting arrangement.

Table 1. Response Rate

	Nursery	Day Care		High School
		#1	#2	
Total number of families contacted	39	23	15	6
Number of families interviewed	19	13	5	6
Number of persons interviewed	24	20	8	7
Number of families moved or ineligible	16	6	3	0
Number of persons who agreed to participate but were not needed	0	1	0	2
Number of families that did not respond to the note	1	2	7	N/A
Number of families that refused to participate	3	2	0	0

full-time. The original plan to include equal numbers of parents from two day care centers had to be abandoned when cooperation at day care #2 proved difficult to obtain.[7] Rather than discard the interviews from #2 (eight had been completed at that time), I retained them as a check on my general observations and to sensitize me to idiosyncracies of the

[7]The main problem was that many of the families did not want to be interviewed because they felt they were not "representative" (some were divorced, others co-habiting). In addition, one of the directors of the center was reluctant to have me be at the day care center when the parents picked up the children. Thus I did not have an opportunity to talk with them individually when they picked up the notices as I did in the other centers.

main sample.[8] In addition, I interviewed seven parents of teenagers to help me sort out influences that might be age-specific.[9]

Sample Characteristics

In all, I interviewed 59 parents: 52 with preschool children in a nursery school or day care center, and 7 with teenagers. My two major goals in selecting the sample were to obtain (1) homogeneity in class membership and children's ages; and (2) as much diversity as possible on other variables. The decision to draw the sample from child care centers and an associated youth group turned out to be an effective means of attaining both goals.

First, and most important, this was an efficient way of locating families whose oldest child was not yet in first grade, and a comparable group of parents of teenagers. Second, this method resulted in a sample that was almost entirely middle class. Using education and employment as indicators of class membership, only one person included in the sample was not clearly middle or upper-middle class. In terms of education, 85 percent of the parents interviewed had at least a bachelors degree, with nearly half of the total sample holding higher degrees (M.A.,

---

[8]Day care #2, while still solidly middle class in income, education, and occupation, tended to attract parents with more radical views on childrearing, They stressed being non-sexist, and non-racist. I hoped interviewing these parents would sensitize me to differences (within class and age groups) related to political and social views, as well as providing a corrective to any possible carryover to parents of a particular day care "line" on how parents should be influenced by their children.

[9]The parents of the teenagers were selected because their children had attended youth groups at the same church that housed the nursery school. Some of the teenagers had attended the same nursery. I hoped to find parents who shared a similar childrearing style but who had children of a different age.

Ph.D., DVM) (see Table 2). Occupationally, the sample was also largely upper-middle class, the five exceptions to this including three who were highly educated (see Table 3).

On other variables (age of parents, marital status, work patterns, sex, size of family, and religion) I found the hoped-for diversity.

A wide range of family work patterns was evident in the sample, although virtually all of the men interviewed were employed full-time. One man was employed part-time, three were students. Paid employment of women varied sharply by group, with over twice as many of the day care (as opposed to the nursery) mothers working full- or part-time outside the home. Twelve (63 percent) of the nursery school mothers were at home full-time (none of these were students), compared to only one of the day care mothers and one of the high school mothers (see Tables 4 and 5).

Both men and women were represented in the sample. Overall more women than men were interviewed (71 percent were women), especially in the nursery and high school groups (see Table 6). I had assumed that both parents would agree to be interviewed so I neglected to make special efforts to ensure this in the early interviews of the nursery parents. By the time I began work at the day care centers, I was more persistent in getting fathers as well as mothers to participate. In addition to variations in my own persistence, other factors contributed to the imbalance. Few fathers picked up children after the nursery school, while many did so at the day care centers. Thus, more men at the day care centers, as compared to the nursery school, were likely to see the note requesting participation in the study. Also, parents in day care #1 had participated in many more studies than the others and

Table 2. Education of Those Interviewed

	Nursery	Day Care		High School	Totals
		#1	#2		
Less than High School	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(1) 2%
High School	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(1) 2%
Some College	(4)	(1)	(2)	(0)	(7) 12%
B.S./B.A.	(6)	(1)	(0)	(2)	(9) 15%
Some Beyond B.S./B.A.	(5)	(3)	(4)	(2)	(14) 24%
M.A./M.S.	(5)	(6)	(1)	(2)	(14) 24%
Ph.D.	(2)	(5)	(1)	(1)	(9) 15%
Professional Degree: DVM, LLD, MD	(2)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(4) 7%

Table 3. Employment of Subjects and Spouses: A Loose Categorization of Types of Occupation

	Women	Men
CATEGORY 1. Professionals with Advanced Degrees Doctor (MD), lawyer, university professor or instructor, veterinarian, social analyst, fiscal analyst, urban planner, museum curator, librarian, engineer, graphic designer, clinical psychologist, social researcher, social science consultant, academic advisor at university.	14	23
CATEGORY 2. Teachers Nursery, high school, or elementary school teacher, school counselor, advisor to a student newspaper staff, teaching assistant.	7	2
CATEGORY 3. Managerial and Business Management (business and public), stockbroker, buyer, newspaper photographer.	1	4
CATEGORY 4. Clerical and Retail Sales Miscellaneous: clerk, lab assistant, sales, sales clerk, secretary, clerk, optician.	4	2
CATEGORY 5. Student	3	3
CATEGORY 6. At Home	14	0

Table 4. Employment Status of Subjects

	Nursery		Day Care #1		Day Care #2*		High School	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
At Home Non-Student	63% (12)	0%	8% (1)	0%	0%	0%	17%	0%
Student	10.5% (2)	0%	17% (2)	0%	20% (1)	33% (1)	0%	0%
Part-Time Job	16% (3)	0%	25% (3)	0%	20% (1)	0%	33% (2)	0%
Full-Time Job	10.5% (2)	100% (5)	50% (12)	100% (8)	60% (3)	66% (2)	50% (3)	100% (1)

*Note small overall number

Table 5. Employment Patterns for Families by Group

	Nursery Group	Day Care #1	Day Care #2	High School Group
Both full-time	1	4	1	1
Husband full-time and wife part-time	2	2		2
wife at home	10			
wife in school	2	1	1	
wife part-time and in school	2	1		
Wife full-time husband part-time			1	
husband at home				
husband in school			1	
husband part-time and in school				
Single mother full-time		3	1	2
part-time				
in school		1		
at home		1		
part-time and in school				
Single father full-time		1	1	
Husband student wife at home	2			

Table 6. Sex of Those Interviewed

	Nursery	Day Care		High School	Totals
		#1	#2		
Women	79% (19)	60% (12)	62% (5)	86% (6)	71% (42)
Men	21% (5)	40% (8)	38% (3)	14% (1)	29% (17)

were accustomed to requests for the involvement of both parents. On another level, the difficulty may have been related to what I sensed as a reluctance of the nursery mothers to ask their "busy" husbands to participate.[10] The fact that so many of the women in this group (as opposed to the day care groups) were at home all day may have sharpened the distinction in their minds about the relative worth of their time compared to that of their husbands. Attempts to generalize from this study should take the sex imbalance into account.

I was able to obtain a range of parental ages--from late twenties to early forties in the preschool groups; and from late thirties to early fifties in the teenage group. Few of the parents, however, were very young. The majority (60 percent) of the parents in the preschool group were between 31 and 35, although the second day care group was somewhat younger than the other two groups. The data indicate that none of the parents had children before they were twenty and several had their first child when they were in their thirties (see Table 7). This may be a crucial variable which should be considered in planning future studies and in making generalizations from my data.

In terms of marital status, 85 percent of the parents interviewed were currently married. The nursery group included no divorced or separated parents, while in the day care groups 25 percent of the parents were currently divorced. Of those currently married, four of these were second marriages for one or both partners (see Table 8).

---

[10] I did find some support for this hunch: of the five fathers who agreed to be interviewed, four had wives working full- or part-time. Only one of the 12 with wives at home agreed to be interviewed.

Table 7. Age of Those Interviewed

	Nursery	Day Care		High School
		#1	#2	
21-25	--	--	--	--
26-30	25% (6)	10% (2)	50% (4)	--
31-35	67% (16)	55% (11)	37.5% (3)	--
36-40	8% (2)	10% (2)	12.5% (1)	29% (2)
41-45	--	15% (3)	--	43% (3)
46-50	--	--	--	14% (1)
51-55	--	--	--	14% (1)
Information Missing	--	10% (2)	--	--
Average	32	34	31	43

Table 8. Marital Status of Those Interviewed

	Nursery	Day Care		High School	Totals
		#1	#2		
Married	100% (24)	75% (15)	75% (6)	72% (5)	85% (50)
Divorced	0% (0)	25% (5)	25% (2)	28% (2)	15% (9)

The sample also included considerable variation by religion. Because of the location of the child care facilities in Protestant churches, I was initially concerned that the sample would miss parents of other faiths. However, although the largest proportion of interviewees were Protestant (39 percent), a nearly equal sized group expressed no religious preference (27 percent). Additionally, both Catholic (19 percent) and Jewish (10 percent) parents were included. A smaller number (3) expressed adherence to Eastern-type religious beliefs (e.g., the Mahariji) (see Table 9).

Table 9. Religion of Those Interviewed

	Nursery	Day Care		High School	Total
		#1	#2		
Catholic	17% (4)	30% (6)	13% (1)	0%	19% (11)
Protestant	42% (10)	25% (5)	13% (1)	100% (7)	39% (23)
Jewish	4% (1)	15% (3)	25% (2)	0%	10% (6)
Eastern	0%	0%	38% (3)	0%	5% (3)
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
None	38% (9)	30% (6)	13% (1)	0%	27% (16)

Predictably, there was little variation in the number of children per family in the preschool groups. Other than one nursery school family with three children, the others had one or two children. Only children accounted for 60-88 percent of the families in the day care groups as compared to only 25 percent of those in the nursery school

group. The narrow range in number of children may be explained in several ways. In the first place, families with more than two children are becoming increasingly rare in the population at large, especially for this social class and age range. Additionally, the costs and logistics of using day care centers or nursery schools increase with family size. Finally, my requirement that the oldest child not yet be in first grade made it still more unlikely that any family would have two children now, even if they eventually had more children. Large families were represented in the teenage group--two families included four children, one had six (see Table 10).

Table 10. Number of Children per Family

	Nursery	Day Care		High School
		#1	#2	
One	25% (6)	60% (12)	88.5% (7)	--
Two	71% (2)	40% (8)	12.5% (1)	57% (4)
Three	4% (1)			
Four				29% (2)
Five				
Six				14% (1)
Average # Family	1.8	1.4	1.1	3.4

The Nature of the Interview

With several exceptions, the interviews were done in the parents' homes. Four preferred to be interviewed at their business offices; one said the church lounge would offer more privacy than her home with four teenagers; and one met me for lunch at a restaurant near his office. I told parents I wanted to interview people alone, and, except for the presence of children, this was possible for all but three interviews. In one case the women's mother came in briefly and then left. In the second the man's wife was in the next room off and on. A third case involved the presence of assorted relatives throughout the interview. In taking notes, I always paid attention to whether or not children were present during the interview and to their influence on the situation. Most interviews lasted one hour, although some lasted as little as one-half hour and others as long as two hours. In none of the cases was an interview terminated because a parent did not want to continue. In fact, most parents reported enjoying the experience: some felt it gave them a chance to step back and evaluate their lives; others appreciated having someone besides a preschooler to talk to. Most were pleased that social scientists were finally looking at something the parents had already noticed, glad for once to shift their attention from how they influenced their children to how they themselves were influenced.

All interviews were preceded by a short period of conversation about children, the weather, work, or whatever interested the parent. Then I made a short statement noting that sociologists generally look at how parents socialize their children but ignore influence flowing in the opposite direction. Following this, I asked a general question:

"Can you tell me something about how you, as a person, have been influenced by your children?" Parents' responses to this first question varied in length from 10 to 60 minutes. I used various probes to encourage them to expand on this general question before I introduced the more specific questions. The more specific questions were aimed at getting information in certain categories derived from analysis of the pilot study data. All interviews were tape-recorded with the parents' permission; only one respondent asked that parts of the interview not be taped. A short personality inventory (The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) was administered at the conclusion of the interview with the first 24 parents. This is not part of the dissertation, but will be used for another study I am preparing on variations in interview response. (See appendix for the interview schedule and the Myers-Briggs information.)

The Process of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data my goal is to generate grounded theory that will be a bridge "between the theoretical thinking of sociologists and the practical thinking of people concerned with the substantive area" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 241). My criteria (following Glaser and Strauss) were that the resultant theory be analytic and sensitizing; "abstract enough to designate the properties of concrete entities, not entities themselves," while at the same time "vividly sensitizing" for persons in the substantive area (in my case for parents themselves).

I transcribed the first twelve of the taped interviews in their entirety. From this I was able to determine which parts of an interview were relevant to the research question. Subsequent transcriptions included only these parts. I omitted side discussions about the

weather, holidays, work and school, as well as any repetitive elaborations on a single theme. In each case I made notes to myself (especially about the latter) for future interpretation of the abbreviated transcripts. I also kept notes on observations made while I was at each house and later reflections on the interview.

Initially, I attempted to code the data using my original interview questions (see Appendix A), and a loose scale indicating the degree to which this person found parenthood an expanding or a diminishing experience. This proved unmanageable. First, I could not use the scale for a variety of reasons--mostly because few parents fell into an either/or situation. Secondly, my questions did not provide a suitable method for categorizing the responses of the parents. This was not surprising since I had deliberately used open-ended questions designed to tap themes I could not have known in advance of the research. In anticipation of this, I kept an on-going list of emerging themes throughout the interview process.

The analytic strategy I used is similar to Glaser and Strauss' "constant comparative method." This method "is not designed (as methods of quantitative analysis are) to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 103).

I reread the completed transcriptions numerous times to identify recurring or unusual themes. The first step was to look for clusters of responses most frequently or most emphatically mentioned by parents. Some of the themes I noticed during the interview process held up here

(e.g., parenthood forcing parents to make decisions, to come to terms with issues), others did not (male/female differences in involvement, patterned differences between parents who felt expanded vs. diminished by parenthood). My selection of theme was based on two criteria: (1) what the parents said most often and/or most vehemently, especially items which were (2) as much unlike popular and sociological notions of adult socialization as possible (i.e., this is because I wanted to open up new areas of inquiry). This process of sifting and weighing resulted in the categories listed in Appendix B.

I then went through all the transcripts and coded everything that fell into one of those categories and made master files of all the examples in each category. The process, though a tedious one, ensured a close correspondence between the emerging theory and the parents' actual perceptions of the change-producing experiencing experiences of parenthood. At first I compared each new example to the ones before it: How were they alike? Different? Did they really represent a common theme? Gradually, I developed more abstract notions of the properties of the categories and could measure each new example against these emerging notions. In the process, some earlier examples were dropped and others were added as I clarified the content of each category (at some points this involved narrowing, at others, especially near the end, generalizing the content). From this point on I went back and forth between the master files and more library research in order to piece together a coherent way of making sense of the parental perceptions I had gathered.

In developing the analysis, I kept rearranging the themes in relation to each other, searching for the best way to express their

underlying similarity. Somehwere in the middle of this process, I went back to the literature to reread what had been written about ways adult socialization differs from socialization in childhood. I took Brim's model as representative of such attempts, examining the fit between that and parental perceptions of change brought about by having children. My decision to focus on "situations" emerged as I noted that many aspects of the changes described by parents were at variance with Brim's model. Brim was, I presumed, describing adult socialization in general (though he did list several situations in which his model would not hold, e.g., mental hospitals or battlefield experiences). That my findings fit his model so poorly, suggested to me that something out of the ordinary was going on. Since I had no reason to believe my sample differed from the adults he had in mind, the difference had to lie in some structural variable outside the individuals involved. That variable appeared to be situational. Thus the dominant themes in parents' perceptions of the changes resulting from parenthood seem best portrayed as a series of situations to which parents are routinely exposed (even when they prefer not to be), and which non-parents can easily avoid.[12]

---

[12]Becker (1964: 41) also sees situations as the key to understanding change in adult life. "The process of situational adjustment, in which individuals take on the characteristics required by the situations they participate in, provides an entering wedge into the problem of change."

PART II

BEING AROUND CHILDREN

CHAPTER FOUR

"THEY WOULD LIKE TO BUT THEY'RE TOO BIG": ACCESS TO THE WORLD OF CHILDHOOD

> We are often reminded in our analytic work that the child lives on in the man and woman. Life itself bears witness to such survival. When my daughter Miriam was a little girl and we took her to the dentist for the second time, she crawled under a desk and no amount of persuasion could overcome her anxiety. Her mother appealed to her in vain, "Do you think that a lady would crawl on all fours under a desk in a dentist's office?" My little girl answered, "They would like to but they're too big." (Reik, 1948: 390) (emphasis mine)

Introduction

Sherlock Holmes observed that the most ordinary events, not the most bizarre, are the hardest to explain. This seems true of the somehow obvious observation that adults often yearn to be unadult. Reik (1948: 390) suggests that even children know that adults would like to re-enter the world of childhood with its special joys and protections. Less often explored are the means of attaining such access and the possible contributions to adult life of having access to the world of childhood.

This chapter explores how parenthood provides such access by placing adults in situations that allow and force them into the world of childhood. Two aspects of such access seem central to my inquiry.

First it provides opportunities for adults to revisit earlier stages of their own development, a chance to work on the earlier issues and to strengthen the gains made at earlier times. Second, this access may be an important ingredient in adult creativity by giving parents access to the trans-schematic perceptions of children. The interview data provide examples of both processes.

Certainly being with children is not the only way for adults to obtain access to the world of childhood; it is simply the easiest route and the hardest one to resist. One of the parents I interviewed noted: "They give it to you ready made." Access may also be provided in other ways. Participation in sports has traditionally been an acceptable avenue for adult men. In the seventies participation in sports by adults increased rapidly, ostensibly for health reasons. What is interesting with respect to my topic is that the increase coincided with a decline in the birth rate. In the sixties and seventies, Esalen type groups provided adults with opportunities to be "honorary children" for certain delimited time periods and for a fee. I suspect it is exactly that opportunity--to obtain access to the world of childhood--that accounts for much of the success of such groups. Psychoactive drugs are also a means of temporarily eschewing the responsibilities of adult life and seeing the world in a new, often child-like, light. Membership in adult fantasy groups (Trekkies, The Society for Creative Anachronism, and the Tolkein Society) may also function primarily to permit an entree into the forbidden world of childhood.

With the gains of adulthood come losses. These losses vary according to one's place in the class structure, one's sex, one's culture and one's place in history. For many contemporary middle class adults, one

aspect of these losses involves having relatively little access to those parts of the self that are physical, intense, irrational, emotional and spontaneous. Being an adult, at least in this society and at this time, means and requires being able to be rational, detached and controlled.[1]

The loss of consistent access to the world of emotion, intensity, irrationality, spontaneity, and physicalness engenders ambivalence in most adults.[2] Being older and having a bigger body only partially cover up the child within. For contemporary middle class Americans, being around children is one of the easiest routes into the world of

---

[1]Philip Slater (1970: 24-25) traces out the sources and implications of such losses. He and others have written about the psychic costs of the sorts of internalized controls typical of contemporary middle class Americans. One of these costs is the inability to give oneself over entirely to an emotion:

> The point of this long digression, however, is that internalization is a mixed blessing. It may enable one to get his head smashed in a good cause, but the capacity to give oneself up completely to an emotion is almost altogether lost in the process. Where internalization is high there is often a feeling that the controls themselves are out of control--that emotion can not be expressed when the individual would like to express it. Life is muted experience filtered, emotion anesthetized, affective discharge incomplete. Efforts to shake free from this hypertrophied control system include not only drugs, and sensation-retrieval techniques . . . but also confused attempts to reestablish external systems of direction and control--the vogue currently enjoyed by astrology is an expression of them. The simplest technique, of course, would be the establishment of a more authoritarian social structure, which would relieve the individual of the great burden of examining and moderating his own responses. He could then become as a child, lighthearted, spontaneous, and passionate, secure in the knowledge that others would prevent his impulses from causing harm.

[2]See also Schachtel's (1959) excellent discussion of ambivalence regarding memories of the experience of being a child. Ehrmann (1968: 49) in his analysis of play, cites the ambivalence of adult nostalgia for childhood.

childhood--a world long closed or perhaps never fully experienced in the first place. A librarian with five children talked about her departure from and return to that world:

> When you first see them examining things, and it's so magnificent . . . when they first look at a flower or a blade of grass . . . they taste it, smell it . . . and I do things like that . . . . I remember as a teenager I didn't do anything like that . . . I was too interested in myself . . . . You're so busy pursuing whatever it is you're pursuing that you don't look around you, but children still do . . . and [so as a parent] you have to look.

Unwilling Exiles

Above all, children seemed to provide for their parents an entree in a forbidden world. While we may imagine we outgrow and lose interest in that forbidden world as we mature, considerable evidence exists to suggest that we are to some extent, simply unwilling exiles. The pull of that world remains, but we resist being drawn in. The parents I interviewed talked about three reasons they resisted being drawn into that world: a feeling that they were "wasting time," a fear of looking like fools, and the possibility that they might even be arrested. This latter suggests a new perspective on "status offenders." Just as engaging in certain activities (drinking, staying out late, running away from home) and frequenting certain places (pool halls and railroad yards) have been considered offenses for children but not for adults, certain other activities (swinging and sliding at the park alone) and locations (parks, zoos and children's matinee movies) are considered off-limits to adults without children. Police may feel justified in watching more closely adults frequenting such places or engaging in such activities. Facetious signs at kids' movies and amusement

parks ("adults must be accompanied by a kid") or at the Honolulu Zoo ("Ask about our rent-a-kid program") testify to the strength of these powerful, though rarely explicit prohibitions.

The interview data betray the deep ambivalence parents felt: the seductiveness of experiencing the world like a child versus the advantages and obligations of adult forms of experience. In a similar vein, Schachtel (1959) and Proust (1964) explore the ambivalence we feel toward deeply remembering our childhoods--the simultaneous attraction and danger we feel in the face of these close-up memories.

Access to the world of childhood may enhance adult growth and experience in two very different ways. First, access provides a chance to revisit earlier developmental stages; and second, it may be causally related to creativity in adult life. Adult access to the world of childhood may be important in other ways, for example, simply as a source of relaxation for adults. The two topics I've chosen to discuss seem, however, to be the most salient to the parents I interviewed, as well as linking up with theoretical literature.

Routes of Access

The interview data contain many examples of ways parenthood provides access to the world of childhood. This chapter has thus far focused on an analysis of the contributions of access (to adult creativity and to re-experiencing earlier developmental stages). However, for an understanding of the routes of this access, we must turn temporarily from these two concerns and explore the descriptions offered by parents. They cited three major ways in which access to the world of childhood comes about.

First, being a parent gives one a chance to do things adults usually don't, and normatively shouldn't, do: like swinging on swings, watching cartoons, going down a slide, losing one's temper, and experiencing feelings adults don't usually experience. Second, being a parent gives one a chance to experience reality from a child's perspective: a different time sense, increased intensity. Third, being a parent gives one a chance to remember one's own childhood.

Access to Things Adults Usually Don't and Normatively Shouldn't Do

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, children provide easy access to a world generally closed to adults. The extent and importance of this access varied among the parents I interviewed. For example, some simply mentioned that they did things they would not have otherwise done. In all cases, though, children provided what a university professor, the father of two teenagers described as "an entree into doing some childish things." For example, some went to places they would not have gone otherwise--to circuses, zoos, and parks. They played more and had a chance to act like a child. Others watched movies and TV shows meant for children like "Candleshoe" or "Wild Kingdom."

Other parents mentioned not only the mere fact of the access, but the learning, enjoyment, and even the joy of such access. For some the learning was of an academic nature. They read encyclopedias and science books they might otherwise have ignored:

> I would never have read National Geographic but by ten-year-old was really interested in animals so I learned from it.
> --mother of school age children (from the pilot study)

For others what they learned was how to have "pure fun." Playing with their children, they learned to play themselves. As the children got

older they sometimes taught parents new sports, as this 37-year-old mother of teenage boys relates:

> I'm starting to learn to play at 37 . . . . In positive ways recently I've become more athletic . . . joined a women's softball team. [My younger son] is extremely helpful and supportive, he teaches me how to do it.

Some found enjoyment in playing board games with their children or in watching the kinds of things only children generally watch. A librarian, a mother of five, was representative of many others:

> I enjoy many of the things they enjoy, some of the television programs . . . when they were small I enjoyed watching some of the cartoons they watched because I found them funny.

Another parent noted that adult movies leave you "just a mental and physical wreck." She welcomed the excuse of her child to go to kids' movies.

For many others, the access provided by children was more than a diversion, more than simple enjoyment. It was a source of intense joy and wonder, as a university professor, a father of two preschoolers, described:

> . . . suddenly cause you have a kid you have a license to do all these things again. And that's fun, that's really terrific! . . . One of the good things, the greatest joys of having kids is that you can be a kid again, you're suddenly allowed to do things that when you're grown-up you're no longer supposed to do, you know, just simple things like swinging, going down a slide . . . . and suddenly Christmas is Christmas again. You know, you remember Christmas as a kid was a great joy, and then it got sort of dull, cause the miracle had gone out of it, yeah, and then suddenly you have kids yourself, and oh boy, it's just a miracle to them, you know and then you can enjoy it that way.

This sense of joy and wonder was especially evident in some of the interviews. The whole demeanor of some parents changed as they recounted times they had acted like children. A mother of four had been talking in a barely audible voice for half an hour. Her own background, she

said, was emotionally deprived--she felt very repressed and didn't remember her own childhood as a fun time. But, as she began to talk about learning to be a child by watching her own children play and by beginning to play herself, her voice came alive and increased in volume: "You can swing on the swings and go down the slide even!!"[3]

The recurrent theme throughout was that children provide a "license" --they let you "be a kid and get away with it."

> I think I've maintained an ability to have fun, to see things from a young person's perspective . . . . When the kids were into that sort of thing I used to just love to catch polywogs with them, you know, the kind of stuff you need an excuse to do . . . . It's too bad you need a kid to do those kinds of things, but that's the way it is. (emphasis mine)
> --a school counselor, the mother of two teenage children

> And so, in a way, I like it now, again now that they're bigger cause you can be a kid and get away with it . . . just walking slowly looking at flowers, even things about animals or birds you know, things that you knew before but you forgot that you knew. (emphasis mine)
> --divorcee, a store clerk with two young children

Play is one of the most important ways in which the learning of primates differs from that of other animals (see Jane Lancaster, 1975). It provides the basis for the complex sorts of learning necessary for a creature born with few instincts. To the extent that adults are now

---

[3] I had expected to find the most mention of the chance to re-experience childhood among those parents whose own childhoods had been especially happy. Also I had imagined that it would be women who were most drawn in by the wonder of re-experiencing the world as a child. In part, I was wrong on both counts. I assumed that those with unhappy childhoods would be the most defended against re-experiencing that world. In fact, almost the opposite was true. Perhaps this is because for those with happy childhoods the wonder of that world is no surprise; while those whose childhoods were dim and unamazing (or if amazing so painful as to have been forgotten) are surprised to come upon it for the first time. In a similar vein, the amazement expressed by fathers as opposed to mothers may reflect the differential access to the world of emotions and fantasy afforded men and women. The child's world is the opposite of the rational world of male work and provides an opportunity to escape male gender role constraints.

required to remain flexible and able to learn things throughout life rather than just in childhood, to that extent children provide valuable services for adults by enlarging their capacity for play.

A Chance to Experience Reality from a Different Point of View

Parents reported three sorts of perceptual changes resulting from access to the activities of childhood. They felt younger or felt they saw the world as young people did; they experienced time and space differently; they felt a sense of wonder. The examples they gave were in some cases similar to reports of perceptual changes resulting from taking drugs.

In general, the respondents spoke of ways that having a child mitigated the ossifying tendencies of adulthood and allowed one to feel like a child:

> You start getting older and older and you kind of get your mind set . . . . [Having a child] kind of helpsyou enjoy life and, you know, be like a kid.
> --mother of a three-year-old boy (from the pilot study)

> I found that having [a child] has helped that . . . especially at [my age] . . . it's put me in touch with very young persons, and part of that . . . brings out in me my own youth . . . and my own attachments to life and regeneration.
> --a university professor, 41 years old, the mother of a four-year-old girl

More specifically, some parents mentioned experiencing time in a new light, gaining a new perspective on the here and now.[4] A mother of two young boys told me:

---

[4]This shift of time perspective that comes with play is described by Eugen Fink, a German philosopher, in a translation of Oase des Glucks. Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels in Game, Play and Literature (Ehrmann, 1968: 21-22):

> In the autonomy of play action there appears a possibility of human timelessness in time. Time is then experienced, not as a percipitate rush of successive moments, but rather as the

> When you have time, when you stop all those adult things and go through the day like a child, with nothing else to do . . . you feel a lot more like a child . . . being able to play, go outside and play basketball with them or go outside and just say, 'I'm not going to do anything . . . for the next three or four hours.' The kinds of things you think of to kill that much time.

In the process of being with their children, some parents saw and were able to experience for themselves different styles of encountering the world. A mother of two preschoolers told me that children "just take things in without any attached value to them, they just soak them up." Another mother told me ". . . you can behave more as a child and you can be more childlike yourself." A divorced woman, the mother of two young children said:

> . . . going to feed the ducks . . . where before I wouldn't have had the patience. You know, I get there and, you know, I gotta go, you know, I gotta keep on the move . . . now [with the kids] you can look at the sky and watch the clouds and pick things out . . . and I guess in a way it lets you be a little kid even though you're big . . . there's times when you can be a little kid cause you're a parent.

> one full moment that is, so to speak, a glimpse of eternity. The child still has this experience of time more than other men, since he engages primarily in play, as Rilke says:
>
> > Oh hours of childhood,
> > when behind the figures was more than merely the past,
> > and before us not the future.
> > Of course we were growing, and sometimes we were eager
> > to grow up soon, half in order to please those
> > who had nothing else besides being grown-up,
> > and yet, in going our own way, we were happy
> > dealing with things that endure, and we stood there
> > in the region between the world and the play thing,
> > in a place created in the beginning
> > for a pure act . . .
> >
> > (4th Diuno Elegy)
>
> For the adult, however, play is a strange oasis, an enchanted rest-spot in his agitated journey and never-ending flight. Play affords a type of temporal present . . . . Play is activity and creativity--and yet it is close to eternal things. Play <u>interrupts</u> the continuity and purposive structure of our lives; it remains at a distance from our usual mode of existence. (emphasis in text)

Finally, for others, being around children provoked in them a sense of wonder.[5] The mother of two preschoolers explained:

> I guess sort of seeing things through my children's eyes . . . the sense of wonder . . . they come on it cold and they think of the most ingenious things.

This new apprehension of reality, together with the sense of wonder it engendered, came to several parents in the process of reading to their children. At first this seemed contradictory to me; reading is such an adult activity, so rational, so controlled. Yet, for children, being read to is none of these. Three parents made special note of the sense in which stories were not just rational adult-world commonalities but rather magical events with a life of their own. The mother of a three-year-old boy told me:

> I brought [some of my old picture books from my mother's] for [him] to read and I can look at those books and I can see exactly how I saw them . . . a picture book to a kid it's like movies and it's real, you know, the animals are creeping around . . . a whole 'nother world. When I started reading those old books that were mine to him I remember how I saw them and it was really like it was real.

---

[5]The comments of several parents betrayed the ambivalence many felt as they entered the world of childhood through their children. One, the mother of two preschoolers, made clear by her tone of voice as well as by her words that such opportunities were <u>not</u> the highlight of her day:

> I have heard a lot of people say, 'Oh, to see the world through a child's eyes,' and it is fun, but it is <u>not</u> the highlight of my day to see [my daughter] ecstatic over a butterfly.

Another mother (who had quit working to stay home with her two children) was quick to add that while playing with her children did change her sense of time (she is the one quoted on the previous page), it was no way for an adult to go through life. She seemed almost embarassed to have admitted to floating through a day like that. She, like other parents, was ambivalent about the extent to which children extended the boundaries of permissible action.

Her own analysis was that it was like tripping on LSD, that it gave her access to a world she had forgotten, and that that access helped her be a better story reader to her young son. Suddenly she realized what the world of story books looks like to a child. Another mother working on the final stages of her dissertation was similarly influenced:

> It's opened my eyes to, or I've relearned or enjoyed fairy tales . . . enough so that I have ended up buying fairy tale books for myself.

A professor of religious studies, the father of teenage children, talked with me about what he had learned from reading stories to his son's elementary school class:

> I learned how to tell stories. I had always been outside. I learned to move inside the story. I used to 'shred' the stories [by giving an analysis instead of reading], now I know how to trust the story. Adults feel they have to apologize for 'just' listening to a story.

This man had been "explaining" scripture to adults for years--analyzing, examining, 'shredding'. Suddenly, by seeing the power of a really good story for a <u>child</u>, he saw the power of the immediate experience rather than a detached analysis for <u>adults</u> as well. He saw something about how a child experienced the reality of stories and was able to incorporate that into his work with adults.

<u>Remembering One's Own Childhood</u>

Children took parents back to their own childhoods in many ways. The most external, direct way in which parenthood prompts remembering is by the opportunities it provides for discussing one's past. Couples who have or are about to have a child have more occasions to discuss their own childhoods with each other than those who do not. The push here is both from practical concerns (How was I raised? How were you

raised? How were we disciplined and how do we feel about that now?) and from a simple sharing of experiences.

Children provide an occasion for pulling up things that may have been forgotten. A university professor with two preschoolers said:

> My wife and I talk lots about when we were that age and when we were little what we did . . . things that you haven't remembered and emotions that you had.

Many parents returned to their childhood experiences for use in making decisions about their own children. A lawyer told me:

> My wife and I have discussed in raising our child the way we were raised . . . [My wife] works . . . neither of our mothers worked . . . . I had never given any thought to the relative merits of a working or a non-working mother and I never would have.

Besides talking to each other and to their own parents about their memories, parents also talked to their children and grandchildren. A mother of teenagers said:

> Well, sometimes I tell them about what it was like when I was little, what I did . . . .

My own grandmother called such tales "ancient history"--the little stories about her girlhood that we loved to hear. The parents I interviewed noted that their children enjoyed this "ancient history":

> [I] tell [my daughter] about my past . . . she always finds it interesting.

In other cases the recounting of the past was less for entertainment and more designed to teach children lessons. Similar to the fabled "when-I-was-your-age I walked five miles to school," such stories were designed to preserve a past and/or teach a lesson. One mother told me:

> I tell her more about my background . . . what her heritage is . . . I'm not a social climber . . . in a way I'm trying to tell her, 'look at what we've lost.'

Many of these stories seemed similar to "war" and "operation" stories. In fact one mother of teenagers said, "Well, sometimes we tell our old war stories to the kids." As such they probably serve some of the same functions. They remind the world (here the children) and yourself of your own worth, bravery, brilliance, tolerance and/or suffering.

Children also provide the occasion for internal dialogues. First, they involve parents in deliberate efforts at remembering the past as an aid to present thinking or decision-making about oneself as a parent. This will be discussed in later chapters. Parents said it made them think more about their childhoods in order to evaluate the memories and use them to help them become better parents. Seeing a problem a child had, made some parents try to remember how they themselves had resolved that, uncovering in the process some uncomfortable memories, while giving one clues to a better understanding of their own present. A working mother with a four-year-old daughter explained:

> Seeing the kinds of issues that [my daughter] deals with now makes me think that I must have been dealing with issues--not very consciously--also, way back then and gives me a sense of how far back stuff I'm working on now goes.

A father made similar observations:

> Knowing now what kids go through at ages two, three and four . . . having watched [my daughter] . . . you begin to wonder how did I as an individual work through that? Which raises a lot of interesting questions, ones which would never occur without [bringing up kids].

The second kind of internal dialogue was the kind that just popped up in the process of being around children who are like one once was. Unlike those mentioned earlier these were spontaneous rather than the result of conscious deliberate effort. These seemed to come about in

several ways: by seeing oneself in the child[6] or by noticing the child doing, thinking or feeling something the parent had done, thought or felt. In both cases the memory usually came as a surprise or a shock--it was unexpected and often concerned something long-forgotten. Unlike the more deliberate recall, these memories were more often detailed and specific--pointing to some unique experience rather than being "conventionalized" or "cliched" (see Schachtel, 1959, for an elaboration on this). Thus parents remembered doing particular things that their own children were doing now:

> Remembering how I had my hair long when I was a little girl and what pony tails were like and the games that I played and how my mother used to put Queene Anne's lace in food coloring . . . .
> --mother of two preschool girls

> She'll come home singing a song and I'll suddenly join in--it's a song that I haven't sung since I was five years old.
> --34-year-old mother of two preschoolers

> Most things [my son] does trigger memories for me . . . how it was to get a dog.
> --father of a five-year-old boy

Parents noted that most of these memories were of "fairly small things." Here a university professor, the father of two girls, is speaking:

> Yeah, all those things bring back vivid memories . . . you can just remember just little incidents in your life that really are fairly small things, like when you learned to tie your shoes . . . events like when you wet your pants in school . . . naps . . . teachers . . . . You never think of them until you have children and then the memories come back.

Such small things carried with them feeling tones that seem not to be evoked in ordinary adult life:

> Oh yes, when she was first starting to walk . . . I had a lot of really strong feelings about what it was like as a child to see things.
> --mother of a four-year-old girl

---

[6]See the chapter on "Close Up Mirrors" for an expansion on this.

> It's kind of a strange feeling to see things happening again . . . [like] remembering an old movie, and remembering similar things happening to you . . . [my daughter] got a new bike--remembering that fear of someone letting go of the back seat of the bike.
> --mother of two preschoolers

> Things like that may make you remember specific instances when you and your parents were interacting like when you were sick like if you had an earache . . . you get those sorts of flashbacks.
> --father of a three-year-old boy

Thus much of the remembering had less to do with actual behavior or words and more to do with feelings and emotions and with "nagging questions." A mother reported:

> It started when I was pregnant with [my daughter] I guess. I just started thinking back--no, not even thinking back . . . [but] feeling back, you know, certain ways that I felt in my own childhood.

The father of a four-year-old girl explained:

> Not really memories . . . . [more like] occasional flashes here or there of 'Hey, I remember that thought' . . . I don't remember my behavior when I was her age--I remember questions I had that were nagging me.

Finally, similarities between themselves and their children provided much of the impetus for remembering one's children. A university professor, the father of two told me:

> The thing that I dislike most about kids is when you see them doing things that you disliked in yourself when you were that age . . . . I don't want to fail and [my daughter's] exactly that way . . . . I find it intensely annoying, because I know myself how that limited some of my growth.

A mother was taken back to her past by watching her children:

> In a sense too when you have children you see yourself . . . you see them going through the same kinds of things you remember going through, the same sorts of anguish and a same happiness . . . and . . . you feel a sense of reliving your life . . . .

Creativity and Access to the World of Childhood

Contact with one's childhood--with the world of children--also seems to have a bearing on creativity. In an exhaustive study of adult geniuses, Edith Cobb (1959) discovered a common thread in all their lives--all had some tie, some bridge to their own childhoods. Her thesis is that genius in adults involves the ability to return in imagination to the early parts of one's life. Schachtel (1959) makes similar claims for the importance of memory. He, like Cobb, identifies creativity in adults with access to "trans-schematic experience" which is characteristic of childhood. Paul Shepard (1977) expanding on Cobb's work, feels that it may be the remembrance of the very landscape of childhood that makes adult development possible. Thus, being around children and consequent return to one's own childhood may not only mend that which was torn, but may also be the very fabric of adult creativity and integrity. Shepard cites the "walkabout" of Australian aborigines as a case in point.[7] In my interviews parents spoke of revisiting the landscapes of their childhood, both in reality and in imagination, once they had children--children provided the excuse for this visiting of old neighborhoods and telling of old stories. Shepard and Cobb maintain that creativity in adulthood thrives on, indeed demands, a connection to one's own childhood. Although Shepard, Cobb and Schachtel do not

---

[7]Shepard (1977: 19) writes: "In going on the pilgrimage called walkabout the Aborigine travels to a succession of named places, each familiar from childhood and each the place of some episode in the story of creation . . . . the landscape is a kind of archive where the individual moves simultaneously through his personal and tribal past, renewing contact with crucial points, a journey into time and space refreshing the meaning of his own being."

explore the possibility, I would argue that parenthood may help facilitate a return to one's childhood and hence have a bearing on creativity.[8]

An Opportunity to Revisit Earlier Developmental Stages

Erik Erikson (1963) has identified eight developmental stages, each characterized by a specific crisis to be resolved. His epigenetic theory of development proposes that the resolution of each stage affects the resolution of all further ones. Erikson further assumes that no one ever completely resolves any of the crises of development and that a certain amount of work on each stage both precedes and follows each critical period. Thus, while the developmental tasks of adulthood are easier to the extent that the earlier crises have been effectively resolved, it is also possible to fill in the cracks in later life. Erikson (1963: 250) talks about the role of institutions for stages of growth and development:

> Each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society, and this for the simple reason that the human life cycle and man's institutions have evolved together . . . .
>
> The parental faith which supports the trust emerging in the newborn, has throughout history sought its institutional safeguard (and, on occasion, found its greatest enemy) in organized religion. Trust born of care is, in fact, the touchstone of the "actuality" of a given religion. All religions have in common the periodical childlike surrender to a Provider or providers who dispense earthly fortune as well as spiritual health; some demonstration of man's smallness by way of reduced posture and humble gesture; the admission in prayer and song of misdeeds, of misthoughts, and of evil intentions; fervent appeal for inner unification by divine guidance; and finally, the insight that individual trust must become a common faith, individual mistrust a commonly formulated evil, while the

---

[8]Yet it is also important to emphasize the ways in which caring for children mitigates against the possibility of creativity in the caretaker. In particular, the constant interruption of children makes focused concentration virtually impossible.

> individual's restoration must become part of the ritual practice of many, and must become a sign of trustworthiness in the community.

One of the major findings of my research is that the presence of children provides parents with another opportunity to engage earlier stages of growth, another set of "moments of decision between progress and regression, integration and retardation" (Erikson, 1963: 270-271). Parenthood as an institution provides an opportunity for a "reinforcement of infantile gains" (Erikson, 1963: 250). In other words, children can, by their presence and their behavior, return parents to critical stages where they may again find themselves at developmental turning points.

In a sense, what this means is that children can serve as "therapists" for their caretakers. Nowak and Harlow (1975) report that adult monkeys suffering social damage from previous isolation can attain relatively normal behavior patterns if they are placed with infant "therapists." Somehow the presence of the juvenile monkeys heals the damaged adults. There is also some evidence that pets may function as therapists for their owners. Recent evidence from experiments using pets with disturbed children suggests that some of these effects have to do with "taking care" of something or someone--perhaps in a way that they themselves were not cared for. Neither the pet nor the monkey studies focused on the possibility that the curative effects result from the provision of opportunities revisit unresolved stages of development. The possibility exists though that this is one of the mechanisms accounting for the success of such ventures.

Returning to humans, it seems that children have the capacity to precipitate either a mending, "filling-in" process in their parents;

or a rending, dissolving one. I found examples of both in the interviews. Those studies based on actual data fall largely on the rending, dissolving side. Most point to the role of children as precipitants of mental illness in parents. (See, for example, Bakan, 1971; Zilborg, 1931; and Wainwright, 1966.) On the other hand, more abstract, theoretical formulations (see, for example, Benedek, 1969) fall more on the mending side. These latter are, however, seldom grounded in empirical work. Parenthood in these writings is seen as a fulfilling enterprise: it enhances adult psychological functioning.

Since there is already a good deal of data on the connection between mental illness in parents and having children who are at particular developmental stages, and since I found more evidence of positive rather than negative effects in this area, I concentrated this chapter on the mending, filling-in, ego enhancing aspects of parenthood. My focus is on how children, in particular, provide opportunities for adults to re-engage earlier stages of development.

Even in a relatively small sample such as mine, I found a variety of references to getting a second chance at growing up. These ranged from intense, life-altering experiences to simple pleasures. My focus here is on the ways this access allowed parents to make up for lost time, fill-in the spaces in poorly resolved developmental stages. While a few parents did talk indirectly about the trouble they had with their children during infancy, it seems likely that their difficulties resulted from the particular conditions under which mothers mothered in the seventies: alone, in isolated households. In any case, on this topic the parents talked very little about the negative effects and

instead spoke of the ways that revisiting the earlier stages helped them to grow.

Before leaving this issue, however, it is important to underscore the degree to which this access to childhood, and, in particular, this chance to revisit earlier developmental stages, is fraught with uncertainty. As such, it is similar to therapy, but unlike therapy, the degree of uncertainty over the possible outcomes is far more extreme. In therapy, one is guided by someone whose own needs are supposed to be ignored. In families, the children as well as the parents have needs. Therapy is guided and arranged by someone who knows the territory. Parenthood (at least with the first child in middle class America in the seventies) is a journey into unknown regions where neither the leader nor the led know what will happen (though the leader may think s/he knows and others expect s/he will).

The most frequently mentioned result of this chance to revisit childhood involved a chance to acknowledge parts of the self that had been suppressed as a child. Having children and providing for them a full range of activities, allowed parents, in the process, to expand their own repertoires and to incorporate parts of themselves that had been ignored or that had been unacceptable to their own parents or to the larger society when they were children. In caring for children, people who grew up at a time when sex-role prescriptions were more rigid had the opportunity to expand the boundaries of permissible behavior. The first speaker below is a part-time secretary and the second is a university professor. Both have preschool children:

> I think I differ a lot from my mother. My mother never did anything with us kids like sports . . . [but] I probably do as much as [my husband does . . .] . . . [as a young girl]

> I was really squelched athletically because . . . after you got out of third or fourth grade there was nothing for a girl to do athletic-wise.
>
> I've learned how to go to dancing class, she's allowed me . . . . I was quite happy that I had girls, because I was always quite concerned that I was never a machismo man. I always like ballet and I always like music and I like flowers and interior decorating and I like furniture . . . you worry about yourself, you know, and so you have daughters and therefore now you can, I can go to dancing class with them, and watch them and feel quite relaxed about it.

For others, the perceived gains of revisiting the earlier stages had more to do with what they saw as very basic deficiencies in their background. Having children gave them a second chance to experience the close physical contact that they had not gotten as children themselves. One mother told me she rocked her children a lot because she remembered wanting to be rocked herself. A mother of four (from the pilot interviews) said she learned a lot about physical affection from holding babies:

> But to have that close contact with a little living thing . . . influenced me a whole lot . . . a real high for me nursing him, cuddling him.

The most striking example of a person who benefitted from the return to earlier stages came from a mother with four closely spaced children. When they were all preschoolers, she began to realize that the impoverishment of her current life went back to the physical and emotional deprivations of her own early life. She said:

> I used to be exceedingly rigid . . . and seeing the kids as little spontaneous beings, you know, just influenced me a lot. I can remember being out on the playground . . . and there was this big sewer pipe and all the kids would get down and scurry through it and I wanted to do that so badly . . . I finally brought myself to do it and felt so high . . . . [Around this same time] I started crawling around on the floor with the kids in the daytime and just [started] trying to do things like that that the kids would do . . . I think [copying the kids] did a lot.

She was doing for herself what therapists do with adults who have had trouble with earlier stages of development. Delacato (1963), in working with reading disabled children, proposed that their problems could be traced to skipping stages of development--in particular he noted that a high proportion of such children had failed to go through the creeping stage. His therapy involved teaching school age children to creep and requiring them to go through a certain number of hours of "creeping practice" each day.

A father typified the feelings of many parents when he said:

> I think that for me, [our daughter] growing up with us has really allowed the child side of me to grow up.

In writing this chapter I was struck by a recurring thought. On the one hand, one really can't have adults going around sliding in the park all day and believing in the tooth fairy and Santa Claus. Yet, being able to participate in such fantasies does seem to add an important dimension to adult life. I noticed that I somehow "approved" of adults participating in myth perpetuation for the benefit of children and I approved of people going down the slide with their children. Yet at the same time, I was aware of being appalled when adults took certain of their own myths too seriously (e.g., by playing Dungeons and Dragons or by joining such groups as The Trekkies, The Society for Creative Anachronism, or The Tolkein Society).

What children offer, and, in a way, almost guarantee, is that adults can participate in some unadult activities, behaviors, and ways of experiencing the world without being consumed by the experience. Children provide "a little window in and out." Thus, the entree provided by children is more bounded than the others and keeps adults' participation

within limits. Thus parents, because their children need them to be parents, cannot become totally absorbed in being childlike--or rather, they must be childlike and responsible at the same time. Playing with children allows a certain measure of abandon, foolishness and heightened affect without the danger of becoming totally lost in such ways.

CHAPTER FIVE

CLOSE-UP MIRRORS: SEEING ONESELF IN ONE'S CHILD

> One way that the child influences you is you kind of see a mirror.
> --mother of a three-year-old boy

Being around a child who is both like one once was and becoming like one is now leads to certain kinds of changes in parents. One's children provide close-up mirrors of the self,[1] of the adult self now and of the child one once was. Caught unawares, we are struck by seeing ourselves in a new light; by the shock that comes with removing (if only for a moment) taken for granted frames of meaning and leaving us exposed without the usual peripheral cues. The shock is similar to the feeling one gets looking at a home movie, hearing for the first time one's own voice on a tape recorder, or catching a reflected glimpse of oneself hurrying by a store window.[2] These sudden glimpses present pictures of ourselves and our circumstances that are quite different from what we see when we deliberately look in the mirror or think about ourselves in

---

[1] In a similar manner, being a parent makes it more likely that we will see ourselves in our own parents. Many of those interviewed mentioned this.

[2] These new glimpses may be more or less "true" than our original notions--the truth or falsity of the image is not what matters here. Rather it is the surprise that comes with seeing what we didn't expect to find that is significant for this research.

our heads.[3] At those deliberate inspection times where there is time to pose and arrange the view to be presented, we are more likely to see what we expect to see.[4,5] However, the close-up reflections provided by children generally have much more in common with the sudden glimpse, the overheard recording and the photograph taken when one is unaware. They do more than simply show us how others see us; for what others say they see can be screened out in many ways. It is easy to dismiss, if not ignore, how others see us. The old childhood taunt, "It takes one to know one," represents one of our early attempts to screen out those observations of others which we find discomforting. Later, we more sophisticatedly say, "Oh, you're just projecting." Adults also have the option of covering up their shortcomings by denial, turning them into valued qualities, or by simply ceasing to notice them. Their sudden appearance in one's children removes that protective screen. The mirrors provided by children lack this mediating quality.

---

[3]A feminist singer introduced one of her songs by saying that she came to be a feminist not because of the injustices she had seen happening to her in her life, but when she saw it happening to her daughter. Thus her own circumstances (which over the years had taken on a taken-for-granted quality) were transformed when she saw her daughter subject to them.

[4]See Goffman (1959) for an elaboration on adult strategies for maintaining a particular image.

[5]At age 11, in the sixth grade, I was horrified to see myself in a home movie. Tall for my age, I was walking up a hill very hunched over, trying, I guess, to appear shorter, I resolved immediately to stand up straight, something no amount of previous nagging had been able to effect. Before seeing the movie, I had insisted that I was <u>not</u> walking hunched over. Children have this same capacity: when we see ourselves in them we see things we would never "see" if others told us.

In a related, yet different, way, we see ourselves in our children because they allow us to regress. Psychoanalytic theorists have discussed maternal regression, explaining "how some adults--that is mothers--come to re-experience these originally infantile states" (Chodorow, 1978: 87). Chodorow (1978: 86) quotes Olden, who writes that the mother "gives herself up and becomes one with [her new infant]." It appears from my interviews that (momentarily at least) parents of older children as well see their children as themselves and vice versa.

A large number of parents (71 percent) reported seeing reflections of themselves in their children. These responses were entirely spontaneous--there were no questions about seeing oneself in a child on the interview schedule. This suggests that the issue is an important one for parents. Indeed, for some parents this reflection was seen as the one best or worst thing about being a parent. Parental response to this reflection varied across parents and across situations. The reflections were sometimes welcome, sometimes not; sometimes conscious, sometimes not; and resulted in both joy and pain.

In some cases, parents reported merely a simple observation: they looked at the child and saw themselves. For some the conscious experience ended there. It made them neither angry nor pleased; it led them to no new insights. It may be that the reflected view of themselves did have repercussions, but they did not tell me about it. The remarks of this mother of three are illustrative:

> Well, he's very stubborn and he wants just what he wants when he wants it, and he's a second child and I was a second child and I can remember that same kind of frustration. People would make what I considered impossible demands on me and then I would just think of ways to outwit them and I can just see him doing it . . .

One mother of a four-year-old boy explicitly denied that the reflections had any effect on her:

> You see your own mannerisms and attitudes reflected back at you, you hear your own words repeated back at you, you hear how you sound . . . . You see yourself relfected . . . he's fairly bossy and officious with other children . . . which is partly just being four years old and partly me . . . . I see [the reflection] but I'm not sure it changes my behavior, I'm not really that introspective a person and since I think I'm reasonably happy with myself I don't have any great motivation to make conscious efforts to change myself.

Most parents seemed to come upon these reflections unexpectedly, one reported <u>trying</u> to see the similarities:

> I was the second of three and I often look at [him] and look for myself in him cause he's the second.
> --father of two preschoolers

Many of the instances of seeing the self in the child had to do with seeing the self one had been during one's own childhood. Some parents reported that this seemed to make them better parents. One mother felt she was more understanding of her daughter's negative, contrary impulses because she had been like that when she was a child. She remembered having the same feelings but not being allowed to express them. Because of this she was able to allow her daughter to express them more directly. Others, like the following mother of preschool girls, provided certain activities for their children because that was what they remembered liking:

> I remember doing the same thing for my mother [bringing in flowers]--she always liked them and put them on the table . . . . I think maybe as a parent I tend to foster things that I liked.

A father who did student teaching in an elementary school felt that being able to remember his own childhood made him a better teacher.

Certainly the psychoanalytic literature suggests that it is precisely this capacity for regression, this ability to remember having

been a cared for child, that allows parents to parent. Nancy Chodorow (1978: 87) writes about this:

> Analysts explain how some adults--that is mothers--come to reexperience these originally infantile states. They imply that empathy, or experiencing the child as continuous with the self may grow partially out of the experience of pregnancy and nursing (though non-biological mothers make fine parents). However, their major argument is that (with or without pregnancy) the ability to parent an infant derives from having experienced this kind of relationship oneself as a child and being able to regress--while remaining adult--to the psychological state of that experience. (emphasis mine)

The parents I interviewed, although talking about far more conscious processes than those referred to by Chodorow, echoed this same theme. The children themselves, by drawing their parents back to childhood, made them into better parents.

Besides contributing to better parenting skills, the experience of seeing in one's child the child one had once been was reported as leading to new insights about oneself. Some felt reassured--the doubts they had had about themselves while growing up were dispelled when they saw their own child doing the same things. This father of a four-year-old explains a typical reaction:

> Watching someone develop from absolutely nothing, and all of a sudden become interested in things that I remember myself being interested in at that age, is a great reassurance. It's so nice knowing that all of a sudden I wasn't crazy when I was young--there really are important things in piles of seeds you bring home . . . .

Others, as I described in the previous chapter, realized more the extent of their own early problems as they confronted the same ones in their own children. The father of a four-year-old girld told me:

> I've wondered what I did with my anger for years and years and wondered at what point did I stop being angry? What did my mother do with my responses? . . . it's a real question for [my daughter]--she has a great deal of difficulty

> expressing anger toward adults . . . and so that led me to wonder what did my mother do [that led me to stop realizing that I was angry].

On the other hand, for some parents these new insights into themselves came more from the present, from seeing their own behaviors and personality traits reflected in their children. A lawyer with a five-year-old daughter gained insight into himself from watching and listening to her. A mother, finishing up a Ph.D. program, told me about the effects of her preschooler on her:

> Because they copy you so much I think they make you more aware of your own idiosyncracies . . .

Some came to see things about their own behavior that they had not realized before. For some this came in the form of projection; they thought about what their child might become and realized they were expressing fears about themselves:

> I want her to be a well-rounded human being without being too male or too female . . . every now and then I'll think: 'gosh, I hope she's not a dyke,' . . . you know, stupid things . . . I have those tendencies myself . . . [she's] just a mirror.

Or, seeing unacceptable behaviors in their children they realized that probably the children learned those at home:

> Maybe she's reflecting some subtle things on our part that we aren't even particularly aware of and that's disturbing . . . the point is she observes what we do and the fact is we don't associate with blacks [even though we do not consider ourselves to be prejudiced].

Mostly, parents reported seeing their own present and past defects in their children. One father, who had raised his teenage son alone, knew already what his own shortcomings were. Seeing them being incorporated into his son, however, was the spur to reevaluation and change.[6]

---

[6]The effects on parents of trying to set a good example is the topic of a later chapter.

He told me:

> Probably the main thing is because I'm so sensitive to what goes on externally to me is that I've always picked up very quickly how [my son] was acting and being and I'd see those parts within me and that probably did more than anything else to make me really force myself to change . . . . there were never any that I didn't know existed before . . . but I would now be so threatened that I couldn't any longer say 'this isn't important and I don't need to work on this.' . . . Now I had to say, 'I've got to do something right away.' Smoking is a very good example . . . . One of the things that I used [in order] to stop smoking was [my son] . . . If he smoked I would see myself in him. I would see a habit there that I would be able to get by with as long as I didn't see it in another person who was . . . copying me. (emphasis mine)

Seeing one's defects (or those of a spouse) in a child sometimes led to new understandings. A working mother with a master's degree explained how she became more understanding both of her husband's idiosyncracies and of the difficulties her own shortcomings presented to other people:

> One way that the child influences you is you kind of see a mirror . . . I can see myself in certain things. He wakes up in the morning like an absolute bear and it's half an hour before he can be talked to . . . and that's the way I am and it has helped me to understand how hard it is for other people to deal with me cause I have to deal with him at a time when I feel the same way . . . . And I also see things my husband does reflected in him. They both tend to be extremely gregarious, always want other people around . . . and that's something that has kind of annoyed me in my husband . . . and seeing it in [my son] has sort of made it seem more like a natural thing to do . . . and so I find I can accept it better in both of them . . . .

In Slaughter of the Innocents (1971), David Bakan suggests that a major contributing factor in child abuse is seeing in the child those very traits one hates in oneself. This is precisely the theme of La Reine Morte by Montherlant (1967), a play in which a father kills off all the members of his family (not only his children) in an effort to exorcise his own flaws which he sees in them. The parents I

interviewed were quite explicitly aware of this. A mother with a four-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy explained:

> Probably the things we don't like [in ourselves] are probably most notable [in kids' imitations]. You see your own defects more . . . probably take it as criticism and maybe notice it more.

A university professor, for the most part ecstatic about having children, pointed to children's capacity to reveal one's own flaws as the worst thing about having children. He said:

> The thing that I dislike most about kids is when you see them doing things that you disliked in yourself.

Finally, a father in the pilot study explicitly summed up what many parents knew:

> That's the heart of child abuse--seeing negative things about themselves in their children.

In addition to the anger, parents also noted the <u>pain</u> they felt at having to "live through it two times." The father of two preschool girls talked about his oldest child's similarities to him and about the difficulty of seeing the same mistakes being made a second time.

> I was one of those people, even now, who will not try something unless I can be good at it . . . I don't want to fail and [she's] exactly that way: things she can do, she'll just dive in and do them. But other things she just doesn't want anything to do with them, won't even try. I find it intensely annoying because I know myself how that limited some of my growth, like in athletic things, cause I wouldn't even try them and now just to go play volleyball or something is a real effort for me; and my parents used to say, 'Oh, you'll regret it' . . . .

A woman with a five-year-old girl and a toddler had a similar reaction:

> Because my older girl unfortunately happens to be very much like what I was like as a young girl--I was very shy and very withdrawn and very slow to enter into things . . . I just want to say '. . . just go do it and you'll have such a good time'. . . I think it's hard because I can associate so much with her when I see her behavior and I know what she should do and I know what she shouldn't do and I

> also know that there's no way I can tell her that. She has to learn it on her own and that just kills me, it really does--to think that I have to live through it two times! Once was enough! Oh, that's awful!

Seeing their own shortcomings in their children made some people less patient parents. One father, a unversity administrator, told me about the source of his differential response to his two children:

> I have been much stricter with [Bill] than with [Andy] and I tend to pick on him more than I do on [Andy], partly because he's older and partly because he's like me . . . cause I can pick out things in me that I don't like and when I see him acting that way I want him to change that behavior.

His wife, a full-time homemaker, had the same reaction to the opposite child. She explained:

> [Andy] is just like me . . . only more so and he and I just go head on you know . . . . When we have a problem . . . I really get annoyed, angry . . . . I don't know if it's . . . just that I see him doing things that I try to work on in myself . . . . [My husband] has just the opposite reaction. He gets very annoyed with [Bill's] shortcomings which are the same as his own. [He] is perfectly delighted with [Andy] and doesn't have any trouble adapting to and putting up with him . . . [Bill] is very often a tearful child and that doesn't bother me, you know, I don't care. But [for my husband] it goes right to the quick: 'Stop crying!' he will say.

They had more patience with a child's problems which differed from their own, as the same mother quoted above told me:

> The areas where [Bill] is competent are the areas where I am not, you know, [so] I feel comfortable just letting him go . . . and where he does need help I feel very comfortable filling in some help or encouragement or whatever.

At the same time, parents sometimes liked best the children most like them despite the conflicts:

> We clash a lot more. Except that the fun times are greater--[Andy] and I are hot and cold, you know.

In addition, they felt they could empathize more with the one like

themselves.[7]

> We're so [similar], we think even alike, you know, which is kind of sad. I can see her . . . when she is acting up and I can see myself and the attitudes that she has I can feel them and I can understand how she feels real well. --mother of two preschoolers

The parents did not always see this increased empathy as a good thing however, especially when the similarity was between a mother and a daughter. This mother's concern was shared by others:

> [My son's] an altogether different person [than I am], while [my daughter]--I really know what she's thinking before she can even really [say it], which is sad for her.

Mothers, like this woman with two daughters, were glad when their daughters were different than themselves:

> So she looks absolutely wrong . . . . She has a round face, blue eyes, blond, curly hair--she's beautiful. But she doesn't look like me or [my husband]. [That] makes identification . . . with her difficult to me, because she's just this really totally foreign person. Um, her personality is very different from mine. She's a different child than I was . . . which is good for her, it really keeps me from really living my life in her . . . I think if she looked or acted more like me it would be bad for her ultimately. This is good that she's making the break now. (emphasis mine)

Chodorow[8] (and other psychoanalytic writers) theorize that it is daughters rather than sons that mothers have trouble seeing as separate from themselves. My interview data provide support for this in that no

---

[7]Research using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (based on the theories of Carl Jung) suggests that people choose friends whose "types" are similar to their own--people with whom they can empathize. One's children, obviously, cannot be chosen by "type".

[8]Chodorow (1978) reviews the psychoanalytic evidence for unique problems of separation and individuation between mothers and daughters. Her own analysis is that it is early childhood experience that accounts for the fact that women want to mother.

mothers[9] reported worrying when they and their sons were similar--even though they often reported similarities.

Finally, these shocks of recognition gave some parents a sense of generational continuity. A mother of two preschool girls told me:

> My mother was the same age when she had me and there's the same difference in age between me and my sister as between [my two children] . . . I think about it a lot.

The mother of a five-year-old boy explained:

> In a sense too when you have children you see yourself . . . seeing yourself all over again . . . you see them going through the same kinds of things you remember going through, the same sorts of anguish and the same happiness . . . and . . . you feel a sense of reliving your life through your kids.

Children provide close-up mirrors for their parents, reflecting back what the parents are now and reminding them of what they once were. This process results in images unlike those we generally have of ourselves--the images children provide are candid, surprising and, often, disturbing. Nor can these (often unfavorable) images be dismissed in the way others can. The parents in my sample gave extensive support to this. Their children, by acting as mirrors, reflected back to them parts of themselves they didn't know existed. Likewise, they cast new light on aspects of which parents were already aware. As a result, parents felt they were able to take better care of their children because of the empathy they experienced. In addition they gained new insight into themselves, were spurred to change some undesirable aspects of themselves, were made acutely uncomfortable, were given a new awareness of the continuity of generations, and were able to see their

---

[9]Nor did any fathers mention problems with a lack of separation and individuation with their sons, or daughters.

own lives as a continuous process. This process of seeing oneself in one's children has much in common with therapy--but its outcome is more problematical, less sure of a successful resolution. This same theme--the problematic nature of the outcomes of issues in parenthood as compared to therapy--emerges in the chapters on emotions and on access to the world of childhood.

PART III

BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of human parent-child relations is the length of time that children are dependent on adults. Unlike most creatures, human infants could not survive without an extended period during which adults cared for them. But more transpires than simple gains to the infant. This process of caretaking, the continuing day-to-day experience of preserving the life of a child, has certain consequences for the caretakers as well. Ruddick (1980: 5-7) sees this process as leading to certain types of thought:

> [A]ll thought arises in practices governed by interests . . . . Maternal practices are governed by interests in preservation, growth and acceptability . . . . Preservation is the most invariant and primary of the three . . . . Even when she lives with the father of her child or other women adults, even when she has money to purchase or finds available supportive health and welfare services, a mother typically takes herself and is taken by others to be responsible for the maintenance of the life of her child.

The three chapters in Part III address parental concern with the preservation of the child.[1] The impetus to make forced choices and

---

[1]Certainly all caretaking is not identical. To the degree that the practice of caretaking differs, the consequences will differ too. For example, teachers and nursery attendants are influenced by caring for children but in ways that are both different and less intense than those experienced by full-time parents. Even among mothers, there are certain variations, as Ruddick (1980: 8) notes:

> These three interests in the preservation, growth, and acceptability of the child are, so far as I can tell, species-wide interests shaping maternal practices . . . . [But] some mothers are incapable of interested participation in the

decisions, the factors that lead to new and heightened emotional experiences, the resultant feelings about one's own adequacy as a parent--all grow out of this concern.

---

practice of mothering because of emotional, intellectual, physical or economic disability. (In our society the very poor are often largely prevented from partaking in maternal practices while the very rich are excused from them.) Actual mothers have the same sort of relation to maternal practice as actual scientists have to scientific practice. As mothers or as scientists they are governed by the interests of their respective practices. But the style, skill, commitment, integrity, with which they engage in these practices differ widely from individual to individual.

CHAPTER SIX

CHILDREN AS PRECIPITATORS OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

> When you don't have children . . . you have no idea of the emotions they bring to you, things you never realized existed in you.
> --father of two preschool girls

> [Having a child brought] a lot more attention to my own emotions, cause . . . having a child around heightened it--heightened it for me: love, fear, anger . . . the basics.
> --father of a preschool boy

Although none of the questions on the interview schedule asked parents to talk about the emotions[2] involved in having children, 78 percent of them spontaneously mentioned that the process of being a parent elicited emotions of a different kind and degree than they had ever experienced before. As in the previously discussed matter of decision making, it appears that highly charged emotional situations are relatively uncommon for non-institutionalized adults in contemporary society.[3]

---

[2] I am using emotion in Hochschild's sense of "a bodily deepening of an idea or an image" (1975: 25).

[3] Exceptions include religious experiences and conversions, drug and war experiences and romantic love. Adults in mental hospitals may have experience with highly charged emotional situations. Group therapy may require the acknowledgement of strong emotions and the willingness to take a stand on issues. The latter is sometimes a condition of release--a sign of "health" and of the patient's ability to come to grips with "reality".

The amount and the quality of the love the parents I interviewed felt for their children surprised them. Many noted that it could not be compared to the love they felt for a spouse, for other relatives, or for children they had taught in day care centers or schools. At the other extreme, the anger and rage provoked by children astounded and frightened parents. They talked about this rage with respect and awe, and often with increased compassion for those parents who actually do harm to their own children. For many, the realization that they were indeed capable of a rage they had never imagined led to an increased sense of humility. Additionally, the love they felt for their children exposed them to new fears and feelings of vulnerability. Before looking at what one father called "the basics" (love, anger and fear) in detail, I want to explore what all three had in common.

The process of caring for a dependent child exposed parents to emotions that they didn't know existed. For some these may have been long forgotten emotions. A mother with two preschool girls talked about the new rage she felt. Her brother-in-law had told her it was not new, just forgotten:

> [He] said that he was sure I had felt that [rage] before, probably toward my own mother when I was [my daughter's] age but I don't remember it.

Others, like this mother of a 5-1/2 year-old girl, felt that children provided a release for potentials previously unrealized:

> The biggest change for me was the realization that you . . . can have so much caring and love for another person . . . [it] made me, not a better person, but a different person. Maybe a little bit more warm and caring . . . <u>It's like you've had the potential but you've never had any release for it before</u>. (emphasis mine)

Both the intensity and the kinds of emotions brought to the surface by children came as a surprise to most parents. They prefaced their remarks with: "I never expected!", "Who would ever have imagined?", "I've been surprised!" Most, like the mothers in the examples above and the father quoted at the beginning of this chapter, said these feelings were entirely new to them. At first, I suspected that those parents who mentioned these extremes of emotions were perhaps people whose whole emotional life was experienced (or at least described) intensely. As I talked with more parents, however, I realized that this emotional intensity, far from being attributable to certain personality styles, was in fact specific to something in the situation of being a parent. The emotional intensity that comes with children often took parents by surprise: the parents I spoke with saw these intense emotions as something previously unimaginable and presently unexplainable (as having almost the quality of a drug-induced state).[4] A father with two professional degrees spoke of his inability even to identify these new emotions:

> The thing that happens when you grow up is you learn to identify specific emotions, and what they do to you, and you learn to verbalize your emotions and isolate different sorts of feelings and realize that a certain response to a situation is a combination of different sorts of influences, and, uh, with kids I haven't got really to that point yet . . . where I can specifically identify my emotions--at present it's just a mess of emotions.

---

[4]The psychoanalytic literature would say that this is because parenthood activates emotions long-buried--emotions experienced in infancy before one had the names to associate with them. Schachtel's chapter "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia" (1959) theorizes about some of the reasons for this forgetting.

In a way, parents were returned to experiencing emotions "like a child," not just because seeing the child brought them back to their own childhood, but because children evoke emotions that can't be defined, understood and managed in the way adults can generally do with their emotions.[5] A mother likened the experience to visiting a psychiatrist or to taking drugs, neither of which she had done:

> It's almost as if you've experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows without any use of anything foreign or artificial--but you've actually experienced some strange emotions that I know for a fact I probably would never have experienced . . . those extremes of personality that you don't even know exist within you without going to a psychiatrist.

What interested parents the most was the intensity, the extremes of emotion which they now experienced:

> I feel a kind of anger toward my [three-year-old daughter] that I don't recall really feeling toward anybody ever.
> --a mother who used to teach nursery school
>
> There's nothing middle of the road--everything's extremely negative or extremely positive.
> --a mother at home full-time with a preschool boy and an infant girl

---

[5]Hochschild (1975: 6) speaks to this issue: "Many compositions together make up our inner mapping of the affective possibilities. It is a map of expectations, based on how we have arranged and categorized cues into discrete compositions. We then cast this map over the stream of raw feeling-experience. The map of compositions creates feelings from inchoate feeling . . . . By virtue of this map we make up distinctions between 'non-affective and affective' experiences defined as 'pure' tiredness, 'pure' sexuality, etc. We make up distinctions, too, between 'naturally available' emotions (feelings which are in the nature of human experience) and feelings which are not. For example, in some cultures homosexual attraction is thought to be unnatural or unavailable to most human beings. It is thus an experience not codified into a recognizable composition, even prior to the act of management of the imposition of external sanction. Our experience may or may not fit the map we cast over it. When experience fails to fit the pre-established categories, the individual may experience surprise or puzzlement . . . In my study some respondents described a search, not so much to detect, as to define already detected elements of experience--i.e., to define their feelings relative to a pre-existing understanding of available feelings and emotions." (emphasis in original)

> I have been to the extremes and back.
> --mother of two

One mother distinguished between the amount of impact on her behavior that came from various sources and the impact on the intensity of her feelings. Many things influenced her behavior but only her child altered her emotions so drastically:

> Maybe all those things [my work, my husband, my own past, my friends] have an equal impact on my behavior, [but] [my son] has more impact on the intensity of the feelings.

As I mentioned earlier, some parents equated these extremes of emotion directly with altered state of consciousness. Certain aspects of parenthood were described as peak experiences. Such aspects, mentioned by both men and women, were most frequently linked with the birth or nursing experience:

> The feeling of being pregnant, just creating something . . . Really it was a feeling of creation, wholeness, just something different than you ever, ever do . . . . [I] couldn't imagine another time in my life where I'm going to have that kind of peak experience.
> --mother of two preschool girls

> If anybody were to say to me what has been the most exciting experience of your life . . . I would have to say giving birth . . . . If you've even been somewhat awake during it all it has to be a rather mind-blowing experience to go through all that. To me that was just the heighth (sic) of everything . . . to see a life come out of your body.

The childbirth literature uses this peak language. It makes parents, especially mothers, expect to have such feelings and even to work for them. And it makes women worry or feel guilty if they do not have such experiences. This process is the same one described by Hochschild (1975).

Some of the mothers reported that this psychological high experienced during the birth altered them in various ways. Primarily it produced an awe for life as this high school teacher describes:

> I think having him and actually giving birth and all gives you more of a feeling for life that you really didn't think about before and it really, you're there watching the whole thing happen. It really strikes you then and kind of gives you an awe for life that you've never had before.
> --mother of a five-year-old boy

A woman with a 2-1/2 year-old girl said the experience changed her feelings about her mother.

> My relationship with my mother has changed considerably. It all happened the day after I had her, it was the actual birth experience . . . . I was just flying for two days . . . . I just felt this incredible current of energy going through my system and I knew that was what it was all about, I mean that's as close to life as you can get . . . . After that I just had this really strong feeling towards my mother.

Another mother, a university professor, noted that her scholarly productivity increased due to this psychological high:

> The feelings of elation I had as a woman having given birth . . . . the feeling of elation that I had in nurturing another human being . . . . was still strong enough that it gave me energy to produce intellectual work. I wrote about four articles in [my daughter's] first two years . . . and they were published--I haven't been able to reproduce that kind of productivity since.
> --41-year-old mother

Mothers were not the only ones who felt elated during the delivery or right after the birth. Greenberg (1974) writes about the enlarging effects of infants on fathers. The fathers I interviewed provided support for Greenberg's notions and for those of Klaus and Kennell (1976) on the importance of contact during the first few hours after birth for the quality of parent-child bonding. A father of two who is a university professor summed this up:

> I was there in the delivery room right there when they were both born and that is just the most fantastic emotion you have ever experienced . . . . It's just such an amazing feeling of relief and joy and happiness--it's like nothing else you've ever experienced and . . . it's just a beautiful experience, you just both start crying and it's difficult to

> say why you cry when the baby is born . . . it's [an] amazing sort of an emotion . . . . And then you hold the baby and it's just amazing . . . . I can remember them both [his children] wide-eyed looking at you [right after birth] . . . [I] always thought they were these little blah things until we had our own.

Speaking in a very different tone, but still awed at the impact, a second father (a businessman with two small children) describes what happened to him:

> I went through some tremendous emotional changes that happened so fast I could actually stand outside my own body and watch them happen . . . [this happened] in a period of 45 minutes to an hour and a half [after she was born].

This feeling of never-before-experienced ecstasy was not confined to the birth experience. Both mothers and fathers spoke of it repeatedly. These feelings, like those previously mentioned in this chapter, were difficult to describe. One parent told me "there's also a joy that goes along with having children that you can't explain to anyone that doesn't have children." Their efforts seemed similar to attempts to describe drug experiences to non-users--not even the words exist. Part of the difficulty is that the feelings experienced have not been codified (Hochschild, 1975). (The pregnancy literature is an exception to this.) Schachtel (1959) writes that we forget early childhood experiences because they have not been codified into the categories to which we have access as adults. The feelings described by parents could likewise not be translated into categories that adults without children could understand. A father of two, with joy clearly in his eyes told me: "[having kids is] a feeling of pure joy that I just can't describe in any other way." This feeling of joy will be discussed in more depth in the next section on "love".

Over and over, as the parents spoke, I felt they were describing storms in the supposedly calm sea of rational adult life--storms that upset their understanding of self and life, and of their feelings of control won (just recently in many cases) during adolescence. For some, this churned up seas in which they felt they might drown. For others it led to new levels of reorganization and understanding--of life, of themselves, of others. These drownings and re-orderings are best understood in the context of the particular emotions involved. As the father quoted at the beginning of the chapter said, having children brings up three emotions: "love, fear, anger . . . the basics." Despite their differences, all three have one thing in common: the kind and intensity of the emotional response surprises and/or shocks the parent and emerges as something previously unknown or even unimaginable.

Love

Parents were surprised by the kinds and intensity of love they felt for their children. Over one-third of the nursery school parents mentioned this spontaneously despite the fact that the interview schedule contained no questions about love. First they noted the surprise:

> I love them much more than I ever expected to, in a way that I never thought I would until I had them . . . . How could you love someone that much?
> --mother of two girls

Many tried to explain the difference in loving a child and other kinds of love one might experience. It was not the same as the love they had felt when teaching:

> You know, I always liked kids, I have always been a nursery school teacher, um, so I expected to love my children. But the feeling of protectiveness and just this sort of all-encompassing sort of feeling--it's much stronger and different than I expected . . . . I didn't expect it to be that

> different [than liking the nursery school kids]. I expected it to be similar but maybe stronger. But it isn't even similar, it's entirely different.
> --mother with two preschool girls

Nor was it the same as the love for a spouse as this 31-year-old mother with a son and a daughter explained:

> There's something about when she wakes up from a nap sometimes and she just looks out the window and the sun's kind of coming in on her face, I just, I just feel like this is what the great artists were trying to capture . . . . I don't get that way about my husband when I see him waking up from a nap--not at all!

Her sentiments were reflected by another mother, a graduate student with a part-time job:

> The biggest change for me was the realization that you can, that you can have so much caring and love for another person--which is different from [for] your husband.

Fathers, too, had these feelings. A university professor with two children said:

> For the first year I really couldn't wait to get up in the morning to see her . . . just really an excitment about getting out of bed that I hadn't felt in a long time, maybe since I was a kid myself . . . . I feel very lucky these days and it's because of the kids . . . . I don't think I've had that feeling of luckiness before in quite that way.

One of those most touched by the experience was a man who had cared for a relative's infant for several months alone. He now had a 2-1/2 year-old boy of his own, but the earlier full-time fathering experience had made a deep impression on him:

> I have really fond memories of it, it was a really beautiful experience, really kind of a touching experience . . . . It was mostly just him and I alone . . . I got pretty attached to him.

For those with more than one child there was an amazement that it was possible to love the second one as much as the first. A university professor father spoke about this:

> [You wonder] could you love the second one as much as you could love the first one? . . . [my wife] was very worried about this . . . [but] there's just no doubt--it was just almost automatic.

A mother with a 3-1/2 year-old girl and a baby boy had the same feeling:

> I'm overwhelmed with the amount of love that I can have . . . to me it's amazing that when you get that second one that there's extra there . . . . I think that's a beautiful part to know that there's always more love in yourself.

Sometimes, however, parents don't love both children equally yet feel they should. A mother confided that "It's a little uncomfortable to know that I don't have the same intensity of feelings for both of them." Some of the difficulty of being a parent lies in this effort to match "actual" feelings with the ones demanded by the situation. Hochschild (1975: 9-11) writes about this problem in a general way:

> The third social act performed upon feelings is the management of them--the shaping, modulating, inducing, and reducing of them through feeling-work. Feeling-work is the deliberate act of trying to feel what we think we should feel in a given situation. It is the social act of trying to move experience to coincide with feeling rules. It has two sides. On one hand, we sometimes try not to feel an emotion or feeling we think we ought not to feel (e.g., supression). On the other hand, we sometimes try to feel an emotion or feeling we think we ought to: i.e., try to fall in love.
>
> Feeling work is not simply the governance of expression, but of feeling itself. Situations often place strains on people which are experienced as demands for emotional display of feelings we may not immediately experience. We can momentarily hold up a facade to the world and display the appropriate emotion. But the strain of upholding one expression with quite another underlying feeling is too much for continual daily wear. Thus, there is often a deeper effort at moving feeling itself to fit the expression thought to be appropriate to the role and occasion.

Since families are a place of constant contact, the strain of upholding facades of appropriate emotions is difficult, and results in a large amount of "feeling-work" there. This is another reason why parenthood tends to evoke such powerful emotions.

The realization of the intense love they felt for their children led many parents to a new appreciation of their own parents. One mother felt that without children, a person could never really understand the love their own parents had had for them:

> Almost instantaneously after I had mine, I felt real bad, because I realized how much love there is of a parent for a child . . . . I think when you realize how much you love your child, that's probably how much your parents loved you and you just didn't realize it. [People who don't have children] love their parents but yet they . . . don't realize how much love their parents really had for them.

A working mother with a 2-1/2 year-old girl summed up many themes--the difference in loving a child versus a spouse, the new appreciation of parents, and the way the love carries over to other children (which is discussed in the section on "Fears and Vulnerabilities"):

> If I don't see [my daughter] for a while, my heart starts aching . . . I would give my husband up in a minute . . . compared to her . . . . This type of love, of yearning that you have has really shed a lot of light on how my parents must have felt protecting me . . . . Of course that type of feeling . . . now has also carried over . . . [to] when I see someone else's child [and I never had that feeling before].

Most of the literature on the parent-child relationship points to the importance <u>for the child</u> of feeling loved and wanted early in life. The positive functions of loving <u>for the adult</u> tend to be ignored. Several functions may be posited. First, the parents I interviewed reported that children bring out the capacity for love in adults more effectively than do other people or other situations. The mother quoted near the beginning of this chapter said, "It's like you've had the potential but you've never had any release for it before." Another mother, who felt she and her husband had serious problems, felt that the child's need for love and security had forced them to get their own emotional lives in order. In particular, she was amazed that the

child allowed them to love at times when they both felt incapable of it:

> We've given her the warmth sometimes when we were feeling horrible about each other and didn't know where [that warmth] was coming from--it was almost like opening up a vein. (emphasis mine)

Another mother explained that loving a husband was not enough--she needed to give more love:[6]

> I found that when there was just my husband and I, I needed a lot more love--both I needed to give more and I needed to receive more than he was capable of giving. And with the children I don't have that problem any more now. Because they demand a lot and they give a lot so they answered a personal need for me.

Some saw this happen to their own parents. A woman here is talking about her own father:

> In a lot of ways I think I made my father more caring and more demonstrative.

One mother felt that what children do is to "provide opportunities to care about other people intensely."

The second aspect of what loving does for adults concerns self-esteem. Since the capacity for love is a valued trait in our culture, having a chance to love may make a person feel more whorthwhile.[7] In this sense, being loving is seen as a symptom of mental health.

---

[6]Nancy Chodorow, in "Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots" (1976), traces out some reasons for this. Because of the structure of families, (everywhere women are the mothers) boys and girls grow up in different psychic environments. This results in adults who have different personalities and different capacities for love.

[7]As I will discuss in the next section, children also bring out the capacity for rage and anger, thus leading to feelings of decreased self-esteem.

Parents talked about feeling that since having children they had become better people in certain ways. A father told me:

> Along with the patience, I think emotionally it's [having a child] probably affected me. Maybe I have a little more tender outlook . . . . I don't know . . . exactly how to say this [maybe I have a] softer, tender kind of feeling toward things in general.

A mother of four high school children who felt she had never been a very social person said:

> I think you must be a warmer person too because you have had a lot of giving of your love to someone else. I'm still pretty inhibited with other people . . . but more comfortable than I would have been without children.

Another mother echoed those feelings:

> I guess with my younger child I see a positive influence [on me] . . . . There's a real warmth there that I never felt with any other person . . . but I guess that's been a positive influence in learning how to love someone.

The sense of being a more worthwhile person was common in the interviews. Two examples, the first from a working mother with two children and the second from a father interviewed during the pilot study, show this feeling:

> The feeling of, um . . . after you've been sitting in the rocking chair and holding a child who's had an earache and you rock them and they finally fall asleep in your arms--that kind of love and compassion and that kind of feeling that you've made a difference . . . in another person's life and you so rarely experience that with people outside your intimate family group and you really don't experience that maybe once or twice in a lifetime with your husband or . . . other person where you go through some type of tragedy together. But the severity of illness and your child's experiencing pain give you that, that intimacy and the joy that you can't really experience many other ways.
>
> Well, I think that positively there's probably a very basic way in which I felt some . . . more sense of meaning in my life. For example . . . one night when [my daughter] had some kind of congestion and couldn't sleep and just to hold her so that she could sleep for several hours was to feel you were doing a good thing; that somehow the cosmos

> needed me so to speak; that there was something in the world where I could be useful. . . children can give you a sense of being useful.

On a third level, one might argue that the fact of loving a child in and of itself causes good mental health. What many parents said in the interviews is that children make it possible to love with abandon in a way that seldom if ever happens with other adults. In the same way that Marx would say that we create our own humanity by doing non-alienated work, it may be that we create a part of our humanity by actualizing our capacity for love. Children, to the extent that they are releasors of that capacity for love, make us more fully human. This is not to say that children are the only way to express love--they simply "give it to you ready made."[8]

Anger, Rage, and Resentment

In contrast to sentimentalized notions of the family as a place of happiness and love, the actual lived-in experience is characterized by other emotions as well. Despite the fact that no questions on the interview schedule pertained to anger, rage, or resentment (nor even to emotions in general), 32 percent (19/59) of all the parents interviewed spontaneously described ways that their own experience and understanding of these particular emotions had been changed by having children. In particular, children sometimes activated an intense rage that few parents had thought themselves capable of. In the words of the father

---

[8]Nuns, for example, do not have children, but are supposed to feel compassion and love for everyone. Thus, their situation would have much in common with the situation of parents. They, like parents, would be required to do a lot of feeling-work (Hochschild, 1975) since there are strong clear feeling rules for nuns which are often at odds with what ordinary people "really" feel.

quoted at the beginning of this chapter, having children brings up emotions, and "then they're up and I have to look at them." This "looking at them" meant many things for parents. For some it was a chance to explore the sources of their rage. For others it was a chance to understand themselves and their parents better. For many, seeing in themselves the potential for child abuse gave them a certain sense of humility coupled with an understansing of abusive parents that they could not have imagined before. Other parents, while not feeling rage at their children, learned about their own anger by seeing rage in their children. Still others became angry for their children rather than at them, things they were willing to endure for themselves, they could not bear to think of happening to their children. Finally a few parents spoke not of rage, but of a smoldering resentment toward their children that developed as the years of parenthood went by.

The Surprise and the Intensity

The intensity of the rage parents felt toward their children was reported over and over again. Sometimes the same parent would describe these feelings repeatedly, incredulous that s/he has actually experienced such rage. Feelings of love within the family are recognized as legitimate; feelings of anger (especially when these are towards children) are not. Arlie Hochschild (1975) describes the "feeling rules" we use in "attending to, codifying and managing feelings." These processes were evident in the parent interviews. Parents spoke of not expecting to have certain feelings, of not wanting to have those feelings, and of trying to change them. Anger (especially when it approached rage and especially when it was directed at very young children) was the most

commonly "managed" feeling reported by parents. Their emphasis in talking with me (as it was in reporting feelings of love), was on the intensity of their anger and on the surprise they felt at discovering that in themselves. A child counselor, the mother of one four-year-old boy, conveys this sense of surprise:

> I have been surprised, um, at the intensity of the feeling of being a parent . . . surprised . . . that I have gotten as angry as I have: that being a parent could involve so much anger . . . . I didn't expect that, to feel that [anger] in myself.

Her husband had expressed similar feelings when I interviewed him the previous evening:

> . . . when he was a baby, I really surprised myself, um, I've never, you know, I've never really hurt him, but I could understand why somebody could get to that point very easily.

A former nursery school teacher with a 3-1/2 year-old and a baby spoke about being upset by seeing that rage in herself:

> So I find a kind of anger that I haven't notice in myself before . . . [and it] upsets me a lot. I don't like this kind of rage that I see in myself . . . . I could wring her little neck sometimes, you know, and I don't like that.

Resentments

Other parents spoke not about anger but about resentments. Since mothers bear most of the burden of childcare (even in this relatively egalitarian-oriented sample), it is not surprising that the bulk of the resentments came from them. The anger described earlier was immediate, tied to specific situations. The resentment was a response to the continuous day-to-day responsibility of caring for children. The mother of two teenage boys (the first speaker below) and another mother with much younger children offer typical examples of this feeling:

> . . . as a result then of what I've had to deal with, just to be really honest with you, [there] has been a resentment of them having gotten in the way of this kind of growth and development.
>
> I feel like I've got little strings hanging off me that are sort of pulling on me and . . . at times I really resent it and I look at people who are childless and think, 'Boy! That really looks good!'

One exception to this was a father, the husband of the woman in the previous example. He felt that he had become a "better" person emotionally through being a parent but that the experience was for the most part (especially in terms of his intellectural life) a bad one:

> I feel very strongly that children have stunted my growth . . . I'm terribly frustrated because our choice has been to raise kids.

Sources of the Anger

Parents attempted to locate the sources of the anger, rage and resentment and found them in belief systems that were out of line with reality, in personality similarities, and in displaced anger. In searching for the sources, they learned about themselves and about children.

For some, the source of the rage was identified as a discrepancy between their belief system (their sense of what children should be like) and the reality of children. The same child counselor cited earlier in this chapter, described what she thought was happening when she got really angry with her preschool son:

> I'm acting like I think it's really possible for a child to be perfect all the time and that's not possible so I have to change my beliefs so I can change the feelings that I get when he misbehaves--so I can look at it like: 'Oh yeah, here's [my son] misbehaving as is normal for a four-year-old.' Then I don't feel the enormous anger.

Her process--changing her feelings by changing what she thought--is what Hochschild (1975: 9) refers to as "feeling-work":

> The third social act performed upon feelings is the management of them--the shaping, modulating, inducing, and reducing of them through feeling work. Feeling-work is the deliberate act of trying to feel what we think we should feel in a given situation. It is the social act of trying to move experience to coincide with feeling rules. It has two sides. On one hand, we sometimes try not to feel an emotion or feeling we think we ought not to feel (e.g., supression). On the other hand we sometimes try to feel an emotion or feeling we think we ought to: i.e., try to fall in love.

For many parents, the source of the anger seemed lodged in misconceptions of what could be expected of children at certain ages. Some, like the mother speaking here, didn't know what to expect of babies:

> I wasn't patient . . . and I expected things from a baby that [were unrealistic] . . . he was just an infant.

Others were patient (and even indulgent) with infants but expected that older children should "shape up". The mother of a four-year-old boy felt angry and cheated:

> I think I had the belief that once he was three he was sort of a grownup or something; that all my patience should bear fruit: . . . it didn't and I felt cheated.

In a very similar vein the father of two children reported:

> There's an age where both [of the children] capture my heart and they can do no wrong at that period and it's someplace around two or three and I have all the patience in the world with them at that time . . . after that I feel that they ought to begin shaping up.

At other times the anger came not so much from unrealistic expectations for children at a particular age but from perfectionist hopes for the children. Here another father with two children talks about one source of his anger:

> I think we want the children to reach their highest potential whatever that may be and when we know they can do better we sometimes get angry.

Children provide safer, more available targets for anger than do spouses, bosses, and friends. The parents I interviewed spoke of displacing their anger in this way. Sometimes it was anger from long ago "meant" for one's own parents as shown in this example from a mother of two:

> [my brother-in-law] said that he was sure I had felt that rage before, probably toward my own mother when I was [the age my daughter is now].

More often it was anger at a spouse. All of these were from women. The first is from the mother of a four-year-old, the second from a woman with four children, ages 8-16:

> I also identified that a lot of times when I was acting angry toward [my son], I was really angry toward my husband and . . . it was easier to be angry with my kid, cause he couldn't hurt me back.

> I get much more angry with [my daughter] and her bad faults that are my husband's same bad faults because I feel subconsciously it's legitimate to get angry with her and not with him . . . .

In other cases, the anger was not displaced onto the child from another person, but rather took the form of anger at what the child could do that one had been denied as a child:

> I might even be angry at [my son] because maybe he's getting to do things I didn't get to do.

That most of the analyses in this category were from women may reflect the extent to which middle-class American women's expression of anger has been constrained and edited. (Confounding this is the fact that there were more women than men in the sample.) At the same time, however, men too mentioned feeling more angry at children than at other

people. Implicit in their responses was the suggestion that somehow in other relationships they were able to control their rage much more easily--that there was something about the parent/child relationship that cut loose those controls. One father made the distinctions explicit:

> I can get angry with him much faster than with anybody [else].

For others it seemed that the anger emerged from trying to deal with a child whose personality was like their own. Two mothers--the first with two young boys and the second a high school counselor with two teenagers--spoke about this problem:

> [My son] is just like me only more so and [he] and I go head on you know . . . . When we have a problem . . . I really get annoyed and angry, and I don't know if it's if I just see him doing the kinds of things that I try to work on myself . . . .
>
> When [my daughter] and I get into confrontations, they're real douzies!

This over-identification with a child and the confusion of anger at the self with anger at the child (as shown in the first example above) has been cited as one source of child abuse (Bakan, 1971). This was mentioned earlier in more detail in the Chapter on Children as Mirrors.

Increased Understanding

Some of those interviewed reported that they now understood their own parents' anger in new ways. Many mentioned this, but a young mother provided the most graphic report of her new understandings. As she spoke I could "see" her mother emptying the drawers, and feel the twin emotions of wonder and understanding that the daughter described:

> My mother . . . used to really lose it. [I used to think], 'Wow, look at Mom, she is crazy! . . . she's really gone bezerk this time.' . . . I've seen more of that in myself

> now . . . . There was the time that my mother came storming in and said, 'You want a messy room? Well, I'll give you a messy room!' [She] took all my drawers out and dumped them on the floor. That incident has left me in wonder for low these many years--until now. Now I can understand it: How someone could be driven to that behavior.

Understanding "how someone could be driven to that behavior" also led to a new understanding not only of their own parents but of child abusers. Seeing in themselves the capacity for violence against their own children, many felt compassion or at least understanding for those parents who do abuse their children. The parents I interviewed, many of them human service workers themselves, were humbled to find this capacity within themselves. A father who was a social worker noted:

> When he was a baby, I really surprised myself . . . . I've never really hurt him, but I could understand why somebody could get to that point very easily.

Another father, this one with two professional degrees, spent a lot of time with his two young daughters. He said:

> You can realize . . . how children get battered. [Even when you are financially secure and all] there are still times when kids can drive you nuts.

Mothers too spoke of realizing they were capable of hurting their children:

> I don't like to think of myself as a person capable of smashing a three-year-old, and though I've never done it I know that I could do it. I could wring her little neck sometimes.

> I can now say with some semblance of mind that I realize why some children are abused . . . . Not that I have ever abused but I can see where you could get to the point where you could take that kid and smack him and throw him against the wall.

Bakan (1971: 90) sees the helplessness of the child as eliciting abuse from "parents who are themselves overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness." Since we are seldom forced to confront helplessness in our

relationships with other adults, these deeply buried feelings of rage have few occasions to escape. We can generally demand that other adults take care of themselves, or, at the very least, that they not expect us to do so. In the final analysis we can usually leave another adult whose behavior is too helpless for our liking. The seriously ill (mentally or physically) are exceptions. Even then we generally have the option of having them cared for in an institution. Barrie Thorne (personal communication) suggests that the abuse of the old (both at home and in institutions) may spring from similar structural causes as that of infants.

In addition to an increased understanding of anger in others (in child abusers and in one's own parents), those interviewed felt they came to understand themselves better through confronting child precipitated anger. Both men and women learned from this experience, though sometimes in different ways. As suggested earlier, the experience sometimes helped women learn to accept and express anger. One mother was especially frank about this:

> I've learned a lot about my own emotions through him and there's a part of me that doesn't like to admit that because I think that's not fair to him . . . it's like I can practice on him, I can express anger far more directly, far more openly, um, and then it passes . . . that really transfers into my dealing with other adults.

Men, on the other hand, have traditionally been free to express anger directly. Through children, though, they became more critical of their responses--they began to do some of the "feeling work" traditionally done by women. The father quoted at the beginning of the chapter concerning "all the basic emotions", noted:

> I like to [keep] everything under control, you know, so it's [the strong emotions unleashed by his child] been a good learning experience.

Another father began to examine his own feelings a bit more:

> She'll say 'Well, why are you mad at me?' . . . then you step back and say 'Gees, well why am I mad? What's the problem here?' . . . it makes you come in contact and think about what you're doing more; think about your own feelings a little bit more.

Finally, parents also spoke of ways that dealing with the anger their children felt helped them understand themselves better. Here a father who is a university professor is talking about what he learned:

> I've wondered what I did with my anger for years and years . . . because it's a real question for [my daughter]--she has a great deal of difficulty expressing anger toward adults . . . and so that led me to wonder what did my mother do . . . so it leads to a personal exploration.

Fears and Vulnerabilities

> I think they make you vulnerable to feelings that you wouldn't have to feel obviously if you didn't have an association with children.
> --mother of two preschool girls

The project of caring for a child, of holding oneself and being held by others as responsible for the protection or preservation of a child, exposes parents to a wide range of vulnerabilities and fears. The parents I interviewed emphasized their pervasive awareness of how much might go wrong in this project. A father (overheard at a dinner party) summarized this sense of vulnerability in the face of one's children: "My children can hurt me more than anyone else." The ways in which children could "hurt" parents were varied, but most seemed related to the way that having children changed one's relationship to danger in the world. Both fathers and mothers said they were more aware of danger, more aware of "how fragile the whole thing is." At the same time, they were also aware of their own powerlessness in the face of these dangers.

This kind of vulnerability--where one is assumed to have complete power and yet is at the same time powerless to prevent things from going wrong--is similar to what Sarah Ruddick (1980) describes as resulting in "humility". In discussing the antecedents of maternal thinking, she suggests that "humility is a metaphysical attidude one takes toward a world beyond one's control." Mothers, she writes, using Adrienne Rich's (1977) words, engage in "world-protection, world-preservation, and world-repair." But they must do that protection, preservation and repair under circumstances beyond their control: children are born with birth defects, are subject to unpredictable influences after they are born, and, as one father said, "do get sick and die." Marx in a more general way makes this same observation about all people:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

Nowhere is this more true than with the experience of parents, especially mothers. This unpredictability and chance, in a project so close to one's self, produces a sense of humility whose roots Ruddick (1980: 19) summarizes:

> As the philosopher Iris Murdoch puts it: 'every natural thing, including one's own mind, is subject to chance . . . . One might say that chance is a subdivision of death . . . . We cannot dominate the world.' Humility which emerges from maternal practices accepts not only the facts of damage and death, but also the facts of independent and uncontrollable, developing and increasingly separate existences of the lives it seeks to preserve. 'Humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, it is a selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of virtues.'

In my own research I found precisely these same factors, even though I was not aware of Ruddick's work until nearing the end of my

project. The parents I interviewed described their new awareness of dangers and their feelings of helplessness in the face of these. While the possibility of a child's death was the most devastating fear, other fears existed as well. Some parents spoke of fearing that a child might "turn out badly" and thus reflect badly on them; others talked about children being sick or injured; still others about the fear that their children might stop loving them. Such vulnerabilities, it seems, occur very infrequently outside of parenthood. Certainly, it is possible that people may be deeply hurt by what happens to their proteges or to other products of their life's work. Yet such possibilities are unlikely for most people, if only because few people have the opportunity to be so invested in their work. Children alone retain the potential to make their parents vulnerable in such all-pervasive, global ways.

The themes of vulnerability and fear as they emerged in the interviews fell into three categories. First, parents felt they gained a new awareness of danger in the world. They felt vulnerable and even fearful in the face of these dangers and realized that their own ability to protect and preserve the child had finite limits. Second, they realized their own vulnerability should these protecting, preserving efforts fail. The possibility of the death of their child was, for most parents, the worst thing they could imagine. Finally, this feeling of vulnerability and fear with regard to what might befall one's <u>own</u> children seemed to result in a changed sensitivity to preserving and protecting all children--even those remote in time and place.

<u>Realization of New Dangers and of the Child's Need for Protection</u>

Psychoanalytic literature is replete with references to the need of the new mother for protection and tends to talk about this at times

in terms of irrational fears (see for example, Winnicott, 1958). Such accounts imply that these fears are the result of female hormones or of specifically female psychic processes. My research suggests that it is rather the practice of mothering that evokes such fears. Since both fathers and mothers mention this and since it appears to have such a clear ground in real dangers, the search for an explanation in hormones or in the early childhood experiences of women seems superfluous. Thus, in my interviews both mothers and fathers spoke of ways that having a child increased their awareness of the fragility of life and of the dangers that exist in the world. A mother of two preschoolers typified this:

> When [my daughter] was born I was immediately into a long period where I was very much aware of the world and the state that it was in and that really upset me . . . . I immediately fell in love with her and I didn't want her growing up in a world full of hate and war and killing. All of a sudden I realized how vulnerable she was . . . I had nightmares for a long time.

The father of two high school boys, his step-sons, echoes this sentiment:

> I have more of a feeling of how fragile the whole thing is.

Dangers that had always been present took on a new significance, "they approach much nearer," as this mother of two preschoolers explained:

> I've become so much more aware of evil influences in the world--bad people--they were always terrifying . . . but they approach much nearer with children to protect . . . . I've become so much more paranoid about protecting myself and my loved ones.

For some parents this new awareness took on an intensity that frightened them and even made them question their own sanity. A mother with two preschool girls described this:

> Another kind of disturbing thing that's happened since I've had children . . . and that's become almost a neurotic

> . . . fear of any situation where I wouldn't be in control. For instance: holocaust kinds of fantasies. You know, being Jewish, and having grown up just knowing about concentration camps and things like that and hearing all the stories and having relatives and everything that went through it, never affected me until I was pregnant with [my first daughter] and suddenly the thought of being in a place where people, evil people were doing things to me and my children makes me crazy . . . . So, when I was pregnant for the first time, I had horrible nightmares about people ripping my unborn children out from my womb and everything. I've heard that they really did [things like that]: strapping my legs together when I went into labor, just these horrible things that . . . I thought it was horrible before, but [then] it was just this horrible gorey storey. But suddenly being pregnant, they all came back--stories that, that, I hadn't heard in years just started creeping back into my consciousness from somewhere--it was really scary . . . . I guess <u>being pregnant and having a child just makes you so much more dependent on your surroundings</u>. (emphasis mine)

Protecting children is not easy. The world <u>is</u> a dangerous place and children, just by their normal activity, subvert parents' efforts at protection and preservation. Ruddick (1980: 17) discusses these difficulties:

> A mother, acting in the interest of preserving and maintaining life, is in a peculiar relation to 'nature.' As a childbearer, in the service of the species, she often takes herself and is taken by others to be an especially 'natural' member of her culture. As a child-tender she must respect nature's limits and court its favor with foresightful actions ranging from immunizations, to caps on household poisons, to magical imprecations, warnings and prayers. 'Nature' with its unpredictable varieties of dirt and disease, is her enemy as much as her ally. Her children themselves are natural creatures, often unable to understand or abet her efforts to protect them. Since they frequently find her necessary direction constraining, a mother can experience her children's own liveliness as another enemy of the life she is preserving.

The parents I spoke with mentioned a wide range of concrete worries and fears that came from trying to protect active, lively children. The mother of a three-year-old told me she was "concerned about her safety as a girl already." Some of these new worries felt by the parents came about as anger:

> If [my daughter] does something like . . . run out in the street I am terrified that she is going to get hit by a car and yet I'm screaming and yelling at her and angry . . . and I know that's the same kind of reaction my parents had . . . .

Parents were afraid of things for their children which they didn't worry about for themselves. A mother talked about being angry at the PBB cover-up not because she might be contaminated, but because she realized she could contaminate her son through breastfeeding.

Repeatedly, the parents talked about themselves as protectors--about the worrying they did and about the steps they took to prevent harm from reaching their chilren. Children were always in the back of their minds. The father of a five-year-old girl, whose wife was away for the year on an internship, told me that now while he was teaching he was always wondering how his daughter was--"before I was a free bird." A mother with a two-year-old girl expressed this same feeling: "I'm going through more anxiety about working full-time since I have her." Parents with older children worried too:

> The older one is finally driving so that means a lot of scary feelings.

Parents became more cautious. They planned ways to escape fire, and they wore seatbelts. A woman with two children talked of seeing an accident in front of her house:

> The woman and child both fell out of the car and were killed instantly. You know, here it was, right in front of our house, and, uh, we started buckling the kids and buckling ourselves and we never said anything even.

Some of the concerns were more existential. One father wanted to protect his daughter not just from dying, but from having to confront her own death:

> I find myself also wanting to protect [her] . . . why bring into the world someone who is going to have to confront their own death?

Both fathers and mothers expressed surprise at the lengths to which they would go to protect their children. One woman came to understand her own parents' love for her when she realized she would save her own children before she would save herself. Another woman, the mother of two girls aged five and two, was describing the extremes of emotion that come with being a parent. She said she now knew that she could steal if her family were starving and that she could kill to save her child.

> . . . when I think of my vulnerable child being forceably taken from me by someone, I really think I could fight until death for my child, which I never would have experienced that type of feeling before . . . if someone were to start dragging my husband off [well] he's an adult, he can take care of himself.

A father with a girl four and a boy two, talked about the protectiveness he felt when his daughter was born:

> Before I saw [her] there was nobody in the world that I would die for . . . that changed just like that.

Yet, through all of this, the parents expressed a sense of their ultimate helplessness in this task of preservation. The mother of a five-year-old girl said:

> [I've realized] how painful it can be to be a parent, I don't think I realized that before . . . . Knowing that you don't know what lies in the future for them and that you don't want them to get hurt and yet chances are that somewhere along the line something . . . is going to hurt them quite deeply.

A mother with two children mused that her concerns were not so much <u>different</u> concerns since she had children, but rather concerns of a different <u>degree</u>:

> My concern for the environment . . . ecology . . . nuclear . . . were always things that in high school and college I

> was very concerned about but now that I have kids it terrifies me . . . some of the things that are happening . . . what kind of life will my kids have? Are they going to have a life at all? I get scared, I get angry at things like the PBB scandal . . . it would have concerned me before . . . [I] was breastfeeding my son . . . . My anger at [the cover-up] . . . . It's not so much I'm worried about any kind of contamination I might have . . . but I feel so helpless . . . [about] my son . . . so again the degree is different. (emphasis mine)

This helplessness is precisely what Ruddick cites as resulting in the virtue of humility. Parents, too, were aware of the effects on themselves of engaging in the tasks of preserving and protecting in such an uncertain project. One parent said it was not that children were the only source of this opportunity, but rather that they give it to you "ready made":

> They provide opportunities to care about other people intensly . . . . I'm not sure that having children is a really essential part of being an adult . . . I'm sure that it's possible to become an adult without having children. I'm sure that those situations can be provided in other ways. Surely I know plenty of people who don't have children who are . . . real responsible valuable adults--my aunts [for example] . . . they have cared for other people. It's not the child, it's the caring and the taking on of responsibility and I suppose having a child sort of gives that to you ready made. (emphasis mine)

Others, like one father of a three-year-old boy, disagreed and felt that this kind of protection and care was not really appropriately directed towards adults:

> It's . . . fun to just have the ability to be a protecting force in somebody's environment--it gives you a sense of accomplishment and importance . . . it's easy to get [that] with a kid. It's much easier to get [that] with a kid than an adult . . . . I'm not sure that I'd want to have a spouse that wanted to be protected all the time.

One facet of the job of protecting the child was staying alive long enough to finish the task. A mother told me:

> You're more conscious somehow of your own mortality and you make conscious efforts . . . [to] avoid situations . . . . We're non-smokers . . . thoughtful [about the food] we eat . . . and I really don't like to go with my husband in an airplane . . . if anything happened to us, what would happen to them?

Parents reported being more afraid of their own death now that they had children to take care of. They drove more slowly or even not at all sometimes (one mother told me "New Year's Eve we don't go out of the subdivision"), and worried about airplanes. One four-year-old told me his parents were "going on separately planes"--a fact his mother verified a few minutes later. A father talked about how much more cautious he had become since his children were born:

> . . . made me much more cautious about lots of things . . . I get nervous on airplanes for example, particularly if [the children] are not there . . . I never used to be afraid to fly and now I find myself nervous about flying . . . maybe it's just that I'm older . . . but I relate it to having kids.

A mother with two preschool boys shared with me her worries:

> . . . about airplanes, I used to love to . . . fly . . . I still like to but it's changed because I don't like it so much cause I'm afraid of crashing . . . . What if the plane does crash? What about the kids? We had to think who would they go to and who could do a fairly decent job of raising them?

Mostly they worried--<u>and</u> made sure they didn't die. A father who had given up scuba diving, told me he now felt "more responsible to stay around." A mother said:

> It becomes more important not to die. I mean I've got this job and nobody can do it. I mean I just decided I can't die. <u>Nobody</u> can take care of my kids in the way I want them to, um, so the thought of dying is just too awful now.

Even parents of teenagers wanted to stick around until the job was "finished":

> Recently [I] confronted the very real possibility of having a very serious disease myself and that really scared me in terms of my kids. I . . . want to live long enough to see them grow up and I just felt like I wasn't finished . . . I wanted all of a sudden to just clarify their values and get everything all tidied up.

Realization of Own Vulnerability Should a Child Die

Many parents spoke of the new vulnerability felt in the face of imagining that one of their children might die. The death of a child is harder to accept than the death of adults (for an analysis of this see Schoenenberg, Carr and Peretz, 1970; Byulay, 1978; and Burton, 1974). Beyond their worries about being there to protect their children most parents said they themselves were really not afraid of their own death. They were terrified of the death of their children. The possibility of death became more immediate when one was a parent:

> I wasn't [concerned] about death in college . . . now I think [about] death, [and] accidents . . . all are very possible and I worry more about something happening to her than to me . . . . Before you just went on your way . . . death was more in the distance, but now it's part of everything. (emphasis mine)
> --mother of one

The step-father of two teenage boys talked about his fears:

> It makes me a little bit more nervous . . . in that they have so much potential and I'd hate to see it cut short . . . . I have more of a feeling about how fragile the whole thing is.

Some of the parents talked about "rehearsing" ways to deal with the death of a child. A father, whose children were both healthy, spoke of thinking about what he would do if he found out his child was going to die:

> I'd try to be rational and say 'If I'd never seen you, never had you, I'd have never known the emotions that I've had up to now . . . .'

Others talked about more religious or mystical ways of explaining a child's death to themselves. Virtually every parent who mentioned the possibility of the death of a child, saw it was the worst thing that could happen in their life time. One mother of two preschoolers who had previously lost infant twins knew the enormity of the loss:

> It may sound terrible, but I wanna die before they do. I buried two sons and I don't wanna go through that again, you know. You can handle it once in your life . . . it was hard enough going through it with the twins.

These fears for the safety of the child and one's consequent tendency toward overprotectiveness and caution grow, not out of flaws in the psychic structure of the caretaker, but rather have their roots in the practice of caretaking. Ruddick (1980: 17) notes correctly that such rigid or excessive control is an "occupational hazard" of mothering--it is "the likely defect of the very virtues [mothers] are required to practice":

> It is no wonder then that as she engages in preservation a mother is always liable to the temptations of fearfulness and excessive control . . . . If mothers are more frequently wary than non-mothers, if we are tempted by fearfulness to simple supernatural comforts or authoritarian states or familes, this is a hazard of our work situation. (emphasis mine)

New Sensitivity to Other Children Being Hurt

Finally, ten out of the 59 parents interviewed reported that having a child somehow altered their reactions to the plight of children in general. Some examples of this have already been cited on the preceding pages. On a very basic level, being a parent made some people realize that children are human, as this 28-year-old mother of one preschool boy explained:

> [Before you have one of your own] you don't realize that they're people just like you or I . . . . I have a lot more respect for children now.

Furthermore, it increased their empathy for other children and for other children's parents. The speaker below is a school teacher with two teenage children:

> You get a different perspective: they're somebody's child--you can empathize with certain things.

Having children made remote dangers more immediate:

> I'm more aware of the things that are going on in the world now in relationship to my kids, . . . thing, um . . . the whole idea of having children or at least a son who might someday have to fight a war . . . I mean I care about the war in Vietnam, I was opposed but my reasons for being opposed were . . . not that personal, it was sort of broad-based thing that war is wrong.

A two-way process seemed to occur: remote dangers took on more personal meaning, and parents' personal feelings about their own children expanded to encompass a larger, more remote world. Parents reported being unable to read about child abuse with the same detachment possible before they had children:

> Before . . . I'd read an article about child beating in the paper and I'd think, 'Oh, that's too bad.' Now it makes me sick.
> --mother of two preschoolers

Nor could they watch television or film violence that involved children. A father with two preschoolers who described himself as a blunt, blustery risk-taker, talked about this:

> I used to be able to watch war movies . . . as an intellectual observer . . . it never affected me emotionally at all . . . . Very many times [now] I cannot watch that stuff anymore [if children are involved].

His wife (who had been interviewed separately a few minutes before, giving them no chance to compare notes) had a similar observation:

> [You] probably have a greater value for children having children of your own. There was a movie on TV one time called 'Cubie 7' . . . films of the Nazi's attrocities . . . . One of the experiments was letting a newborn starve to death . . . . I don't think it would have affected me as much if I hadn't had my own children.

Another mother could no longer watch horror movies:

> My husband and I have always been horror movie freaks . . . but [now] we cannot go to . . . anything [that shows things] happening to children.

Even parents who had always opposed war on intellectual or moral grounds found they experienced a new revulsion to it once they had children of their own. A politically active mother of a preschool girl said:

> [What struck me was] the different impact that footage from Indochina about children had on me after she was born as [compared to] before she was born . . . . Just knowing in a much more gut level way the humanity of children . . . . anyone who does that to a child has got to be stopped . . . . I guess it's knowing . . . the humanity of children plus a gut level sense of their dependence on adults that it's far worse to do wartime situation things to children than it is to adults.

In a related, yet almost opposite way, having children made parents take a new attitude toward danger and hopelessness. For the sake of their children, they had to try to be hopeful, as this father of a preschool girl describes:

> One of my doubts about bringing children into this world . . . where the world is going and so why bring children into that . . . . [but since my daughter was born] I'm a lot less apocalyptic.

Children, in order to grow, must confront dangers and parents learn a lot in the process. The mother of five children talked about the early seventies and about her son, then 15, whose political beliefs and actions both terrified her and led her into new growth:

> I woke up one morning and he was gone [to a political rally in Florida]. I was absolutely panic-stricken . . . . On the one hand acting as mother I was wanting to protect him and

> get him to ease off on things that were foolhardy. On the other hand when it came down to a matter of basic principle sometimes I could see that he was really right and that a person needs to put things on the line and put themselves in danger in order to make the society notice . . . . I imagine in some ways the mere fact of what I saw as a very real danger was enough of a goad to make me do some things to make me stand up and face [my son] in some ways I wouldn't have if it hadn't seemed so dangerous to me . . . . [My husband] and I for instance, went out and, uh, listened to some of the speeches that were being given at the rally . . . which I probably wouldn't even have done if [my son] had not been involved and I found that I felt much better after having done it. I didn't feel as frightened about the whole situation.

In contrast to claims that the concerns of women (taken usually to be identical with those of mothers) tend to be particularistic while those of men tend to be more universalistic, the interviews indicate that intense parenting (which may be done by men or women) results in more universalistic rather than particularistic concerns. The internal dynamics of this more universalistic concern may differ (as indicated by the parents quoted in the last few pages), but the results are similar. In the process of parenting a particular child, one comes to feel more concern about the fate of children in general. I find in the interview data, support for the possibility that being a parent, with its demands to focus on one's own children, simultaneously enlarges one's capacity for caring about other children and about concerns that go far beyond one's own family.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHILDREN AS PRECIPITATORS OF DECISION MAKING

> I think you have to make all decisions when you have children.
> --mother of two preschoolers

Introduction

One of the earliest patterns I saw in the interviews was the way that children forced parents to make up their minds, take stands, act on long-held beliefs, or come down on one side of the other of an issue. The issues involved were both practical and philosophical ones--usually a combination of both. For example, parents reported feeling a need to decide about baptism or to decide whether, as pacifists, they should allow their children to play with guns. The interviews were filled with "they've forced me . . .", "they've required me . . .", "they've made me . . ."[1] The forced nature of these decisions was clear. Many noted that without children they would never have been required to make a choice or take a stand on many of the issues. In other cases, the decisions were ones that all adults are generally required to make, but being a parent gave them a new cast.

---

[1] Compare this with the words used in the chapter on "Access to the World of Childhood". In that context parents were more likely to describe children's influences with words like "allowed", "enabled", "facilitated".

In this chapter, I will explore some of these forced choices described by parents. Sometimes the decision involved simply acting on a long-held belief. Other times, it meant finally making a decision on some long-considered topic (e.g. parents said that children made them finally settle some issues, like religion, which previously they had left open). In still other cases, parents were forced to make decisions on dilemmas they had never imagined existed before. In this sense, and others, the way in which children forced their parents to make decisions or to take stands was similar to the way in which children increased the degree and type of emotional response to which their parents were exposed.

A brief look at some differences between regular decision making for adults and that which occurs as a result of being responsible for a child may be useful in underscoring the special nature of children's contributions in this realm. In adult life, habit and routinization (both personal and cultural) remove large parts of life from problematic status. Standardized ways of perceiving the world mitigate against the introduction of novelty that would require new adaptation and thinking.

In addition to these routines, adults (when they choose to) have other means at their disposal to avoid making decisions or even confronting issues. For example, they can often leave the scene of conflict, can avoid answering questions that make them uncomfortable, and can avoid (by careful selection of friends and activities) putting themselves in situations where "things will come up" that they don't want to deal with.[2]

---

[2]There are, of course, exceptions to this immunity to difficult decision making that are similar to the experiences of parents. The

Kinds of Decisions

In virtually all the interviews the sense emerged that children's mere presence, and one's responsibility for their care, pervaded virtually all decision making. The comment of this father of two preschoolers was typical:

> Suddenly all your decisions are modified by the fact that you have kids.

Yet his response was not typical of fathers. While many of the parents in this sample professed role sharing and some even came close to equally dividing the physical work, in most cases the wife assumed much more of the emotional work of child rearing. The mother in the following example explained that although they split things fifty-fifty, she was still the "psychological parent":

> That kid is constantly inside my head so that everything I do I do partly with an evaluation of the impact of him in my head and so, you know, sometimes I wish that I could just wrench it out of my head for a while and be free of that concern.

Many husbands did talk about the effects of children on their own decision making processes but they generally did so in less all-encompassing ways than did the mothers.

---

loyalty oaths of the sixties forced people to take public stands. Therapy (or confinement in a mental hospital) makes heavy demands on adults to confront new issues, to look at old ones in a new light, and to answer questions one might prefer to avoid. Religious conversion likewise demands that novices redefine large parts of their old lives and values. Practicing transcendental meditation or transactional analysis has aspects of both therapy and religion for Westerners. Travel to a foreign country forces new perceptions and tends to make strong demands on an individual to come to terms with unfamiliar situations. While all of these have some things in common with parenthood in forcing one to confront new issues and make decisions, there are important differences. Parenthood combines duration and intensity in ways the other do not (e.g. A teenage girl traveling with me and my two children for several weeks, observed suddenly "Oh, you have them all day, every day, for e-i-g-h-t-e-e-n years!). Travel seldom lasts 18 years, therapy does end eventually, and religious conversions are, by definition, time bounded.

The level of the decisions varied--from decisions about concrete everyday matters to moral and ethical decisions. On an everyday level, children required parents to make many decisions in different and more pressing ways than if they had not had children. The mother of two preschoolers told me:

> You make a decision now, you consciously put them into it, you know, you talk about where we move, our job, ... Those things are practical everyday things but they certainly would never have entered into our thinking had we not had children.

Many of the decisions parents felt they had to make now that they had children were ethical, moral or religious. For some, the coming of a child drew them back to the church of their childhood. Others saw churches in a new light--some decided that a particular church, while it had been fine for them as adults, was not good for children. Others found that having children left them stranded--they could not decide what to do:

> I had thought 'Well now, should the children go to church or shouldn't they' and for me I couldn't do that, because I would be the first hypocrite, I should think, to send my children without taking them.
> --mother of two

> I do more thinking about my childhood . . . I try to make value judgments on what experiences I had that I want to provide for my kids . . . [I ask myself, 'what did I get out of church] that I am denying my kids?'

In many cases these moral and ethical issues were closely tied to practical ones. In fact, in many ways, this seems to be the most important point. Children take abstract beliefs and make them concrete. For example, breaking up fights among toddlers raised for many parents the whole issue of pacifism. The same issue came up in deciding whether to allow the children to play with toy guns. Parents had to find ways to

reconcile their own beliefs with what "seemed workable" in the face of childrens' needs and possibilities. In some cases this process strengthened, in others it weakened, parents' commitments to their old values and forced them to take stands even in cases where before they had not seen any issue. Suddenly for many parents old beliefs popped up and demanded action. In some cases this had all the mystery of rabbits being pulled out of hats. A mother tried to explain the curious position in which she found herself:

> I said to my husband: 'I want to have [our daughter] baptised.' He said, 'Why?' And I said, 'I don't know, I just do.'

Somehow the situation of being a parent encouraged pulling all kinds of rabbits out of hats--rabbits that then demanded food and cages. The rabbits were often long-forgotten or dimly remembered values and beliefs pulled out of who knows where. To cage and feed those old beliefs, children were sent to church, baptised, and taught moral codes that had little to do with the lives their parents led. In many cases this influence was a conservative one. As such it had an almost magical quality: some magical rite performed in one's own childhood must be continued to protect the baby (or child). Like throwing salt over one's shoulder, it may be something one doesn't even really "believe" anymore, but the stakes are too high to ignore it.

The outward signs (the baptism, the church attendance) then tie one even tighter to the myth.[3] This applied not only to church

---

[3]The literature on attitude change as a function of behavioral change is relevant here. People tend to come to believe in those things on which they have taken a public stand (see e.g. Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959). Children, by forcing parents to take public stands may profoundly shape their parents' values and beliefs.

attendance but to visits to the doctor and to sending children to public schools.[4] This mother's response was typical:

> I don't think they've changed (my values and beliefs) that much but as we raise the kids we're forced to act on them a lot more and we tend to be a lot more rigid about them.

Convervatism

The often cited conservative influence of children may be at least partially attributable to such mechanisms as those I have just described.[5] One mother told me that since she had children, she had become more rigid, "more protective of some of those values." Another mother said she was more conservative and religious than she thought she was now that she had children. Another mother of preschoolers told me

> Something I know I was more liberal about (before I had children) . . . was such things as X-rated movies . . . . I really feel they should be more restricted, I think since I've become a parent--I've become more conservative along those lines.

The task of being responsible for the care and protection of children forced parents to redefine their stand on many issues. One mother's response was typical:

> I'm becoming more conservative, more concerned about things like crime . . . [before] it wasn't a big concern of mine, you know. I was worried about the 'war' and things like that. Now I find myself heading towards my parents more.

---

[4]A group of highly educated parents met for two years to discuss alternatives to public school education. They worked out an analysis of how to improve such education and planned to open a school when their children reached kindergarten age. At the last minute most of the parents decided against putting their own children in the new school. They felt they couldn't "take the chance" with their own kids. For reasons they could not entirely articulate, they found it easier to commend their children to the experts they "knew" were wrong, than to take a chance on something new with their own kids.

[5]See the section on "Setting an Example" in Chapter Eight for other ways in which children can be a conservative force in parents' lives.

> You know, wondering about crime and the effects of it on kids. Um, worrying about drugs in school--before I could care about drugs in school . . . now the thought of having my children smoking dope in the nursery school does not please me.

However, children's influences on parents' decision making was not always in a conservative direction. Parents of older children (like one father who began wearing work shirts instead of neckties at his children's insistence) felt they had changed their views on many specific issues because of their children (e.g. on dress styles, the war, sex, drugs, the work ethic).

In addition, parents' concern with and responsibility for the future was broadened as they became parents. A father, talking about his own future, said he now saw it in a different light:

> My decisions as to the future are very much weighed by my kids and I think a great deal about the years that are left and how best to spend them.

Similarly a mother remarked:

> Now I think more about the future . . . I'm forced to think ahead . . . . Now I find myself thinking in years.

Their concerns about the future become more broadly defined:

> I worry a lot more about pollution, energy, anything that smacks of the future--I suddenly have a real stake in the future . . . it always had bothered me before, but now it's definitely different now that I have kids because it's personal.
> --mother of preschoolers

More Universal Concerns

Children also seemed to make the concerns of their parents more universal, as this mother describes:

> I think they probably in their greatest influence have taken me out of a very small, little world and moved me into thinking about lots of other things than I probably would have . . . [they] make my concerns more universal.

PART IV

BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR SHAPING THE GROWTH AND ENSURING THE ACCEPTABILITY OF CHILDREN

Daily contact with children who are learning, who are new to the world, who need knowledge to survive, and who have fresh questions means that all parents must come to see themselves and act as teachers. The effects on parents of acting as teachers has only recently been explored. Ruddick (1980) cites the parent's interest in the growth and acceptability of the child as one of the forces shaping "maternal thinking." In particular, she cites two outcomes of encouraging the growth of children and of trying to ensure their acceptability. The first involves a tendency toward thinking in terms of openness and change in response to the changeability of the growing child. The second involves a sense of humility resulting from the necessary conflicts that emerge (e.g. the conflict between fostering preservation and acceptability).

Over 42 percent of all the parents interviewed spontaneously mentioned the effects they experienced from serving as teachers of their children. That parents see this as a central influence can be gauged both by the enthusiasm of their response and by the fact that over two-thirds of those mentioning such effects did so within the first few minutes of the interview. The secions that follow examine four aspects of this teaching process: deciding what's worth teaching, providing a setting and a cast of characters, setting a good example, and answering

questions. In each case, the parents themselves were changed in the process of teaching their children.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TEACHING

Deciding What's Worth Teaching

> I think you have to make all those decisions when you have children.
> --father of two preschoolers

Almost every parent interviewed said that having a child precipitated a whole series of decisions with regard to what's important to teach. Involved here are decisions about the content of instruction (how do we decide what the children should learn?), about the values that are important and worth passing down, and, as a special case of the previous one, what religious values and customs should be taught to children. For many parents this meant decisions about very broad areas of value and belief. Children were the occasion for digging into areas that might otherwise remain buried. A father with a five-year-old daughter described his thinking:

> Having [my daughter] in the house has given me a chance to really think about it and decide, 'Hey, how do I want to bring this child up? Do I want to do as [my father] did and pretty much leave everything open, offer no direction either philosophically, morally or anything else, or set down a pretty definite path that when she gets old enough she can accept or reject?'

Many of the examples had to do with making decisions about the importance of religious training. As in the previous example, such efforts involved reflecting back on one's own moral or religious education. Many re-evaluated their own upbringing. Some reaffirmed their early

beliefs, like a 33-year-old mother of preschoolers who said that having children made her think more about religion, and decide that she liked the specific one she was raised with and wanted it in her own home. Others who had stopped going to church began to feel again that it was important. The response of this working mother of two was typical:

> I was always very church oriented anyway . . . but then I drifted away. But having small children, why I want them to know God and . . . so it's up to me to make sure that they do . . . . It's been there but it's coming out in the open again.

Others, like this father of two, were more ambivalent. A churchgoer as a child, he did not attend now but wondered sometimes: "What did I get out of it that I'm denying my kids?" Still others rejected church. A father of two said the church had been fine for him and his wife until they had children. With children to think about, they re-evaluated the messages given by their church and decided to leave. Another father told me:

> I think . . . consciously . . . of whether to us religious training in children is important and in my case I think I have rejected it as something that you teach children . . . . I think you have to make all those decisions when you have children.

Making decisions about what's worth teaching had a variety of effects on parents. As the previous examples illustrate, making such decisions tended to force parents to look at their own past and at how their own parents had answered those questions. The result was a critical appraisal of that past and a hooking of the past to the present and the future. What transpired was more than idle reflection. One father told me that deciding what to teach his son drove him "back to my own childhood . . . trying to figure out what sorts of influences [my parents] had on me that I might like to pass on." Parents sifted

through memories of their own childhoods and selected experiences and values to pass on. A 31-year-old father of two told me "I try to make value judgments on what experience I had that I want to provide for my kids." A mother teaching part-time at a university said:

> One of the things about being a parent is you feel maybe you [have learned] some valuable lessons in life and you hope to pass those on to make it easier for the next generation, hopefully a better place for that.

Choices regarding family tradition included a simultaneous reappraisal of the past and orientation toward the future. A mother of two preschoolers told me "You remember how [Christmas] was celebrated when you were little, and what you want to incorporate of that into your own family now." Another mother typified the conscious attempts of middle class parents to shape the content of their children's memories:

> I think you think about things consciously. For instance: What kind of tradition are we gonna have around Christmas? What is important for children to have as a memory or as tradition associated with that sort of thing?

Parents also looked elsewhere for help in deciding what's worth teaching. Some, like this mother, turned to their own mothers:

> For some reason, although I feel in a lot of ways she isn't the type of person I'd want to ask for advice from, because she's my mother she's the one I call and ask--it's so contradictory.

The increasing role of experts and the decreasing experiential bases for gaining information about child rearing contribute to the anxiety experienced by many parents. (For a discussion of these issues see Ehrenreich and English, 1978.) A single father who had raised his teenage son alone talked about this in one of the pilot interviews: knowing how to raise children, he said "was, and still is, a great mystery to me." Many in this highly educated sample turned to books

for advice on what to teach children. Not surprisingly, those parents who talked the most about turning to books were the least sure about their own ability to know what to do. The remarks of this 31-year-old homemaker with two preschoolers were typical:

> I read everything I can get my hands on, you know, whenever I'm coping with something new. I've read Dryker's one hundred times backwards and forward, but it's still very hard for me to apply.

While reading such books helped parents feel they were doing the right thing by consulting an authority, such practices also led to increased guilt as parents like the preceding one realized the gap between what they were supposed to do and what they actually did with their children.

Deciding what is important to teach children led parents to question the importance of values they held. A divorced women, just finishing her Ph.D. in education, told me that confrontations with her five-year-old son often resulted in her realizing that what she was going to such lengths to teach him (e.g. manners and certain sorts of discipline) was not really so important as she had thought. Another mother who had taught full-time during most of her five-year-old's life, had a similar experience:

> A lot of these values that I had, that really when you come right down to it I question their importance.

Fathers, as well, came to question their own values, as in this case where the work ethic came under fire from a five-year-old:

> It's hard to explain to him. 'Well, I don't want to go to work today particularly but I still have to . . .' and a whole series of these [questions] has made me think more about 'Well why <u>do</u> I have to go really?'

Many noted that being a parent had not led them to <u>change</u> their ideas about what's important to teach, but it did lead them to <u>do</u>

something about what they believed. This was reported by both men and women and by those who stayed home as well as by those who went out to work. A mother who was going to school part-time talked about the effects her preschoolers had on her:

> I don't think [my values and beliefs have] been changed that much, but as we raise the kids we're forced to act on them a lot more and we tend to be a lot more rigid about them.

A university professor, the father of two preschool girls, said virtually the same thing:

> I'm not sure so much that [my values and beliefs] have changed as that I find myself in the role of teacher more and so I'm forced to make these attitudes explicit.

A high school teacher with preschoolers told me that having children gave her an opportunity to teach the things she already knew were important--things you really couldn't teach in school to other people's children:

> These are things that I've always, you know, felt strongly about anyway [but] I don't really have a whole lot of opportunity to talk about it . . . it's there but it's inside. But with children you talk about it more, it comes out in the open more.

At the opposite extreme was the mother of six children, the youngest eighteen. Before she had children she didn't even realize she <u>had</u> any particular values. As she got older she realized that she did have some and that she was communicating them to her children.

In summary then, deciding what is worth teaching to children engages parents in a variety of re-evaluations of their own childhood experiences and of their current value systems. This process not only raises new issues and reopens old ones, but also, in many cases, results in taking action on issues in ways that could be avoided if one did not have children. Thus children move parents from idle speculation and reflection to an engagement with concrete issues requiring immediate

action. This "decision precipitating" quality of caring for children was discussed in a more general way in Chapter Seven.

Providing a Setting

Virtually all the parents interviewed discussed the effects on themselves of working to provide a particular context and cast of characters within which their childrens' socialization would take place. Whiting (1978) sees the provision of settings as the major route by which parents influence their children. Reporting on the results of her recent work on "the effect of culture on mundane social behavior" she writes (1978: 4)

> We do not deny the importance of the mother and father in molding the child but our analysis of samples of maternal behavior acorss cultures convinces us that the mother's and father's greatest effect is in the assignment of the child to settings that have important socializing influences.

My own research suggests that parents are quite explicitly aware of this and will go to great lengths to place their children in the settings they feel are appropriate.

First, many parents cited "what's best for the children" as a major determinant of residential choice. The particular residential settings chosen by this sample of well-educated parents reflect the values of that group. They altered their place of residence in order to provide children with settings that would teach them lessons such as getting along with other children, tolerance, and racial awareness. The response of a 34-year-old mother who loves the country was typical. She said they moved so the kids would have playmates:

> [having children] influenced where we bought a house . . . . We lived in the country before and it was very peaceful but we didn't have any neighbors.

The mother of a three-year-old chose this particular town because she wanted her son exposed to different kinds of people:

> That's why I like living in [this town], because I feel there's such a mixture of people . . . I want them to know there's all kinds of people.

Others moved to avoid "bad" influences on their children. The divorced mother of a preschool girl told me:

> I lived in California which is really wild. But I moved from there cause I don't think it's a good place for kids.

The mother of a three-year-old boy emphasized the value of stability:

> I think it made me want to own a home a little more too. And it's made me want to stay put--I like to travel and [my son has] proved to be a good traveler . . . . But I have a real sense of wanting him to grow up in the same house and have the same friends.

In other cases the place of residence was chosen with educational opportunities for the children in mind. This father's comment was typical:

> Well, education has become an important thing. Moving into a school system that . . . had available . . . foreign languages, music . . . we knew we were going to pay through the nose in property taxes.

The effects of place of residence on growing children seemed clear to parents. The effects on the parents themselves are also considerable, though they were less often mentioned by parents. Surrounded by neighbors they might not have chosen for themselves, the parents changed in a variety of ways. One mother, for example, noted her new appreciation of a sense of community in a neighborhood:

> I would very much like to be more out in the country. [My husband] would like to be in a very urban kind of place, but to be in a neighborhood with kids [is just so nice] . . . and the sense of community is something that we weren't that responsive to [before we had children].

On a smaller scale, parents reported providing other settings or situations for their children that necessitated change in their own

lives as well. For example, as I described in Chapter Four ("Access to the World of Childhood"), they went places they would not otherwise have gone. One parent offered the example of doing things she wouldn't ordinarily have done (e.g. "taking swimming classes or a bug class"). A university professor, the father of two small children, talked about the demands of the nursery school for parent participation on weekends at functions like "mud-pudging". He explained:

> My automatic reaction to that is 'God damn it, I will not!' . . . [but when] I do go and 'mudpudge' and I find that actually when I get there I do enjoy it.

In particular, many, who otherwise wouldn't have done it, reported going to church for the children, as this mother of two preschoolers noted:

> We were not going to any church, but all of a sudden when [our daughter] got old enough to [ask questions about religion] . . . we started looking around for some church.

The community ties provided by churches have a kind of universal appeal to parents. Even people who would ordinarily be opposed to organized religion sometimes joined churches to provide their children with a stable sense of community. One father, a long time political activist, recognized that his daughter lacked such a stable community because of the transience of the university community coupled with the paucity of like-minded people in the town. He himself was surprised that he was thinking about joining a church:

> So what I've really been thinking about is going to Church X . . . a real change for me. To think that I would even consider it!

Like the father in the last example, many reported that providing a setting for children meant making drastic changes in their own plans (e.g. "just kind of putting [aside] what you want to do"). The effects of this, both in terms of the particular situations the parents were

now in, and in terms of simply putting aside what they wanted to do, are considerable and deserve further study.

Providing a Cast of Characters

Whiting's (1978: 2) analysis of cross-cultural data examines the relationship between contextual variables and "mundane social behavior." Her theory:

> . . . says that patterns of interpersonal behavior are developed in the settings that one frequents and that the most important characteristics of a setting are the cast of characters who occupy the set, in particular the age and sex of these characters.

Many of the parents reported altering their own activities so they would be around their children more. They changed their employment patterns and divided up their time differently. Mothers, especially those in the nursery school group, made more changes than fathers and provided complex justifications for doing so. A mother of three preschoolers explained:

> I'd rather stay home until they get into school and see that they have the kinds of things that I want them to have. I feel like I can do a good job.

With some there was a thinly disguised message that without the mother at home, things would go wrong. This 29-year-old mother with a B.A. gave a common response:

> But for me, I would not be happy--going out and having a babywitter all day--because . . . I want to be able to say at least I was there.

Some justified the ways children had hindered their career growth by explaining that raising children who would contribute to the world was important:

> Oh, in both cases I think they've been a handicap to my career because in each case I've chosen to remain home . . . but I

> really can't see myself devoting my life to improving other kids' conditions and ignoring my own . . . if I am going to make a contribution to the world . . . I think the biggest contribution I can make is to produce, raise two healthy, giving, loving children who are also going to contribute to the world.

Even professional mothers (such as the previous one) took it for granted that they would stay home at least part-time with their children. Some didn't even justify their actions but rather seemed to deny that anything was going on. In several cases I mistakenly assumed that some mothers were working full-time outside the home because they repeatedly said that children had not hurt their careers at all. It was only later in the interview that I discovered that they were working part-time or not at all. One mother who was teaching only part-time told me:

> I don't think [having children] altered my long-term plans for myself much . . . . I'm part-time employed as a professor . . . and I'm gonna continue to be that way until I feel the children don't need some influence from me.

Only one father was the primary caretaker, and the couple said this was going to change when they had a second baby. The father was home because of a work-related injury, which happened before the first child was born, and continued to care for the baby while going to college. His wife worked full-time. Other fathers did alter their work lives but never to the degree that mothers did. A university professor, 35 years old, explained his recent actions:

> I was just offered the chairmanship of department X, and I turned it down . . . it was going to eat a great deal of time away from my family.

Another father in a managerial position decided that he "didn't want to work under a tremendous amount of stress and have a heart attack at 55 and die, and spend [his] evenings away from home." Not only were the

fathers less likely to alter their work patterns very drastically for their families, but the reasons they gave differed--none worried about something awful happening to their children if they worked full-time.

As part of providing a particular cast of characters, some parents talked about getting pets because of what that would teach the children. This mother's explanation was typical:

> That's another reason why we bought the dog--because I think animals are helpful in teaching children about death.

If, as Whiting (1978) suggests, the provision of settings and choice of a cast to people them are the most important ways that parents shape their children, we should also be sensitive to the implications of these choices for the parents themselves. Such choices mean that parents will be exposed to the same situations--certainly adults who live in suburban communities are exposed to quite different situations and a very different cast of characters than those who live in a dense city. More significantly perhaps, by wanting themselves to be the main cast of characters for their children, parents are selecting children as their own main cast of characters.

Setting an Example

> You've got to work toward being the kind of person you want to be or can be, so they will have an example.
> --father of two preschool boys

As children, most of us were exhorted to "be a good example" for our little sister or brother, or to "set a good example for the first graders." We were well aware then that the goal of our parents and teachers was as much to reform our own behavior as to insure the good behavior of the "little ones." Ordinary people know a good deal about

the significance for the self of being a model. Educational research (see especially Miller and Morris, 1974; Fouts, 1972, 1974, 1975; Newman and Dickerson, 1976) has demonstrated significant effects of modeling on the model. One experimental study (Miller and Morris, 1974: 1103) of a marble dropping task found that children "increased their choice of the hole imitated and decreased their choice of the others." Another study (Newman and Dickerson, 1976) showed that serving as a model results in better performance regardless of whether imitation occurs as long as the model's status is higher than that of the observer. Similarly, social facilitation studies (see for example Dashiell, 1930; Pessin, 1933; Zajonc, 1965) have shown that the presence of an audience alters subject's task performance. A more recent study (Henchy and Glass, 1968) demonstrates that subjects whose task performance is viewed by an evaluative audience emit more dominance responses. Surprisingly, study of the effects of serving as a model has not captured the attention of sociologists of the family.[1] That such effects do occur within the family seems clear. That they have been neglected, only underscores the degree to which the study of parenthood is locked in sentimentality and ideology and ignores the day-to-day lived-in experiences of parents and children.

---

[1]An exception to this is the work of Haugan and McIntire (1972) which found that parental imitation was reinforcing to infantile vocalization. Miller and Morris (1974) note, however, that it may be simply the contingent vocalization, not its imitative component, which is reinforcing. O'Toole and Dubin, 1968) have observed that parents imitate their infant's body movements. Others (see especially Cosaro, n.d.) have documented adults' imitation of children's speech patterns. Neither of these latter two studies, however, looked at the effects of the modeling process on the parents.

Although I asked no questions about "setting an example," (or even about teaching in general), 42 percent ofthe parents interviewed gave examples of how their own thinking and behavior had been altered by their efforts to "set a good example" for the children. The percentage of parents mentioning this varied: 58 percent at the nursery school, 40 percent at day care #1, 25 percent at day care #2, and only 14 percent in the high school sample. Due to the small number of parents in the last two groups (only eight and seven respectively) these comparisons must be treated cautiously. If they are representative, however, they suggest that concern with setting a good example is more salient for parents of younger than for parents of older children, and more salient for parents who see themselves as the sole caretakers.

For most adults there are few opportunities or requirements to set an example for anyone. One's personal behavior is rarely scrutinized in a close way. Teachers do try to set examples for younger ones. In the case of teachers such modeling is bounded in time and space and confined to setting particular sorts of examples and lacks the total, continual quality of parents' modeling.[2] Older children take (and are expected to take) this example-setting role less seriously than do parents. They lack both the commitment to adults goals and the responsibility for the younger child's attainment of them.[3] Non-parents do sometimes establish intense mentoring relationships where their students

---

[2]Barrie Thorne (personal communication) reminds me that there are exceptions to this. Teachers' private lives, for example, may be scrutinized by school boards concerned about the overall example they are providing.

[3]See Ruddick (1980) for an elaboration on the parent's responsibility for the "acceptability" of the child.

imitate them. This may be especially true when one passes down a particular style of painting, dancing, or writing to a protege, at those times the example one is setting takes on a heightened importance.

Examples from the Interviews

The parents I interviewed spoke of trying to set a good example in three different areas: daily life details, moral issues and in a more general, all-pervasive way. Not only did parents mention an awareness of setting a good example, but they were explicit about the effects of this modeling on their own behavior and thinking.

For most adults, the details of daily life are hidden from others' scrutiny. Goffman (1959) distinguishes between front and back regions:

> The performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards. One grouping has to do with the way in which the performer treats the audience while engaged in talk with them or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute for talk. These standards are sometimes referred to as matters of politeness. The other group of standards has to do with the way in which the performer comports himself while in visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them. I shall use the term "decorum" to refer to this second group of standards . . . . [p. 107] (emphasis mine)

> It was suggested earlier that when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. It is clear that accentuated facts make their appearance in what I have called a front region; it should be just as clear that there may be another region--a "back region" or "back stage" --where the suppressed facts make an appearance. [pp. 111-112]

In Goffman's view, "Since the vital secrets of the show are visible back stage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage from the front region to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience . . . ." His subsequent discussion points to the difficulties experienced by workers

with inadequate control over the entrance of others into their own back stage. That he does not mention the lack of "back stage" available to parents only highlights the degree to which this is taken for granted. Goffman does talk about bathrooms and bedrooms as back stage, but not specifically in connection with exclusion of children. As anyone with small children knows, these areas are hardly back stage for parents anyway.

For middle class American parents, the back stage area shrinks as children leave infancy. More details of their everyday life become part of the front stage area, observed and commented upon by their children. Not only are children witness to what is immediately visible and audible (i.e., parents language and behaviors), but they become adept at recovering traces of behavior that parents have attempted to keep secret from them. Thus children find candy wrappers in the trash or under the car seat to use as evidence that parents have sinned on the sly.

Language, specifically the parents' use of profanity, was the most frequently mentioned daily life behavior that parenthood constrained. In the first place, having children made parents more aware of their own use of profanity. A father of two told me:

> I never realized how much I used [profanity] until it came back through the pure mouths of babes. It didn't sound so good.

Parents reported that this realization was generally followed by attempts to "clean up their act." A lawyer with a preschool daughter said:

> I think I've grown more concerned about some of my language . . . you know, you hear it repeated and you say, 'Well, wait a minute, maybe I'd better be careful about my own language.'

A mother who worked occasionally as a secretary told me:

> We'll say, 'Shut up,' which I don't like saying. It slips out. Then when he says it we say, 'That's not a nice word and we don't use that word.' . . . so I really stop and think now before I reprimand him with words I don't want him to use.

That they should "clean up their acts" had a taken-for-granted quality. Only one parent spoke about <u>why</u> kids shouldn't swear:

> Cleaning up my act . . . I do realize there are a lot of people that [my son] might be talking to [that would judge him] by the language he uses.
> --social scientist, father of a three-year-old boy

The parents, too, would be judged since children serve as extensions of parents' reputations and "face".

On another level, some parents began to change their speech patterns (using a larger vocabulary and more complex syntax) as an example for their children to imitate. Change of speech patterns often occurs among upwardly mobile persons or among those whose schooling or job requires it. Doing it for the children, however, has a different quality: it is both less instrumental and more important at the same time. A father of a 3-1/2 year-old boy told me:

> We're more conscious not only about the type of words we use but about the way we use the English language.

This mother reported she and her husband changed:

> . . . the way we explain things to him, the vocabulary we use. I think we're a little bit more careful in how we say things . . . so they'll understand . . . trying to be a little bit more descriptive . . . . [My husband] and I both thought that we needed to improve our vocabulary.

Language and other daily-life-details may be seen as good or bad "habits"[4]: habits which, as adults, we generally need not take seriously.

---

[4]This is not the place to go into a definition of good and bad habits. However, it is important to recognize that the particular habits which are considered good and bad vary by social class and across time. The interview data provide clues that parents find it relatively easy to set a good example for those habits that they themselves learned in childhood. Not surprisingly, they have more difficulty modeling those "good" habits they have merely read about.

Those few bad habits that we feel especially guilty about can be kept a secret and the rest are, after all, our own business. Thus, after childhood, most adults are free to watch as much television as they please, to eat candy before dinner, to procrastinate, to be messy, and to be unsociable. Parenthood, to a certain degree, removes this freedom, placing "habits" again in the foreground as parents try to set a good example for their children. For example, the food habits of parents changed not only because they wanted to eat healthy food and feel better physically, but because they wanted to set a good example for the children. In some cases the focus was on what was good for the children's health:

> I would eat any junk food before--I ate it all. We do not have anything in the house with preservatives or anything like that and that's for the kids.
> --mother of two preschool girls

In other cases the emphasis was less on simply providing healthy food for the kids and focused explicitly on setting a good example. Speaking is the mother of a three-year-old boy in a family where both parents work outside the home:

> He has affected our eating style . . . I got concerned about what he was eating and in order to influence him toward the way I felt he should, I had to change what I was eating.

Parents also stopped smoking tobacco and using drugs so their children wouldn't pick up these habits. The mother of two preschoolers told me:

> It made me decide I don't want to take drugs or do any of that cause I don't want my kids to do it. And they'll think: 'Well, if Mom does it, it's ok,' and I don't want that. It's like smoking tobacco . . . . I don't want my kids to do it.

Parents watched television less and became more careful about keeping the house neat--all in an attempt to set a good example for the kids:

> I find I don't watch even things that I would like to watch cause I don't want [my son] sitting there watching it too.
> --mother of a preschool boy

> My husband is constantly throwing his stuff all over the place . . . however now that the son is imitating his father, it's a little bit easier to encourage my husband to pick up.
> --mother of a boy aged five and an infant girl

> If it were just me alone in the house I might let the dishes go for ten days . . . with her I try to keep everything orderly so she can come from some semblance of order.
> --working mother with one preschool daughter

A very quiet man, the father of two preschool boys, forced himself to be more sociable so that his oldest son, who shared his introverted tendencies, would not grow up ignoring people and relationships:

> I'm the kind of person who for the most part could get along without other people . . . . But I really don't want him to grow up and be that way . . . . So I probably let my wife talk me into doing things with other people more than I might have.

In the chapter on decision making, I discussed the extent to which children force interaction between spouses and require confrontations on issues that might otherwise be ignored. This same process occurred with regard to example setting. A mother of a preschool boy talked about how disagreements with her husband about food could be ignored before they had a child:

> I'm much more concerned about nutrition than [my husband] is, . . . before he could have plenty of junk food in the house . . . and it didn't bother me cause I could ignore it. Now if he's sitting there eating junk food [our son] wants it and I don't want him to have it, so we have to work that out . . . there <u>has</u> to be more interaction. You either have to work these things out or else it's going to blow up completely.

Some parents talked about the adult equivalent of sneaking cookies from the cookie jar. Parents find themselves with new constraints on their behavior that put them curiously in the same position as children.

Thus, even Americans, who like to see their behavior as freely chosen, are aware of the degree to which they are constrained, first as children by their parents, then as parents by their children. A father with two young children told me:

> Well the dual standard catches everybody . . . you reprimand them for something and then you turn around and do it yourself . . . . You feel guilty sneaking candy. You won't give any to the kids cause they shouldn't have any before a certain time, but you're a parent and you can . . . so you feel kind of guilty.

While many of the things parents said they changed in order to set a good example for the children were related to eating, recreation, and other concrete behaviors, some parents did mention changes or more attention to what might be called moral issues: being fair and honest, being religious, or, more generally, being a "good person." In a pilot interview a mother of five children mentioned the honesty issue:

> Because we feel we've had to be honest with our children, we are honest in our relationships with others . . . I think . . . that you are somewhat of a role model . . . they've got to see these values in action.

She felt that by trying to set a good example, she and her husband incorporated more honesty into their dealings with the rest of the world. Another mother picked up this same theme:

> It brings out more honesty too, I think, in an adult cause you're trying to teach your child, you know, to be honest, and so you as a parent have to make <u>every effort to be honest</u> . . . .
> --high school teacher, mother of two preschoolers

Single parents spoke of ways that the presence of children altered their own sexual behavior. Behaviors they would have found acceptable had they been childless, were now seen as unacceptable because of the example they felt they were setting for their own children. A 26-year-old mother of two preschoolers told me:

> I guess living with somebody before getting married [would have seemed ok before] . . . but now I think it would be screwing up their heads . . . . [I] don't want them to think it's ok to live with anybody.

A mother with older children, both in high school, felt the same way:

> I'm sure they affect my sex life currently . . . . I'm not comfortable with having men stay over and wake up in the morning with my kids here.

Finally, many parents explained the effects on themselves of setting an example in general rather than specific ways. Children seem to have the capacity in this sense to prod parents to "do better." A mother with a three-year-old boy said:

> He really influences me, and my husband too, I think, to try to do better.

In addition, children prod parents to think about what's important and to do something about that. The father of two preschool boys, himself a professional, told me:

> They help refine your own thought processes. You arrive at these values and those personality traits that you don't want the children to have [and] you attempt to control yourself better . . . . It's like screaming at the kid for screaming in the house.

Another father talked about this introspection:

> They force me to look at my behavior, and they force me to have an idea of what's important, and what it means to be a grownup in terms of setting an example for them.

This same father, a university administrator, summed up the feelings of many parents when he observed that:

> Without kids, I doubt that one thinks about being an example for others . . . when you have kids and you have to be an example, you have to think about what kind of an example you want to be. You've got to act that out--and in some cases it is an act--you've got to do that, you've got to work toward being the kind of person you want to be or can be so they will have an example.

The interviews provide support for the notion that models are changed as a consequence of being watched and imitated. Children confront parents with an incentive to "try to do better," to "set a good example." Part of this results from the relatively small back stage area parents have vis-a-vis their children. This process involves not only changes in the overt behavior of the parent but also sets in motion chains of valuing decisions: What is right? What is good? What is important? These issues, initially raised for most people in the abstract during adolescence, now take on concrete meanings and must be acted upon in the present--whether or not one feels that all the information is in.

What is interesting to me here is the way that behaviors that are permitted for childless adults become forbidden (or at least subject to constraints) when one has children. This eliminates some of the need for formal social control over adults--those who are parents will be kept in line by their children.[5] In this way children are a conseva-tive force. Adults may really believe that certain habits are relatively harmless but when it comes to their own children, they would rather not take a chance. In the process their own behaviors are constrained and narrowed, approaching closer current ideologies about the correct way to live.

---

[5]Here I am talking only about the extent to which parents behavior is constrained in order to set an example. Parents are also kept in line in other ways by the responses of their children. Thus children exhort parents to dress more like other children's parents, to buy the right products, and (especially if the child is in the 6-12 age range) to be as much like everybody else as possible.

Answering Their Questions

New to the world, children with their questions about the universe and life and death cast parents in the role of experts. A 31-year-old mother, with a B.A., currently at home with two preschool children said:

> You know, all of a sudden you're supposed to know where rainbows come from and why rain feels the temperature it is . . . and, you know, who is God? . . . a lot about death. Your big topics: God, death, sex . . . . You realize that what you say is really going to make an effect on this little mind . . . it's awesome.

Parents responded to this challenge by becoming experts. They realized they could remember things they never even realized they knew. A 26-year-old mother, a store clerk with a high school education, told me she had to answer questions about:

> . . . even things about animals or birds, you know, things you knew before but you forgot that you knew or didn't realize that you knew . . . when the kids ask you questions you think, 'Oh, I didn't know that I knew that.'

Most of the time they didn't already know, so they had to dig. The father of a four-year-old girl at the day care center explains how this works:

> And I guess for her it's nice to have somebody who can answer the questions which keeps me digging . . . which of course brings up questions for myself which I had asked at her age and I didn't remember the answers or never got answers for.

This digging involved fast and hard thinking as this mother with some graduate school offered:

> [It] makes you really think hard, cause all of a sudden you're having to come up with all these answers to questions --things you never even answered to yourself before.

Some turned to books for the answers:

> He has made me think seriously about getting a set of encyclopedias which is something I would never do . . . [But now] I need somewhere to get real fast information.

In the process of trying to explain things to their children, parents changed their ideas about themselves as teachers, about children as learners, and about education in general. A woman working on a Ph.D. reported that teaching her preschool children gave her confidence to go on to teach at the college level:

> . . . just the teaching role itself . . . not only the modeling, but the explaining . . . . Teaching my children gave me some confidence in seeing that I can [do it well] . . . . About three or four years ago I started teaching at the college level and I don't think that I would have done that if I hadn't had some kind of rewards from my daughter that I was getting my message across.

Many parents noticed that they saw children and teaching in a new light. Practices they favored before now seemed inappropriate in the light of their experiences. One mother told me she had previously been quite taken with Montessori schools. Having a child of her own now, she realized that Montessori schools might not be good for all children. She explained, "Now I would not even consider taking him to a Montessori school." Another mother of preschoolers changed her mind about the plasticity of children:

> [Now] I sometimes feel you don't really have a lot of influence. You can teach extraneous things . . . but you don't really have much effect on what kind of person this is . . . They are already there, they are not blank slates.

A mother finishing up a degree in education said that having a child of her own made her know things about education in "a different way":

> I have learned, I guess, the real meaning of things that I knew cognitively, like you can't push people to learn. I can see that in action and I know it in a different way.

A father (also a teacher) told me that raising a child gave him a chance to confirm his theories of growth and development. Others felt there was a carryover of what they learned from teaching their own children

to their professional lives. A university professor, the father of two said:

> Also it's probably helped me a little bit in my teaching and relationships with students to realize the role of things like discipline.

Most importantly to the parents, trying to explain things to a child exposed them to new worlds, forced them to see things in a new light, and refined and clarified their own thoughts. A mother summarized this when she was telling me about her daughter's question about "Why are butterflies blue?":

> That's when the real re-education begins--answering the basic questions for your child.

Sometimes it was a matter of learning about particular things. For mothers, a chance to learn some science was one of the benefits of having children. Science has traditionally been closed to women, yet being mothers they had a ready-made excuse to dig in and learn something. This mother's response was typical:

> He has opened up other worlds to me that I might not have been interested in . . . the science stuff [for example]--although that had been a fantasy way back . . . . When I knew I was pregnant [I thought] 'Wow, if I have a kid maybe it will be one that is interested in science and then I can learn all that stuff that I was curious about but never learned the first time around.
> --divorced woman, son age five

The chance to do things adults of one's sex have been denied seemed one side benefit of having children. Other examples of this, not confined to a teaching setting, were discussed in the chapter on "Access to the World of Childhood." The father who talked about taking his daughter to dance class parallels the experience of the mother just quoted. Thus, in a certain very delimited way, being a parent provided opportunities to cross gender-specified boundaries of behavior. More

generally, children gave parents a new look at the world. This was discussed earlier in Chapter Four, but is included here since much of the access to the world of childhood comes in the process of answering children's questions. A 34-year-old woman who usually worked but was home that year with her two children told me:

> I think . . . it's given us a different look at life . . . parents tend to see things again like it's the first time--like you're really looking at something that we've taken for granted . . . like a flower and the sun and stars and the moon. And when you have to start answering these questions you have to start looking a little bit more closely yourself . . . you see things with their eyes.

In a more disconcerting way, children confronted their parents with questions that are usually not discussed in everyday life. They asked about "your big topics: God, death and sex." One mother told me she has "to answer some of the basic questions of life that I would never have had to do probably." Most of the questions were ultimately unanswerable, as a mother of a five-year-old explains:

> I've learned a lot about things. The questions he asks that I don't know the answer to . . . questions for which there are no answers . . . [like] 'Why do people hurt each other?'

Children forced their parents to confront their own death, at sometimes inappropriate times, as a mother of two describes:

> It really makes you have to face things that maybe you hadn't faced before. I remember the time [my son] said to me 'Well--are <u>you</u> going to die?' . . . We were driving the car and I almost ran into a tree cause I had to say 'yes' and it just hit me that I had never had to say that to myself . . . that was really a shocker to me . . . . He just got an answer, it wasn't that scary to him.

Another mother remembered her own bad timing as a child when she asked questions about veneral disease on the subway:

> I remember that happening too. You're real confused and you don't know why things are going a certain way what is happening and when you try to find out you're hitting on very sensitive territories . . . . Of course a kid doesn't have the

> sense of danger to shut up. I can remember being on the bus with my mother and . . . they used to put advertisements up all around the top of the bus and one of them really caught my eye because I didn't know what it meant and I said to her, 'What is cyfullus?'--it was an advertisement about syphilis and gonorrhea . . . and she kept saying 'don't ask me' . . . and I of course just got that much worse, wanting to know.

The biggest challenge for parents, and the aspect of teaching that changed them the most, was the attempt to explain things in ways a child could understand. Many parents said that trying to explain death to a preschooler made them give it much more thought than they might have otherwise. A lawyer, the father of one preschooler, said children raise

> Questions like 'Why do flowers bloom? . . . What happens when you die?' I think it gets you thinking [more] about questions than you would have otherwise . . . and it's even more challenging to do [that thinking] with a child . . . . You and I could talk about what happens when you die . . . but to put it in terms that a five year old can understand . . . (emphasis mine)

One father spoke about the difficulties of explaining parental values to a child--how, for example, do you explain your objections to "the plastic economy" to a four year old? Explaining things to a child required parents to dig beneath rhetoric and fiture out what the real issues were to them. A mother told me:

> The things that keep coming to mind is what has happened to my consciousness and my attitudes and beliefs in trying to explain a whole series of things to a child . . . . It's real different to explain a class analysis of why things are the way they are in South Africa rather than a race analysis to a four year old . . . . Trying to find key concepts that she can understand . . . while trying not to frighten her . . . . It's forced me to clarify some of my thinking and not rely on slogans or words that have whole bunches of connotations . . . . When you start describing things on that level--like that half your kids die cause you can't make enough to support them--it's just so heavy, it has such an impact on me--it really intensifies how I feel. (emphasis mine)

The theme of clarification resulting from trying to explain things to a child was mentioned frequently in the interviews: it seems to be a central way in which the teaching process changes the teacher.[6] The two fathers (both with professional degrees) quoted below typify the comments of many parents:

> I usually like to . . . . sit down and watch ["Little House on the Prairie"] with her and talk about it during and after the show . . . and discuss what do you think about that . . . . The simple morality type thing that you don't even think about but when you sit down and [try] to verbalize it . . . it helps you condense it into something more tangible than just a general feeling that you shouldn't do [this or that]. (emphasis mine)

> . . . without children it becomes a value we just more or less use for our own decision making, but with children you'd like them to get . . . their priorities straight . . . . And as you attempt to impart it to them, you refine it better in your own mind. (emphasis mine)

---

[6]The fruitfulness of this in college teaching has not been sufficiently explored. This year I have experimented with assignments that require students to write explanations of complicated books as if they were writing for a child. As a pedagogical tool this has been quite successful.

PART V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

What factors distinguish the kinds of influence that children have on their parents from other kinds of influences adults experience? Any answer to this question depends partly on which other adult influences one considers. In Chapter Two I discussed the problems inherent in using a socialization framework for understanding the effects of children on their parents. Despite those problems (e.g. the conceptual ambiguity that pervades the field, its emphasis [especially among sociologists] on preparation for role performance, and its tendency to ignore unwitting influences), the concept is useful here in providing a means of highlighting the unique features of the process I studied. First, it allows a comparison of the effects of parents on their children (the traditional focus of socialization research) with the effects of children on their parents. Second, an examination of models of adult socialization can offer a systematic means of identifying the ways that the influence of children on their parents differs from other sorts of adult socialization (e.g. learning to drive, or training for a new job).

Some theorists have argued that socialization after childhood is quite different from socialization during childhood. Yet, as I will explain in this concluding chapter, in the special case of the socialization of parents by their children, such differences are at a minimum.

The non-elective nature of parents' participation in three major change-producing situations appears to be the key to understanding why the socialization of parents by their children is so unlike other kinds of socialization in adulthood.

Differences in Socialization During Childhood and Socialization in Later Life

It has been claimed that there are central differences between the socialization of children and that of adults. Such differences, however, are minimal in at least one type of adult socialization--the case of socialization of parents by their own children.

Orville Brim's (1966) broad conceptualization of such differences is a useful focus for exploring this claim because of the clarity with which it illustrates commonly held notions about the differences between socialization in childhood and socialization in later life.[1] Against his model, the content and the process of the socialization of parents by their children stand in sharp contrast.

In his essay, "Socialization Through the Life Cycle," Brim (1966) presents a conceptual framework for understanding the differences and

---

[1] Brim himself (1966: 46) mentions that children do have effects on their parents. He writes:

> At first one thinks of the adult as being the more autonomous, mature member of society with clearly greater power to change the behavior of those with whom he interacts. He may alter his marital relationship, change his boss's ideas, and influence the community's political climate. But on reflection it is clear that the child also may influence the family system in which he lives. He modifies the expectations of his parents about his wishes and actions, teaching them the concept of developmental tasks, forcing them to convert both their proscriptions of what he should not do and their demands for what he should do to fit his own maturational sequence.

However, Brim does not integrate his observations about the effects of children on their parents with his own theoretical model of socialization in adult life.

similarities between socialization during and after childhood. He looks at both the content of socialization and the relationship of the learner to the socializing agent. With regard to the content of socialization, Brim (1966: 25) identifies six shifts: "[a shift] from a concern with values and motives to a concern with overt behavior . . . from acquisition of new material to a synthesis of the old; from a concern with idealism to a concern with realism; from teaching expectations to teaching how to mediate conflict among expectations; from a concern with general demands of society to a concern with role-specific expectations; and finally, a change from 'I-me' components of the personality to other components." Further, he selects several aspects of the individual's relationship to the socializing agent which differ over the course of the life cycle. First, "[s]ocialization at later ages quite often does not require the individual to take the role of one being socialized"(Brim, 1966: 34). Second, there are differences with regard to the degree of power and affectivity present in the situation. Third, adults, unlike children, are free to leave situations in which they are being socialized.

Over half of the differences betwen child and adult socialization cited by Brim do not pertain to the special situation of the socialization of parents by their children. The results of my study indicate that, on the contrary, this particular case of adult socialization <u>does</u> involve (1) values and motivation, (2) a high degree of generality, (3) core identity issues, (4) a high degree of power differential and affectivity, and (5) takes place in a setting which one cannot leave. Each of these five parts of Brim's model is analyzed in more detail below.

The Content of Socialization

Brim begin's his model by positing that over the life course a shift occurs in the content of socialization. Childhood socialization is concerned with values and motivation--that of adults with behavior and knowledge. He writes (1966: 25-27):

> There are three things a person requires before he is able to perform satisfactorily in a role. He must know what is expected of him (both in behavior and values), must be able to meet the role requirements, and must desire to practice the behavior and pursue the appropriate ends. It can be said that the purposes of socialization are to give a person knowledge, ability and motivation.
>
> A simple cross-classification of these three concepts with values and behavior establishes a paradigm which helps to analyze the changes in content of socialization through the life cycle. In this paradigm six cells are indicated by letters for simplicity of reference:

	Behavior	Values
Knowledge	A	B
Ability	C	D
Motivation	E	F

Brim (1966: 25) proposes that over the life course, "the emphasis on socialization moves from motivation to ability and from a concern with values to a concern with behavior." Adults are presumed to have the proper values and motivations. He notes that, "In general, then, socialization after childhood deals primarily with overt behavior in the role and makes little attempt to influence motivation of a fundamental kind or to influence basic values. Society is willing to spend much less time in redirecting the motivations and values of adults."

Contrary to Brim's claim that socialization after childhood has little effect on values and motivations, socialization of parents by children is intensely centered on issues of value and motivation. My data, and the research of others (see especially Klaus and Kennell,

1976; and Rheingold, 1969) point to a substantial amount of motivational socialization of parents by their children. Clinical evidence supports the view that motivation to want to take care of a child often comes after delivery as well as before (see Fraiberg, 1975). My own data support this. Belief in an "instinct" for mothering in humans has largely been abandoned (see, however, Rossi, 1977, for a new look at this question).

Further, the assumption that motivations for parenthood are learned during childhood and adulthood also seems like an over-simplification. Greenberg's (1974) study of fathers present in the delivery room, Fraiberg's (1975) observations of breakdowns in the attachment process between parents and their blind infants, and Rheingold's (1969) descriptions of the socializing nature of the human infant--all point to ways in which infants (by early eye contact and later smiles and vocalizations) encourage parents to want to care for them. Brim (1966: 25) assumes that childhood is the time when "the individual is motivated to behave in appropriate ways and to pursue designated values." My interviews with parents point to the extent to which adults, too, learn new motivations as a result of being parents. The motivation for caring for a child is one example: such motivation is not simply learned in childhood and then acted upon in adulthood--but rather it is learned to a substantial degree during experiences with an infant.[2]

---

[2]Here I am not arguing against formulations, such as that of Nancy Chodorow (1978), which claim that the early childhood experiences of women predispose them to want to mother. Rather I am asserting that experiences with an infant both produce and reinforce motivations to care for children.

Likewise, my interview data show that parents experience substantial shifts in values as a result of influences from their children. Parents of older children reported becoming less conservative on many issues.[3] Values regarding premarital chastity, drug use and the work ethic were altered. Parents came to question their earlier support of the war in Vietnam, and their response to conscientious objectors changed. As a consequence of raising children, parents also changed their religious beliefs (becoming sometimes more, sometimes less religious). In general, being responsible for a child led parents to take stands on issues they would otherwise have left unexamined and not acted upon.

Brim posits an increase in specificity in adult socialization. He suggests that over the life course there is a change in "whether what is taught applied to many social situations or to just a few," and notes that in "most instances the content of later-life socialization tends to be role-specific, rather than general in nature" (1966: 32). Yet the parents I interviewed stressed the general nature of the things they learned from being parents. What they learned from (or about) their children they applied to a wide variety of social situations, not simply to themselves in their role as parents. For example, as a result of having children, parents were able to change their own relationships

---

[3]The influences of children on their parents are historically conditioned. The degree of isolation of the nuclear family, for example, significantly alters the kinds of effects parents will experience. In addition, such things as the social and political climate have an enormous impact on the issues that will be salient for a family at a particular point in history. Most of the older parents I interviewed had teenagers during the sixties and seventies--times of turmoil and unrest. Teenagers may have had very different effects on parents during the forties and fifties. Research on families has often been blind to such historical constraints.

with other people--they learned to be less defensive. Others took what they learned from children and applied it to their work--like the minister father who learned not to "shred" stories. For many, their response to other children being harmed was sharply altered by being parents (e.g. the ones who could not watch horror or war movies if children were being hurt, or the father who was reluctant to fire a man who was a parent). What they were taught by their children altered them in fundamental ways and applied to many social situations rather than to just a few.

The issue of a shift from "I-me" to "I-them" components of the personality is more complicated than the previous issues. For Brim, the "I-me" system corresponds roughly to Mead's "generalized other"--the child has forgotten the particular others (from the earlier "they-me" relationships) but internalized their prescriptions. Brim argues that adults, on the other hand, engage more in "I-them" relations (where the self is the subject and the other is the object) or in "they-me" relations (where the other is clearly identifiable). Brim says (1966: 32-33), "At later ages the source of the material which is acquired is more readily identifiable; the 'they' involved is usually quite clear. Moreover, with the growth of power in maturity, one increases the degree to which he is the instigator of the action and consequently is engaged more frequently in, and thus thinks about himself as, the 'I-them' relationships."

My data contradict this claim, especially if one takes Brim's (1966: 33) equation of "the 'I-me' component of the personality with the core personality, with 'identity'." While parents are to an extent able to identify the particular other (in this case their own child) quite

clearly, this model breaks down in several ways. To begin with, one's children may take on a larger-than-life significance. Their appraisals (as many of the parents in my study asserted) are taken more seriously than those of others. Parents are also judged by others on the basis of the product they have fashioned. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that being a primary parent evokes deeply felt yearnings and results in a diminishing of ego boundaries. In such a context there is a less sharp separation of the two people, making the distinction between "I" and "them" more difficult than usual. All these factors lead to an increase in the extent to which being a parent shapes the core identity issues that most theorists consign to childhood. While Brim notes (1966: 33) that "not uncommonly, dramatic shifts in identity do occur at later stages of the life cycle, since significant persons may have an unusual impact upon a person's appraisal of his own basic characteristics," he does not explicitly include one's children among such "significant persons." The perceptions of the parents I interviewed are that the process of caring for a child almost necessarily involves re-appraisal of one's own core characteristics. At the most basic level, parents reported the process giving them feelings of increased competence or incompetence that were quite pervasive--spilling over into other areas of life. Some said that their parenting skills provided a basis of self-esteem, or esteem from a spouse, while others felt that they had failed miserably. Others began to see themselves as a different sort of person (one capable of anger and rage, of compassion for others and of being "brave").

Relationship to the Socializing Agent

Brim also outlines differences between adults and children in their relationship to the socializing agent. My interview data do not support two of the three differences he claims.

Brim states:

> It is clear that the child is socialized in a context of high affectivity and high power, and the adult in a sharply contrasting situation of affective neutrality and little power differentiation. Strauss points out in his paper that the "high power," "high support" (or positive affect) relationship leads to the acquisition by children of deep-seated motives and values. Other investigators theorizing about the child's acquisition of basic parental and cultural values also take this view: that the environment where the socializing agent and the affective rewards and punishments are great is the one where the fundamental components of personality are established. The adult socialization context does not have these characteristics and is not conducive to the inculcation of basic values.

Unlike the adult socialization situations Brim had in mind, the socialization of parents by their children is conducted in a highly affective relationship. The interview material underscores this point dramatically. It appears that it is precisely this highly charged affective component that accounts for the striking differences between socialization of parents by their children and other sorts of adult socialization. Brim cites exceptions, e.g. prisoners of war, religious conversions, and brainwashings, but fails to mention parent/child issues.

Research on primate behavior has uncovered an interesting parallel to this matter of the relationship between learning and affectivity. Jane Lancaster (1975: 45-46), reporting on the work of Itani (1958), Kawai (1965) and Kawamura (1963), notes that the spread of innovations in troupes of Japanese Macaques could be understood by looking at "attention structures." New habits spread slowly through troupes "following lines of special relationships, usually ties of affection."

Adult males, she reports, "were not resistant to [new ideas] on principle; they simply did not notice what was going on in a way that would affect their behavior. On those occasions when adult males did learn new food habits it was in the context of "very special relationships which they develop during the birth season," when they sometimes "'adopt' recently weaned yearlings for a few months." Lancaster underscores the importance of a strong affective climate for new learning in adults.

In addition to high affectivity, the parent-child relationship also involves a high power differential, though in this case it is in the opposite direction from what Brim describes. My research leads me to believe this is a crucial ingredient of the situation in which parents are socialized by their children.

Finally, socialization of parents by their children takes place in a system they cannot leave. Alice Rossi (1969), in one of the few theoretical papers on the "transition-to-parenthood," proposed that it is exactly this inability to leave that makes the transition to parenthood different from the transition to other adult roles.[4] Fabe and Wikler (1979), who interviewed women in their late thirties regarding decisions about child bearing, cite this is one of the major issues confronting parents. Once you've had children, you can't send them back.[5]

---

[4]Other seemingly irrevocable role transitions (e.g. being a nun or a priest) can be reversed. Interestingly, sterilization (which is again related to parenthood) is about the only other non-reversable process to which adults are generally exposed.

[5]Yet it is important to recognize cultural variations in the degree of irrevocability (see, for example, the child sharing described by Stack, 1975). To a certain extent my sample may be skewed to conceal more transitory experiences of parenting.

This irrevocability, together with the constant pressure to maintain the role, has certain consequences that differentiate it from other sorts of adult socialization.[6] One must deal with things whether or not one is ready (one parent I interviewed said, "We realized we had to get ourselves together, we didn't have time to stay immature."), and whether or not one is able. Thus, while adult socialization is usually confined to learning things one wants to learn (e.g. attending nursing school), making changes one wants to make (e.g. joining a social movement), and confronting issues one wants to confront (e.g. going into therapy), parenthood involves little of this freedom. Beyond the initial "choice" to have a child, what follows is a non-elective trip through uncharted territory, with no chance to get off and few chances to take a break.

---

[6]The irrevocable nature of parenthood may be especially significant in this particular historical context where so much else (e.g. marriage, careers) is revocable.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PART A

1. Introductions, pleasantries.

2. Begin with a broad question: "Traditionally sociologists have focused on parents' influence on their children. I'm interested in the other side of this. That is, how are parents influenced by their children? Can you tell me something about how you, as a person, have been influenced by your children? How have your adult growth and development been influenced by them?"

3. Notice where they take this broad question and how they answer it.

   What do . . .

   They mention first? last?
   Are they general? specific?
   Note tone of voice, manner, style, attitude, choice of words.
   Note body language, facial expressions.
   Are they enthusiastic or not?
   Do they offer little or much elaboration?
   Do they seem puzzled by the question or do they seem to "Know what I mean?"
   Do they mention a lot of things or just a few but in detail?
   How much probing is necessary?

4. Use of probes.

   Initially, use the following: Any other ways? Have you noticed anything else? Is that all? Any other areas?

   When they began to slow down and the general probes didn't work anymore, I went on to Part B.

PART B

1. Has having children influenced your memory of your own childhood? How or in what ways?

2. Has having children affected the way you feel about or interact with your own parents? How or in what ways?

3. Has having children influenced your values and beliefs? How or in what ways?

4. Has having children influenced your sense of the future? How or in what ways?

5. Has having children had an influence on how you feel about life and death? How or in what ways?

6. Have you noticed any differences (in influence) according to the age and sex of the child? What are those differences?

7. For some people, having children seems to expand their world, makes them think of things they never thought of before. For others, being a parent seems to be a constricting experience, one that cuts them off from the world and narrows their experience. Do you know both sorts of parents? Has it been mostly constricting or enlarging for you? What do you think makes the difference? (for yourself and for others)

8. Some theorists feel that being a parent is a necessary part of adult growth and development. Others feel that children inhibit adult growth and development. What do you think?

PART C

Analysis (this was not really part of the interview, but rather a way for me to be thinking about the information as I was gathering it).

Setting the interview up in this manner provided the following categories:

1. Those things parents mention spontaneously:
   a. Before probing
   b. After probing

2. Those things they mentioned when I followed up on earlier comments.

3. Those things they mentioned only in response to a specific question from the list in Part B.

4. Those things mentioned spontaneously during Part B (e.g., sometimes parents talked about the importance of changed emotional response during a question on values and beliefs or memories).

APPENDIX B

GENERAL CODING CATEGORIES

1. Children as precipitants of emotion response.
2. Children as decision precipitators.
3. Setting an example, being a model for the child.
4. Trying to teach children something.
5. Seeing own childhood behavior and personality in the child now.
6. Seeing oneself in the child.
7. Triggering memories.
8. Making one think about the future.
9. Providing an entree into the world of childhood.

APPENDIX C

PLEASE RETURN TODAY IF POSSIBLE

June 12, 1978

Dear Parents,

I'm doing an interview study of the ways that children influence their parents. If you'd be willing to talk with me about this, please check the YES box below and add your phone number so I can call you soon about arranging an interview. I'm interested in the experiences of both single and married parents. The interview will take about one hour and involves only the parent(s), not the children.

NOTE: Since my focus is on the influence of young children, I will not be interviewing parents with older children. If you have an older child (one who was in the first grade or above during 1977-78) please indicate below.

Thanks,

Beverly T. Purrington
1651 Seven Trails Court
Okemos, MI
(349-0420)

☐ YES, you may call me.
NAME:
PHONE:

☐ I do not want to participate.

☐ I am ineligible because I have a child who was in first grade or above during 1977-78.

PLEASE LEAVE THIS LETTER IN THE BRIGHT GREEN SHOEBOX IN THE MAIN OFFICE, AFTER YOU HAVE CHECKED ONE OF THE BOXES ABOVE.

(A letter from my dissertation advisor, explaining the project, was posted at each of the day care centers and nursery school.)

APPENDIX D

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

April 26, 1978

To whom it may concern:

Beverly Purrington is conducting an interview study of the influence of children on their parents. This study will provide material for Beverly's Ph.D. dissertation in Sociology at Michigan State University.

Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated. Should you have any questions, please call:

Beverly Purrington-- 349-0420 or

M.S.U. Sociology Dept.-- 355-6640 or

Barrie Thorne (Beverly's dissertation adviser)-- 332-3866; 355-7545

Sincerely,

Barrie Thorne

Barrie Thorne
Associate Professor

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aberle, D. F. "Culture and Socialization." In Psychological Anthropology: Approaches to Culture and Personality. Edited by F. S. Hsu, Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1961.

Anthony, J. E., and Benedek, T. eds., Parenthood: Its Psychology and Psychopathology. Boston: Little, Brown, 1970.

Arnold, F.; Bulatao, R.; Buripakdi, C.; Chung, B.; Fawcett, J.; Iritani, T.; Les, S. J.; and Wu, Tsong-Schein. The Value of Children: A Cross-National Study. Volume 1: Introduction and Comparative Analysis. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1976.

Bakan, David. Slaughter of the Innocents. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1971.

Beach, F. A., and Jaynes, J. "Studies of Material Retriving in Rats. II. Sensory Cues Involved in the Lactating Females' Response to Her Young." Behavior 10 (1956): 104-125.

Beauchamp, D. "Parenthood as Crisis: An Additional Study." Unpublished paper, University of North Dakota, 1968.

Becker, H. S. "Personal Change in Adult Life." Sociometry 27(1) (1964): 40-53.

Bell, R. Q. "A Reinterpretation of the Direction of Effects in Studies of Socialization." Psychological Review 75(2) (1968): 81-95.

_____. " Stimulus Control of Parent or Caretaker Behavior by Offspring." Developmental Psychology 4(1) (1971): 63-72.

Bell, R. Q., and Harper, L. V. Child Effects on Adults. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1977.

Benedek, T. "Parenthood as a Developmental Phase." Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 7 (1959): 389-414.

Berberich, J. P. "Do the Child's Responses Shape the Teaching Behavior of Adults?" Journal of Experimental Research in Personality 5 (1971): 92-97.

Bergler, E. Parents Not Guilty! of Their Children's Neuroses. New York: Liveright, 1964.

Bernard, J. The Future of Marriage. New York: Bantam, 1972.

Bogdanoff, K. P. "Method of Childbirth and Its Relationship to Marital Adjustment and Parental Crisis." M.A. thesis. Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University, 1974.

Bossard, J. H., and Boll, E. S. "Marital Unahppiness in the Life Cycle of Marriage." Marriage and Family Living 17 (1955): 10-14.

Brim, O. G., Jr. "The Parent-Child Relation as a Social System: 1. Parent and Child Roles." Child Development 28(3) (1957): 343-364.

_____. Education for Childrearing. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959.

_____. "Socialization thru the Life Cycle." In Socialization After Childhood: Two Essays. By O. J. Brim and S. Wheeler, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966.

Bruner, J. "The Nature and Uses of Immaturity." American Psychologist 27 (1972): 687-708.

Burgess, E. W., and Cottrell, E. W. Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage. New York: Prentice Hall, 1939.

Burr, W. R. "Satisfaction with Various Aspects of Marriage Over the Life Cycle." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(1) (1970): 29-37.

Burton, L. Care of the Child Facing Death. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

Carnuchan, B. "The Child Is Father of the Man." Unpublished manuscript.

Chodorow, N. "Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots." Social Problems 23(4) (1976): 454-468.

_____. The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkley: University of California Press, 1978.

_____. "Considerations on 'A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting'." Berkley Journal of Sociology 22 (1978a): 180-197.

Chester, R. "Is There a Relationship Between Childlessness and Marriage Breakdown?" Journal of Biosocial Science 4 (1972): 443-454.

Christensen, H. "Children in the Family: Relationship of Number and Spacing to Marital Success." Journal of Marriage and the Family (30)2 (1968): 283-289.

Clausen, J. A. Socialization and Society. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968.

Cobb, E. The Ecology of the Imagination in Childhood. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

_____. "The Ecology of the Imagination in Childhood." In The Subversive Science: Essays Toward an Ecology of Man. Edited by P. Shepard and D. McKinley, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969.

Coley, S., and James, B. "Delivery: A Trauma for Fathers?" The Family Coordinator 25(4) (1976): 359-363.

Cooley, C. H. Social Organization. New York: C. Scribner and Sons, 1925; Reprint edition, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1956.

Corsaro, W. "Sociolinguistic Patterns in Adult-Child Interaction." Unpublished manuscript.

Cowan, C.; Cowan, P.; Coie, L.; and Coie, J. "Becoming a Family: The Impact of a First Child's Birth on the Couple's Relationship." In The First Child and Family Formation. Edited by W. Millert and L. Newman, University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming.

Cox, R. D. Youth Into Maturity. New York: Mental Health Materials Center, 1970.

Cronenwett, L. R., and Newmark, L. L. "Fathers' Responses to Childbirth." Nursing Research 23 (1974): 210-217.

Dasheill, J. F. "An Experimental Analysis of Some Group Effects." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 25 (1930): 190-199.

Delacato, C. The Diagnosis and Treatment of Speech and Reading Problems. Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1963.

Deutsch, H. The Psychology of Women, Vol. 2. New York: Grune and Stratton, 1945.

Devor, G. "Childran as Agents in Socializing Parents." The Family Coordinator 19 (1970): 208-212.

Dexter, L. Elite and Specialized Interviewing. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

DiRenzo, G. J. "Socialization, Personality, and Social Systems." Annual Review of Sociology 3 (1977): 261-295.

Dyer, E. D. "Parenthood as Crisis: A Re-study." Marriage and Family Living 25(2) (1963): 196-201.

Ehrenreich, B., and English, D. For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts Advice to Women. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1979.

Ehrman, H. Game, Play and Literature, 1968.

Erikson, E. "Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers." Psychological Issues 1(1) (1959): 1-171, New York: International Union Press, Inc.

_____. Childhood and Society. New York: W. W. Norton, 1963.

_____. Identity, Youth and Crisis. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

Espenshade, T. J. "The Taste for Children." Family Planning Perspectives 9(1) (1977): 40-43 and 47.

Fabe, M., and Wikler, N. Up Against the Clock. New York: Random House, 1979.

Falkman, P., and Irish, D. "Socialization: Resocialization: Reverse Socialization: Analysis and Societal Significance." Paper presented to Midwest Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Omaha, Nebraska: April 5, 1974.

Fein, R. A. "Men's Entrance to Parenthood." The Family Coordinator 25(4) (1976): 341-348.

Feldman, H. "Changes in Marriage and Parenthood: A Methodological Design." In Pronatalism: The Myth of Mom and Apple Pie. Edited by Peck and Senderowitz, New York: T. J. Crowell Company, 1974.

Festinger, L., and Carlsmith, J. M. "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 58 (1959): 203-210.

Figley, C. R. "Child Density and the Marital Relationship." Journal of Marriage and the Family 35(2) (1973): 272-282.

Fraiberg, S. "The Development of Human Attachments in Infants Blind from Birth." Merrill-Palmer Quarterly 21(4) (1975): 315-334.

Fraiberg, S.; Adelson, E.; and Shapiro, V. "Ghosts in the Nursery: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Problems of Impared Infant-Mother Relationships."

Freeman, T. "Pregnancy as a Precipitant of Mental Illness in Men." British Journal of Medical Psychology 24 (1951): 49-54.

Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L. The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Goffman, I. The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Goslin, D., ed., Handbook of Socialization Research and Theory. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1969.

Gould, R. "The Phases of Adult Life: A Study in Developmental Psychology." The American Journal of Psychiatry 129 (1972): 521-531.

Greenberg, M., and Morris, N. "Engrossment: The Newborn's Impact Upon the Father." American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 44(4) (1974): 520-531.

Greif, J. B. "Child Absence: Fathers' Perceptions of Their Relationship to Their Children Subsequent to Divorce." D.S.W. dissertation: Adelphi University, 1977.

Gurin, G.; Veroff, J.; and Feld, S. Americans View Their Mental Health. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1960.

Gustavus, S. O., and Henley, J. R. Jr. "Correlates of Voluntary Childlessness in a Select Population." Social Biology 18 (1971): 277-284.

Gyulay, J. The Dying Child. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978.

Harper, L. V. "Ontogenetic and Phylogenetic Functions of the Parent-Offspring Relationship in Mammals." Advances in the Study of Behavior 3 (1970): 7-117.

_____. "The Young as a Source of Stimuli Controlling Caretaker Behavior." Developmental Psychology 4 (1971): 73-88.

_____. "The Scope of Offspring Effects: From Caregiver to Culture." Psychological Bulletin 82(5) (1975): 784-801.

Haugan, G. M., and McIntire, R. W. "Comparisons of Vocal Imitation, Tactile Stimulation, and Food as Reinforcers for Infant Vocalizations." Developmental Psychology 6 (1972): 201-209.

Heath, L. L.; Roper, B. X.; and King, C. D. "A Research Note on Children Viewed as Contributors to Marital Stability: The Relationship to Birth Control Use, Ideal and Expected Family Size." Journal of Marriage and the Family 36(2) (1974): 304-307.

Henchy, T., and Glass, D. G. "Evaluation Apprehension and the Social Facilitation of Dominant and Subordinate Responses." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 10(4) (1978): 44-454.

Henley, N. Body Politics. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977.

Hicks, M. W., and Platt, M. "Marital Happiness and Stability: A Review of Research in the Sixties." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(4) (1970): 553-574.

Hilgard, J. R. "Anniversary Reactions in Parents Precipitated by Children." Psychiatry 16 (1953): 73-80.

Hobbs, D. F., Jr. "Parenthood as Crisis: A Third Study." Journal of Marriage and the Family 27(3) (1965): 367-372.

_____. "Transition to Parenthood: A Replication and an Extension." Journal of Marriage and the Family 30(3) (1968): 413-417.

Hobbs, D. F., Jr., and Peck, S. P. "Transition to Parenthood: A Decade Replication." Journal of Marriage and the Family 39(4) (1976): 723-731.

Hobbs, D. F., Jr., and Wimbish, J. M. "Transition to Parenthood by Black Couples." Journal of Marriage and the Family 39(4) (1977): 677-688.

Hochschild, A. "Attending to, Codifying and Managing Feelings: Sex Differences in Love." Paper presented at American Sociological Association Meetings, San Francisco, August 29, 1975.

Hollingworth, L. "Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children." American Journal of Sociology 22 (1929): 19-29.

Houseknecht, S. K. "Reference Group Support for Voluntary Childlessness: Evidence for Conformity." Journal of Marriage and the Family 39(2) (1977): 285-292.

Hurley, J. R., and Palonen, D. P. "Marital Satisfaction and Child Density Among University Student Parents." Journal of Marriage and the Family 29(3) (1967): 463-484.

Itani, J. "On the Acquisition and Propagation of a New Food Habit in the Natural Group of Japanese Monkey at Takasakiyama." Primates 1 (1958): 84-86.

Jacoby, A. P. "Transition to Parenthood: A Reassessment." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31(4) (1969): 720-727.

_____. "Transition to Parenthood." Unpublished study, 1970.

Jessner, L.; Weigert, E.; and Foy, J. "The Development of Parental Attitudes During Pregnancy." In Parenthood. Edited by J. Anthony and T. Benedek, Boston: Little, Brown, 1970.

Kaplan, E., and Blackman, L. "The Husband's Role in Psychiatric Illness Associated with Childbearing." Psychiatric Quarterly 43 (1969): 396-409.

Kawai, M. "Newly-Acquired Pre-Cultural Behavior of the Natural Troup of Japanese Monkeys in Koshima Islet." Primates 6(1) (1965): 1-30.

Kawamura, "The Process of Sub-Culture Propagation Among Japanese Monkeys." In Primate Social Behavior. Edited by C. H. Southwick, New York: Van Nostrand, 1963.

Keifert, R. M. and Dixon, G. I. "A Preliminary Study of the Childless Couple." Rocky Mountain Social Sciences Journal 5 (1968): 119-122.

Keshet, H. F., and Rosenthal, K. M. "Fathering After Marital Separation." Social Work 23(1) (1978): 11-18.

Klaus, M. H. and Kennell, J. H. Maternal-Infant Bonding: The Impact of Early Separation or Loss on Family Development. St Louis, Missouri: Mosby, 1976.

Komorovsky, M. Blue-Collar Marriage. New York: Vintage Books, 1962.

Korner, F. "Mother-Child Interaction: One- or Two-Way Street?" Social Work 10 (1965): 47-51.

Lamanna, M. A., and Kurtz, R. "The Value of Children to Parents: Biological and Adoptive Parents." Paper presented at the 74th annual meeting of the ASA, Boston, Massachusetts: August 27-31, 1979.

Lancaster, J. Primate Behavior and the Emergence of Human Culture. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

Laws, J. L. "A Feminist Review of the Martial Adjustment Literature." Journal of Marriage and the Family 33(3) (1971): 483-516.

LeMasters, E. E. "Parenthood as Crisis." Marriage and Family Living 19(4) (1967): 352-355.

Lerner, B., Raskin, R., and Davis, E. "On the Need to be Pregnant." International Journal of PsychoAnalysis 48 (1967): 288-297.

Levinson, D. The Seasons of a Man's Life. New York: Knopf, 1978.

Levinson, D., et al. "The Psychosocial Development of Men in Early Adulthood and the Mid-Life Transition." Life History Research in Psychopathology 3 (1974): 243-258.

Levinson, D., et al. "Periods in the Adult Development of Men." Counseling Psychologist 6(1) (1976): 21-25.

Lewis, M., and Rosenblum, L., eds., The Effect of the Infant on Its Caregiver. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1974.

Lively, E. L. "Toward Concept Clarification: The Case of Marital Interaction." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31(1) (1969): 108-114.

Luckey, E. B. "Number of Years Married as Related to Personality Perception and Marital Satisfaction." Journal of Marriage and the Family 28(1) (1966): 44-48.

Luckey, E. G., and Bain, J. K. "Children: A Factor in Marital Satisfaction." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(1) (1970): 43-44.

Mead, M. Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap. Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970.

Melges, F. "Postpartum Psychiatric Syndromes." Psychosomatic Medicine 30(1) (1968): 95-108.

Meyerowitz, J. H. "Satisfaction During Pregnancy." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(1) (1970): 38-42.

Meyerowitz, J. H., and Feldman, H. "Transition to Parenthood." Psychiatric Research Reports 20 (1966): 78-84.

Miller, R. S., and Morris, W. N. "The Effects of Being Imitated on Children's Responses in a Marble-Dropping Task." Child Development 45 (1974): 1103-1107.

Monahan, T. P. "Is Childlessness Related to Family Stability?" American Sociological Review 29(5) (1955): 446-456.

Montherlant, Henri de. La Reine Morte: Drame en Trois Actes. Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

Movius, M. "Voluntary Childlessness--The Ultimate Liberation." The Family Coordinator 25(1) (1976): 57-62.

Neugarten, B. "Adaptation and the Life Cycle." Counseling Psychologist 6(1) (1976): 16-20.

Newman, A., and Dickstein, R. "Effects of Being a Model on Scores on a Performance IQ Test." Developmental Psychology 12(4) (1976): 355-356.

Nisbett, R. E., and Wilson, T. D. "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes." Psychological Review 84(3) (1977): 231-256.

Noirot, E. "Changes in Responsiveness to Young in the Adult Mouse. III." Behavior 24 (1965): 318-325.

Novak, M. A., and Harlow, H. F. "Social Recovery of Monkeys Isolated for the First Year of Life: I. Rehabilitation Therapy." Developmental Psychology. II(4) (1975): 453-465.

Nye, E. I.; Carlson, J; and Garrett, G. "Family Size, Interaction, Affect, and Stress." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(2) (1970): 216-226.

Orden, S. R., and Bradburn, N. M. "Working Wives and Marital Happiness." American Journal of Sociology 74(4) (1969): 392-407.

Osofsky, J. D. "The Shaping of Mother's Behavior by Children." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(3) (1970): 400-405.

O'Toole, R., and Dubin, R. "Baby Feeding and Body Sway: An Experiment in George Herbert Mead's 'Taking the Role of the Other'." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 10(1) (1968): 59-65.

Peck, E. The Baby Trap. New York: Pinnacle Books, 1971.

Peck, E., and Senderowitz, J. Pronatalism: The Myth of Mom and Apple Pie. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1974.

Pessin, J. "The Comparative Effects of Social and Mechanical Stimulation on Memorization." American Journal of Psychology 45 (1933): 263-270.

Pincus, Lilly. Death and the Family: The Importance of Mourning. New York: Random House, 1974.

Pohlman, E. W. "Burgess and Cottrel Data on 'Desire for Children': An Example of Distortion in Marriage and Family Textbooks?" Journal of Marriage and the Family 30(3) (1968): 433-436.

_____. "Childlessness, Intentional and Unintentional: Psychological and Social Aspects." Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease 151 (1970): 2-12.

Popenoe, P. "Motivation of Childless Marriages." Journal of Heredity 27 (1936): 469-472.

Proust, Marcel. A la Recherche du Temps Perdu: Selections. Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1964.

Pugh, T.; Jerath, B.; Schmidt, W.; and Reed, B. "Rates of Mental Disease as Related to Childbearing." New England Journal of Medicine 268: (1963): 122-1228.

Reik, T. Listening with the Third Ear: The Inner Experience of a Psychoanalyst. New York: Grove Press, 1948.

Renne, K. S. "Correlates of Dissatisfaction in Marriage." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(1) (1970): 54-66.

Ressler, R. H. "Parental Handling in Two Strains of Mice Reared by Foster Parents." Science 137 (1962): 129-130.

Retterstol, N. "Paranoid Psychoses Associated with Impending or Newly Established Fatherhood." Acta Scandinavica 44 (1968): 5161.

Rheingold, L. Maternal Behavior in Mammals. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1963.

_____. "The Development of Social Behavior in the Human Infant." In H. W. Stevenson, (ed.), Concept of Development. A report of a conference commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 31 (5 Whole, #5), 1966.

_____. "Infancy." International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. New York: Crowell-Collier & Macmillan, 1968, pp. 224-285.

_____. "The Social and Socializing Infant." Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research. Edited by D. Goslin, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969.

Rich, A. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. New York: Bantam, 1977.

Rollins, B. C., and Feldman, H. "Marital Satisfaction Over the Family Life Cycle." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32(1) (1970): 20-28.

Roman, M. Untitled study on depression in non-custodial parents after divorce. Cited in "Report of the California Women Lawyers Child Custody Project," September 30, 1977 (mimeo).

Roman, M., and Haddad, W. The Disposable Parent: The Case for Joint Custody. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Rosenblatt, J. S. "Nonhormonal Basis of Maternal Behavior in the Rat." Science 156 (1967): 1514-1515.

Rosenblatt, J. S.; Turkewitz, G.; and Schneirla, T. C. "Early Socialization in the Domestic Cat as Based on Feeding and Other Relationships Between Female and Young." In Determinants of Infant Behavior. Edited by B. M. Foss, New York: Wiley and Sons, 1961.

Rosenblatt, P. C., et al. "A Cross-Cultural Study of Responses to Childlessness." Behavioral Science Notes 8 (1973): 221-231.

Rosow, Irving. "Forms and Functions of Adult Socialization." Social Forces 44 (1965): 35-45.

Rossi, A. "Transition to Parenthood." Journal of Marriage and the Family 30(1) (1968): 26-39.

_____. "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting." Daedalus 106(2) (1977): 1-31.

Rubin, L. B. Worlds of Pain. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Ruddick, S. "Maternal Thinking." Feminist Studies, in press.

Russell, C. S. "Transition to Parenthood: Problems and Gratifications." Journal of Marriage and the Family 36(2) (1974): 294-302.

Schachtel, E. Metamorphosis. New York, Basic Books, 1959.

Schiff, H. S. The Bereaved Parent. New York: Crown Publishers, 1977.

Schneirla, T. C.; Rosenblatt, J. S.; and Toback, E. "Maternal Behavior in the Cat." In Maternal Behavior in Mammals. Edited by H. L. Rheingold, New York: Wiley and Sons, 1963.

Schoenenberg, A.; Carr, D.; Peretz, D.; and Kutscher, A., eds., Loss and Grief: Psychological Management in Medical Practice. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Schoenberg, B.; Gerber, I.; Wiener, A.; Kutscher, A.; Peretz, D.; and Carr, A., eds., Bereavement: Its Psychosocial Aspects. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

Sears, R. R.; Maccoby, E.; and Levin, H. Patterns of Child Rearing. Evanston, Illinois: Row Peterson, 1957.

Sheehy, G. Passages. New York: Bantam, 1977.

Shepard, P. "Place in American Culture." Talk given at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1977.

Silka, L., and Kiesler, S. "Couples Who Choose to Remain Childless." Family Planning Perspectives 9(1) (1977): 16-25.

Silverman, A., and Silverman, A. The Case Against Having Children. New York: David McKay, 1971.

Singer, M. A. "A Survey of Culture and Personality Theory and Research." In Studying Personality Cross-Culturally. Edited by B. Kaplan, New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

Stack, C. B. All Our Kin. New York: Harper Colophon, 1975.

Stollak, G. Until We Are Six. Huntington, New York: Robert Krieger, 1978.

Thornton, A. "Children and Marital Stability." Journal of Marriage and the Family 39(3) (1977): 531-540.

Titus, S. "Family Photographs and Transition to Parenthood." Journal of Marriage and the Family 38(3) (1976): 525-530.

Tod, E., and Edin, E. "Puerperal Depression." The Lancet (1964): 1264-1266.

Tooke, S. "Adjustment to Parenthood Among a Select Group of Disadvantaged Parents." M.S. thesis. Montana State University, 1974.

Towne, R., and Afterman, J. "Psychosis in Males Related to Parenthood." Bulletin of Meninger Clinic 19 (1955): 19-26.

Uhlenberg, B. "Crisis Factors in the Transition of College Students to Parenthood." M.A. thesis. Ohio State University, 1970.

Veevers, J. E. "Voluntarily Childless Wives: An Exploratory Study." Sociology and Social Research: An International Quarterly 57(2) (1973): 356-366.

Veevers, J. E. "Voluntary Childlessness: A Neglected Area of Study." The Family Coordinator 23 (1973a): 199-201.

Wainwright, W. H. "Fatherhood as a Precipitant of Mental Illness." American Journal of Psychiatry 123 (1966): 40-44.

Wente, A. S., and Crockenberg, S. B. "Transition to Parenthood: Lamaze Preparation, Adjustment Difficulty, and the Husband-Wife Relationship." The Family Coordinator 25(4) (1976): 351-357.

Wenar, Charles and Wenar, S. "The Short-Term Prospective Model, the Illusion of Time, and the Tabula Rasa Child." Child Development 34 (1963): 697-708.

Whiting, B. "Culture and Social Behavior: A Model for the Development of Social Behavior." Paper presented at a seminar on the Life Course at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, December, 1978.

Winnicott, D. W. Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis. New York, Basic Books, 1958.

Wrong, H. "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology." American Sociological Review 26 (1968): 183-193.

Wylie, M. L. "The Effect of Expectations on the Transition to Parenthood." Sociological Focus 12(4) (1979): 323-329.

Yarrow, M. R.; Waxler, C. Z.; and Scott, P. M. "Child Effects on Adult Behavior." Developmental Psychology 5 (1971): 300-311.

Zajonc, R. B. "Social Facilitation." Science 149 (1965): 269-274.

Zajonc, R. B., and Markus, G. B. "Birth Order and Intellectual Development." Psychological Review 82 (1975): 74-88.

Zilborg, G. "Depressive Reactions Related to Parenthood." American Journal of Psychiatry 87 (1931): 927-962.