Fifties Freud and the
"Fragmentation of the Oedipus"

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While Cold War America was to witness a broad surge of interest in Freudian theory, and, in particular, the psychoanalytic notion of oedipal conflict, psychoanalysts beginning in the mid-forties embarked on modifications of the classical psychoanalytic paradigm which would result in fundamental reformulations of the 'oedipus complex,' arguably, the core concept of Freudian theory. Working from Freudian premises, psychoanalysts like Peter Blos, Kenneth Keniston and, perhaps most influentially, Erik Erikson, directed the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry away from the earliest stages of development—infancy and early childhood—onto later phases associated with the emergence from latency and the onset of puberty. This altered perspective on critical junctures within the life-course invariably necessitated closer scrutiny of the adolescent child in relation to parental figures—from whom the adolescent begins to distance him/herself—but also of the child's response to the growing urgency of preparing for entry into 'adulthood.' If postwar Freudians were in key respects aligned with new cultural and ideological forces with which postwar youth had to contend, they also identified emerging lines of stress within American postwar culture which were to make postwar youth's task of 'adjustment' all the more difficult. The rise of postwar youth dissidence, the breakdown of the post-

war consensus, and the crisis of cultural legitimacy culminating in the re-
volts of the sixties cannot be adequately grasped without understanding the
conceptual framework postwar psychoanalysts deployed in their efforts to
understand youth who found themselves, in certain key respects, at the vor-
tex of changes which swept through America in the Cold War era.

      While the influence of Freudian theory on postwar intellectual and
popular culture cannot be attributed solely to specifically postwar
concerns—Freud had been welcomed to the United States in his own life-
time, and by the 1920s psychoanalytic schools had been established in all
major American cities—the cultural dynamic of the early Cold War years,
above all, a desire to return to 'normalcy' contributed much to renewed in-
terest in family, as well as psychological and sociological accounts of the
family and intra-familial dynamics.[1] But in investigating postwar family
life, American psychoanalysts identified a relational pattern which diverged
in key respects from Freud's model of the 'oedipal family' with its relative-
ly clear-cut assignment of roles to mother, father and child. Indeed, Peter
Blos would come to speak of the American adolescent possessing an "illus-
ory oedipal complex;" Erikson would refer to the "fragmentation" of the
oedipus complex—expressions suggesting that the process of resolving
oedipal conflict as posited in classical Freudian theory had been disrupted
in ways that hindered the 'internalization' of the parent as model and thus
completion of the maturation process.

      Contributing to this revisionary process was the growing influence
of social science disciplines—anthropology, sociology, political
science—which, indeed, from the time of Bronislaw Malinowsky's early re-
search, had challenged implicit claims by Freud and his followers for the

trans-cultural validity of psychoanalytic theory. Citing the research of anthropologists like Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, the American psychoanalyst Karen Horney was to insist in the mid-thirties that concepts of neurosis and psychosis were historically and culturally speci-fic. In her widely influential *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, Horney had identified behavioral symptoms characteristic of 'neurosis' in conven-tional Freudian terms: she refers, for instance, to "a certain rigidity in reac-tion and a discrepancy between potentialities and accomplishments" (20). But she would also go on to qualify this observation by commenting that 'rigidity'—or what she more precisely terms a 'normal rigidity'—was in fact at the basis of all behavioral patterns constitutive of a 'culture.' Horney notes that "rigid suspicion of anything new or strange is a normal pattern among a large proportion of peasants in Western civilization," just, too, as "the small bourgeois' emphasis on thrift is an example of a normal rigidity" (21). Horney's account of the 'neurotic competitiveness," specific to the American character, similarly, adduces the influence of the American 'free enterprise' system, whereby it would be 'normal' to regard others as poten-tial competitors and thus, for instance, as 'untrustworthy.' With her focus on psychopathology, Horney continued to work within a recognizably Freu-dian framework, but her approach signaled a crucial step in the effort to expand the range of issues, in particular those pertaining to national identi-ty, to be accounted for in models of personality development and/or dys-function.

Further contributing to the modification of postwar psychoanalytic theory was the influx of European writers, psychoanalysts and social scien-tists steeped in an already established Freudian tradition, who, fleeing

Nazi-controlled Europe, had come to the United States in the thirties and early forties. Many of these figures, notably Wilhelm Reich and members of the Frankfurt School, including Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse, deployed a synthesis of Weberian sociology and Marxism in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory to explore the effects of economic and political organization in advanced industrial societies on the psychology of the individual. Their account of the behavior of those living in 'rationalized,' bureaucratically-organized societies was in part an immediate consequence of personal experience—the historically-unprecedented scope of persecution under Nazism—and an attempt to identify what were perceived as the irrational forces which 'modernity' (scientific progress, development of new technologies, 'efficient' administrative apparatus, the anomie of urban life) seemed to have unleashed on the world. In asserting that any account of the rise of fascist movements and their attraction to broad segments of the population had necessarily to go beyond questions of economic circumstance, Horkheimer, Fromm, and Marcuse sought to specify aspects of behavior constitutive of those susceptible to the siren calls of authoritarian ideologies. They viewed what they labeled the 'authoritarian personality' as a product of deep-rooted unconscious drives: on the one side, a feeling of powerlessness—perceived as symptomatic of 'regression'—among large segments of the population; on the other, the impulse of a regressive, insufficiently developed 'ego' to merge with a more powerful corporate body; this, in turn, resulted in the release of aggressive drives which could be manipulated and deflected towards those identified as agents of repression (which Freud himself had seen as the source of anti-semitism).[2] Holding out the promise of an account which could explain in cogent fashion

why fascist movements had attracted mass support—and why 'fascism' was perceived to pose a danger to any modern, 'mass society'—psychoanalysis opened up the possibility of tracing the unconscious roots of political and cultural movements whose appeal and practices otherwise defied 'rational' analysis.

But perhaps more decisive for the postwar influence of Freudian theory in the American context were sweeping developments which had transformed American society in the course of the Second World War and its aftermath: in particular, the re-familializing of American culture associated with the marriage and baby-booms, and the re-domesticizing of American women. The postwar domestic revival was, to certain degree, a response to a new 'technological' regime ushered in by the dropping of the atomic bomb and the onset of the Cold War—a desire to re-affirm the possibility of 'normal' life in the face of the new nuclear threat—an impulse which fed into the political 'quietism' of the era and did much to fuel postwar consumerism with its emphasis on 'the comforts of home.'[3] The attractions of the 'split-level home,' modern appliances, the Ford station wagon to broad segments of the American population—and all that these might have implied in terms of 'conformity,' 'blandness,' 'homogeneity'—cannot, in this sense, be attributed solely to the machinations of large corporations or manipulative Madison Avenue advertisers. To be accounted for is the urgency with which something perceived as 'the American way of life' was embraced, and this had, finally more to do with powerfully defensive impulses—'reaction formations'—shaping American culture in the period, and the sorts of stability which marriage, family, job, home implied in the midst of the anxieties of the Cold War, a spiraling

arms race, and the spectre of nuclear cataclysm.

It is within the context of this re-familializing of American culture, and a return to 'traditional' gender configurations (husband as breadwinner; wife as mother/homemaker) that renewed interest in Freud in the postwar period must be situated. In asserting the primacy of 'family' as principal determinant of personality—as a framework of relationships which constitute the foundation on which all subsequent social interaction was predicated—classical Freudian theory aligned itself with broad social tendencies of the postwar era. But if the Freudian emphasis on the nuclear family as shaper of personality served to underwrite the re-domesticizing of American culture, the very clarity with which the oedipal model was delineated in classical theory had the effect of throwing into relief the limits of the standard Freudian account. While postwar psychoanalysts like Blos and Erikson continued to affirm their commitment to fundamental premises of Freud's theory, they came to question how the family as 'psychosocial unit' was to be conceptualized in its relation to other institutional spheres, and were particularly concerned with how, given the insecurities and anxieties which pervaded postwar America, the child was to negotiate the transition from a position of physical and emotional dependence within the family to assumption of roles customarily associated with 'adulthood.' Erikson's assertion that it was necessary to "approach childhood in an untraditional manner, namely, from young adulthood backward ... the earliest stages of childhood cannot be accounted for without a unified theory of the whole span of preadulthood;"[4] Peter Blos's insistence on adolescence as a 'nodal nexus'—a "stage which reflects in a kaleidoscopic view the entirety of developmental antecedents in one form or another;"[5] Keniston's efforts to

incorporate the sociological notion of 'cohort' into the psychoanalytic modeling of parent-child relationships and his view of American postwar society as one in which "many Americans are left with an inarticulate sense of loss, of unrelatedness and lack of connection"[6]—constituted recognition that the 'standard' oedipal model was ultimately only a point of departure for conceptualizing the overall developmental process.

Freud himself, in assuming that the fundamental tasks confronting the self were essentially complete with the child's emergence from 'latency' (that moment in which in displacing libidinal drives onto other-than-parental figures, the child finally overcomes the 'castration anxiety' triggered by his/her desire for mother/father), would also seem to have been asserting that despite second-order behaviors—the pubertal adolescent's predisposition to fantasy and auto-eroticism—the adolescent, insofar as he or she has achieved a capability for heterosexual intimacy, has essentially achieved 'adult' status. In his "The Transformations of Puberty," (the third in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*), Freud had noted: "With the arrival of puberty, changes set in which are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape. The sexual instinct has hitherto been predominantly auto-erotic: it now finds a sexual object ... the erotogenic zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone ... The sexual instinct is now subordinated to the reproductive function (127-128). While Freud himself recognized that puberty presents a special challenge to the adolescent child—specifically, that act of "detaching oneself from parental authority," which Freud refers to as "one of the most painful, psychical achievements of the pubertal period"—this achievement coincides with a definitive "over-

coming and repudiating of incestuous phantasies" (150). The notion of "detachment," which Freud further qualified as "a process that alone makes possible the opposition which is so important for the progress of civilization, between the new generation and the old" (150), is, in other words, restricted to the realm of the libidinal, and 'adult' status conceived exclusively in terms of psychosexual function. Freud's point here was simply to underscore the significance of the psychosexual for the development of personality; i.e., that in effectively displacing libidinal striving onto other-than-parental objects (which, for Freud, signaled entry into puberty), the child overcomes what within classic psychoanalytic theory constitutes the primary obstacle to the achievement of maturity. In this sense, Freudian theory lacked the conceptual tools for addressing issues specific to some later developmental phase, or of a need to come to terms with the psychic impact of events—loss of job, war, natural disaster—over which the individual qua individual exercised little power.

In establishing 'genitality' as the sole criterion by which the 'status' (child/adult) is determined, Freud's theory effectively side-stepped a host of issues which were posed with ever greater urgency both as the range of forces at work in shaping a personality in accord with the requirements of industrial societies was becoming more apparent, and a sense of political and social crisis was deepening as the historically unprecedented succession of events—First World War, Depression, the rise of fascism, Second World War and the Holocaust, development of the atomic bomb, outbreak of the Cold War—wracked Europe and the West in the first half of the twentieth century. To assert, as Freud did, that a fully genitalized disposition constituted the measure by which achievement of 'adulthood' was to be de-

termined was to ignore the range of roles and behaviors required of a self capable of functioning both within technologically complex societies and a world of growing collective and personal anxiety.

Increasingly aware of the lacunae in Freud's account of youth and adolescence, certain theorists were to deploy Freud's own arguments to suggest that the crisis confronting Western industrial societies was the result of precisely the sort of repression that Freud himself had identified as both the condition of social life and the source of 'neurosis,' and that failure to achieve a truly independent, 'adult' personality was to be solved by the removal of restrictions on adolescent sexuality. Following Freud, Wilhelm Reich was to note that "an adolescent, at about the age of 15, reaches sexual maturity," which for Reich meant that the child "experiences the physiological necessity of sexual intercourse and the capacity to procreate or bear children." But Reich also had a much clearer perception of the social forces, and the discrepancies between the essentially "subjective" psychosexual status of the adolescent self and "the fact of being economically and structurally incapable of creating the legal framework demanded by society for sexual intercourse, i.e. marriage" (80). Insisting that "the future of mankind depends on the solution of the problem of man's character structure," Reich proposed a "transvaluation of all values regarding the sexual life of human beings" (xv, xiii). Key to such a 'transvaluation' was recognition and acceptance of the consequences of Freud's claim that with puberty the adolescent experiences libidinal drives like those of an adult, and that only through sexual emancipation can adolescents develop an authentic, autonomous selfhood. For Reich, this required fundamental reas-

sessment of the bourgeois family, the foundations of which were "the re-lationship of the patriarchal father to wife and children":

> (The father) is, as it were, the exponent and representative of the au-thority of the state in the family. Because of the contradiction be-tween his position in the production process (subordinate) and his family function (boss) he is a top-sergeant type: he kowtows to those above, absorbs the prevailing attitudes (hence his tendency to imitation) and dominates those below: he transmits the governmental and social concepts and enforces them. (73)

Central to Reich's concept of the father as principal agent of sexual repression—a notion derived directly from the role Freud assigned the father—is a much broader, culturally-disseminated inhibition which, in Reich's view, served to ensure the child's continuing fixation on parental figures. What Reich referred to as the "compulsive family" was perceived as "economically and ideologically, part and parcel of authoritarian society" (78), and in Reich's account it is the "submission to paternal authority" which "makes the step into sexual and social reality at puberty difficult if not impossible." He regarded "the conservative ideal of the good boy and good girl" as "the extreme opposite of a free, independent youth," and one that ensured that youth would "remain hopelessly stuck in the infantile situation far into their adult lives" (77). He would go on to argue that this prolonged "infantilism"—rooted in an excessively repressive sexual morality—"creates that specific psychic structure—a mixture of sexual im-potence, helplessness, longing for a Fuehrer—which forms the mass-

psychological basis of any authoritarian social order" (79). Resolving this contradiction required a dismantling of the 'repressive' apparatus—marriage, family, school, church—which for ideologically-promulgated reasons sought, through the denial of adolescent sexuality, to maintain the essentially subordinate status of the child within the family: "

> In no other field has conservative ideology been able to influence sexology as deeply as in the sexual problem of adolescence. The essence of all treatises on the subject is the jump from the finding that puberty is essentially the reaching of *sexual maturity* to the demand that adolescents should live in *sexual abstinence* (emphasis in original, 80).

Acknowledging arguments which hold that "the abstinence of adolescents is necessary in the interest of social and cultural achievement," a stance predicated on "Freud's theory that the social and cultural achievements of man derive their energy from sexual energies which were diverted from their original goal to a 'higher' goal, the theory known as that of 'sublimation'" (85) and thus "necessary for social development" and that "sexual intercourse of youth would decrease their achievements," Reich countered with the argument that insofar as "all adolescents masturbate" they are already sexually active, and he goes on to argue that "conflict-laden masturbation" is "infinitely more harmful than an orderly sex life" (85-86).

In the critique of what he perceives to be a fundamental "gap in the theory of sexuality," Reich notes that "filling this gap would lead to the loosening of one after the other of the rivets which hold together the com-

plicated and clever structure of reactionary ideology" (86). If the relation between child and parent was, as in the standard psychoanalytic account, the ultimate determinant of personality, Reich himself came to regard the family as itself simply one agent within a larger disciplinary regime. It was in these terms, however, that Reich also argued for the essentially emancipatory effect of youthful sexuality:

> If the most important argument for adolescent chastity were official-ly invalidated, youth might get ideas into their heads and might pro-ceed to activities which, though in no way dangerous to their health and their sociality, might constitute a danger to the continued exist-ence of the authoritarian family and its institution of compulsive marriage. (86)

In his call for the removal of restraints, Reich pointed to adolescence as a critical moment in the psycho-sexual development of the subject, but in fact his own 'solution'—permitting adolescents to engage freely in sexual activity—remained within the framework of orthodox Freudian doctrine, in the sense that it simply sought to redefine the psycho-sexual moment at which nominally 'adult' prerogatives might be granted to the young. In Reich's argument, if the young have in fact achieved sexual maturity, as Freud himself had asserted, they should simply be treated as adults—which is to say, the only category relevant to the definition of age and age-group status is the psycho-sexual.

Like Reich's observations on adolescence, those of Anna Freud reiterate the

basic Freudian position, which regards the onset of adolescence as characterized by "endocrinological changes that aim at a complete revolution in sexual life;" but rather than marking the completion of developments associated with childhood, these changes signal, in Anna Freud's account, a radically new stage of development characterized by its own specific behaviors and conflicts: "upheavals in character and personality ... often so sweeping that the picture of the former child becomes wholly submerged in the newly emerging image of the adolescent" (7). Under the sway of fundamental "alterations in the drives"—both qualitative ("namely the changeover from pregenital to genital sexual impulses") and quantitative (an intensification which the move out from family in its own way facilitates)—the adolescent confronts "dangers which did not exist before and with which he is not accustomed to deal" (7) and must come to grips both with the radical changes occurring within him/herself and with the complex transitions into adult society. For Anna Freud, this transition is doubly difficult, inasmuch as adolescents must adapt both to somatic changes and new social demands placed upon them, demands no longer issuing exclusively from the family. Arguing that adolescence constitutes a period in which the child must be allowed to accustom itself to the physiological changes taking place and its new capabilities and status—a period inevitably marked by uncertainty, indecision, and regression—Anna Freud notes that "nothing helps (the child to complete this transition) except a complete discarding of the people who were the important love objects of the child, that is, the parents," a process Anna Freud characterizes as a "battle ... fought out in various ways: by openly displayed indifference toward them—by denying that they are important—by disparagement of them since it is easier to do

without them if they are denounced as stupid, useless, ineffective; by open insolence and revolt against their person and the beliefs and conventions for which they stand" (8). While this view puts Anna Freud at clear odds with Wilhelm Reich, she also notes that in the process of rejecting "the ideals that (the youthful self) shared with parents formerly," the adolescent needs to find substitutes which may be a Führer-like figure: "a self-chosen leader who himself is a member of the parent generation" or "a politician (who is) considered infallible, Godlike and is followed gladly and blindly;" this parental substitute may, however, also be drawn from "the peer group (and who) is exalted to the role of leadership and becomes the unquestioned arbiter in all matters of moral and aesthetic value" (8-9). In both instances, "the hallmark of the new ideals as well as of the new emotionally important people is always the same: that they should be as different as possible from the former ones" (9).

While the changes associated with adolescence may provoke feelings of "helplessness and dependence" (8), it is clear that for Anna Freud the achievement of adult sexuality ("the qualitative change to a primacy of the genital urges, that is, adult sexuality proper" [8]) sets the stage for a period in which the maturing subject confronts an essentially new set of challenges. Unlike Reich, who had asserted the youthful subject's right to active sexual experience, Anna Freud argues that youth must be permitted a period of time in which to adjust to the multiple demands placed upon them, among which the sexuality associated with puberty is only one. If these challenges are conceived in conventional psychoanalytic terms as a matter of detaching oneself from parental figures, Anna Freud recognizes that what transpires on the level of the psychosexual—"adolescent upheaval and

inner rearrangement of forces"—coincides "with such major demands on the individual as those for academic achievements in school and college, for a choice of career, for increased social and financial responsibilities in general" (9). In conveying the pressures placed upon adolescents, she underscores the spectrum of choices confronting adolescents in complex industrial societies, in which, given the pace of technological and social change, parental figures do not always function as effective role models. This sense of an ever-widening gap between the child's experience within the family, where parents continue to wield authority, and the child's experience of a society in which one's adult role can, in this sense, never simply be extrapolated from one's experience within the family of one's own parents. Unlike Freud and Reich, Anna Freud notes that advent of puberty and the genital stage is not in itself a guarantee of 'normal' advance into adulthood proper, but may in itself be a factor contributing to the "many failures" ("often with tragic consequences") of adolescents who do not successfully negotiate this transition: these "failures" are "due not to the individual's incapacity as such but merely to the fact that such demands are made on him at a time of life when all his energies are engaged otherwise, namely, in trying to solve the major problems created for him by normal sexual growth and development" (9). Thus what Anna Freud refers to as "normal sexual growth and development" in fact creates a new set of demands, to which the adolescent may respond in psychically regressive ways, but which in any event create a set of issues which both classic Freudian theory and Reich's 'liberationist' view, fail to address.

It is in the context of this evolving perception of adolescence within the

mainstream Freudian tradition—one which increasingly came to see puberty as posing a new set of problems to be addressed (rather than simply signaling emergence from latency)—in conjunction with a newly problematic view of modern industrial societies that we can situate the early work of Erik Erikson.　Among the generation of psychoanalysts who came to prominence in the postwar years, Erikson was perhaps the most explicit in efforts to link larger social and political issues, in particular the question of American national identity in the wake of the Second World War, to questions of personal identity and psychosocial development.　His groundbreaking study *Childhood and Society*, published in 1950, marked a major reorientation within the American psychoanalytic movement.　Defining his objective as that of "facilitating the comparison of the stages first discovered by Freud as sexual to other schedules of development (physical, cognitive)," Erikson notes that what he calls the "shift of conceptual emphasis" is dictated "by the revolutions that are taking place in our lifetime."[7]　More specifically, he speaks of how "the patient of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe and who he should—or, indeed, might—be or become" (which is to say the problem of "identity," a term first used in the psychoanalytic context by Erikson).[8]　Suffering from uncertainties about identity, the Eriksonian subject stood in sharp contrast to the "patient of early psychoanalysis (who) suffered most under inhibitions which prevented him from being what and who he thought he knew he was" (279).　Erikson goes on to observe, however, that the problem of 'identity,' is posed with special urgency for Americans: "we begin to conceptualize matters of identity ... in a country which attempts to make a super-identity out of all identities ... and at a time when rapidly increasing mechanization

threaten the essentially agrarian and patrician identities in their lands of origin as well" (282).

While Erikson's modeling of the earliest stages of development essentially recapitulates the trajectory plotted in the classic Freudian schema, it conceives this developmental process as meaningful only once the full range of needs, desires, goals and modes of activity shaping the life-course have been recognized.   In extending the infant/child-focused sequence (centered on the 'aural,' 'anal,' 'genital' and 'latency' periods) of traditional Freudian theory to include 'adolescence,' 'young adulthood,' 'adulthood' and 'maturity' as phases to be characterized in terms of distinctive issues and 'tasks,' Erikson argues that a theoretical account of childhood can be meaningful only once the position of the 'adult'—of what the child is putatively destined to become—has been properly delineated.   In shifting the focus of his inquiry onto the sequence of phases constituting the life-course as a whole, Erikson addressed in much more intensive form issues related to 'socialization' and 'integration'—of how in moving out of the family-of-origin the adolescent is to find his or her place in the broader society and what roles he or she can be expected to play once one has achieved such 'integration.'

Erikson's "Reflections on American Identity," a later chapter in *Childhood and Society*, in which he explores attitudes and behaviors associated with parental roles, is in this sense the necessary complement to his positing of his eight-stage model of the life-course.   But it is precisely in his discussion of the American experience of parenting that Erikson's theorizing begins to reveal uncertainties as to what constitutes 'adulthood' in the American context, or, on a more general level, as to what factors can

be adduced as contributing to the creation of a distinctly American 'personality type.' On the one plane, Erikson's discussion invokes a fairly conventional series of topoi, including 'Puritanism,' the experience of the 'frontier,' the impact of continuing 'immigration' as factors shaping American identity, but he comes to place special emphasis on the early struggle for independence. Stressing "the image of the freeman" as key to the American identity, Erikson notes that this image is "founded on that northern European who, having escaped feudal and religious laws, disavowed his motherland and established a country and a constitution on the prime principle of preventing a resurgence of autocracy" (304). The commitment to a social and political arrangement which sought to guarantee the autonomy and initiative of the individual was reinforced by the "size and rigor of the country and the importance of the means of migration and transportation" (which) "helped to create and to develop the identity of autonomy and initiative" (304).

But it is also the geo-political (or geo-psychic) factor which accounts for the sorts of ambivalence Erikson sees as characteristic of the American personality. Identifying a polarity—that between 'mobility' and 'settlement'—as fundamental to an understanding of American history and culture, Erikson traces a psycho-social dynamic which determined in basic ways the shape of the American family, the development of the child within the family, and in particular what Erikson perceives to be the dominance of the mother. In part recapitulating, in part re-butting Philip Wylie's wartime polemic against 'Momism,' Erikson attempts to explain in historical and cultural terms the forces contributing to what he perceives as the matri-focal character of the American family.[9] Tracing the origins of what

he calls the American 'mother-type' to "contradictions which emerged from intense, rapid, and as yet unintegrated changes in American history," Erikson notes:

(I)t was up to the American woman to evolve one common tradition, on the basis of many imported traditions, and to base on it the education of her children and the style of her home life: when it was up to her to establish new habits of sedentary life on a continent originally populated by men who in their countries of origin, for one reason or another, had not wanted to be 'fenced in.' (291)

Given what Erikson identifies as the primary anxiety afflicting American men—that of "ever again acquiescing to an outer or inner autocracy"—it was upon women that fell the burden of maintaining whatever familial and social cohesion was to be achieved, a situation which, in Erikson's view, resulted in the essentially provisional nature of ties American men maintained to their families and communities. American men have, as Erikson observes, "insisted on keeping their new cultural identity tentative to a point where women had to become autocratic in their demands for some order;" he notes that as a consequence, "American women in frontier communities had to become the cultural censor, religious conscience, the aesthetic arbiter, and the teacher" (291-292).

What Erikson identifies as the "rejective" features of American mothers—"once a historical virtue but now a modern fault"—were dictated in a similar way by conditions of frontier life: "The American mother reacted to the historical situation on this continent ... when she further de-

veloped Anglo-Saxon patterns of child training which would avoid weaken-
ing potential frontiersman by protective maternalism" (292). American
mothers faced the double challenge of "preparing men and women who
would take root in the community life and gradual class stratification of the
new villages and towns and at the same time prepare these children for the
possible physical hardship of homesteading on the frontiers" (293). The
long-term cultural dynamic shaping the American family and personality
thus tended to subvert the possibility of either settling permanently in one
place or of achieving a stable cultural identity:

> The process of American identity formation seems to support an in-
> dividual's ego identity as long as he (*sic*) can preserve a certain
> element of deliberate tentativeness of autonomous choice. The indi-
> vidual must be able to convince himself that the next step is up to
> him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has
> the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction if he
> chooses to do so. (286)

When Americans do settle down, this may be little more than a "transitory
series of overcompensatory attempts at settling around some Main Street;"
settling down thus in fact never precludes "high mobility (or) a cultural
potential unsure of its final identity" (287). The impulse to keep options
open further explains, in Erikson's account, "the fear of becoming too old to
choose," a fear which "gave old age and death a bad name in this country"
(293-294). It is in this sense, that the notion of 'frontier' remains central
to the American self-image, even where it has simply become a metaphor

for the possibility of 'moving on' and self-reinvention.

In an argument which resonates through much American postwar writing, Erikson speaks of how in a nation of immigrants, the children are, in terms of language and acculturation, always in a more advantageous position than the parents: "the psychoanalysis of the children of immigrants clearly reveals to what extent they, as the first real Americans in their family, become their parents' cultural parents" (294)—a formulation which suggests the basis for the privileged position youth have come to occupy in American society. But the ambivalence-laden position in which parents find themselves—the father who contemplates setting off for a 'world elsewhere;' a mother compelled to assume what would otherwise be a paternal role as agent ensuring cohesion and authority within the family, but simultaneously preparing children for their own eventual departure—and rejection by the mother (behaviors intended to ensure the children's survival on the shifting frontiers of American life) also results in what Erikson terms a "fragmentary oedipus complex" (296). If classical psychoanalytic theory predicated a virtually indissoluble bond between mother and child, the American mother can in some sense properly nurture her child only by preparing him/her for the time when the child will have to move on, only by making clear that she cannot be there to help the child in its efforts to find a place within society. Erikson asserts that "Behind (this) fragmentary 'oedipus complex' appears a deep-seated sense of having been abandoned and let down by the mother .... The small child (feels) that there is no use in regressing, because there was nobody to regress to, no use investing feelings because the response was so uncertain" (296). Here, in contrast to the classical Freudian account, in which the father intervenes to

deny the child's infantile relationship to the mother (thus initiating the period of oedipal rivalry), it is the mother who is perceived as failing the child. Thus, in fact, the child is never permitted to develop ties of the sort which would permit genuine rivalry to the father, who is simply perceived as absent. Thus, too, the child never develops that singularity of passion or feeling (resulting either from continued but displaced attachment to the mother, or identification with the father) that characterizes the Freudian child: "underneath his proud sense of autonomy and his exuberant sense of initiative the troubled American (who often looks the least troubled) blames his mother for having let him down" (296).

It is in this context that Erikson's re-modeling of the life-course, while incorporating salient features of classical Freudian theory, not only shifts the emphasis onto those phases in which the child must negotiate the transition out of a family into a world for which parents can no longer adequately prepare him, but, in a revisionary move of perhaps even greater consequence (and following his delineation of American identity), conceptualizes adulthood as a distinctive phase defined by its own crises and obstacles to be overcome. While one can argue that Erikson's eight-stage model with its rigidly linear sequence of tasks and goals, its neat classification of obstacles to be surmounted, displays a restrictive normativity, in which the goal remains the mature mastery and stability associated with adults who have "achieved" their life goals, the fact that Erikson extends the growth process, viewing adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and maturity as themselves *developmental* phases (rather than simply outcomes of childhood or adolescence and periods of stability) suggests a general loosening of the polarity informing the classical psychoanalytic model, in

which the subject, in successfully weathering the oedipal ordeal, is viewed as prepared for the rigors of adult life. In asserting that 'adulthood' is itself susceptible to vicissitudes—a stage in which adults must struggle with the challenge of 'generativity'—Erikson inevitably brings into question the broader social authority Freud (and figures like Reich) routinely conferred upon parental figures. Unlike the Freudian model, in which the adult's position in relation to the child is perceived as essentially fixed (the father as implacable authority figure but ultimately a rival to be emulated; the mother as ardently desired but unattainable object for whom the child must find an adequate substitute), the adult is now re-figured as him/herself subject to forces and demands emanating from a social world not immediately continuous with what is expected of one as parent, and which may, in unforeseeable ways, undercut one's capabilities as a parent.

Against the backdrop of Erikson's 'reflections on American identity,' his eight-stage model of the life course can be understood as specifying those conditions most conducive to the growth and maturation of the child, but, not surprisingly, Erikson brings into focus the role of parental figures. Thus, the first of the eight stages centers less on the child's experience per se than on what the mother is expected to provide the child, and a capability for mothering is itself perceived in terms of the degree to which the mother can herself speak for the culture. Thus, ideally, "Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their culture's life-style" (249). From the outset, developmental tasks are conceived in terms of eventual social integration:

> There are few frustrations in either this or the following stages
> which the growing child cannot endure if the frustration leads to the
> ever-renewed experience of greater sameness and stronger continui-
> ty of development, toward a final integration of the individual life
> cycle with some meaningful wider belongingness. (249)

But the question of the child's development and the achievement of such
'belongingness' is clearly identified as a function of the parent's cultural
location and commitments: "(parents) must be able to represent to the child
a deep, an almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning to what they
are doing" (249). Erikson makes the point that "children become neurotic
not from frustrations, but from the lack or loss of societal meaning in these
frustrations" (249-250), a formulation which suggests that the child's de-
velopment is, from the beginning, a function of the degree to which parents
themselves can be said to be 'socialized.'

But if Erikson seems to presuppose fundamental endorsement by
parental figures of the society into which the child must be integrated,
Erikson himself perceives parents in an ever-more ambivalent light as the
child develops. As the child emerges from the oedipal phase, he must
undertake not only a search for substitutes, but prepare himself for the
world of work which will allow him to support a family: 'he must begin to
be a worker and potential provider ... he now learns to win recognition by
producing things" (258-259). In advanced industrial societies, this period
of formal preparation has the effect of further calling into question the
roles of parents. While it is the responsibility of "Literate people, with

more specialized careers" to "prepare the child by teaching him things which first of all make him literate, the widest possible basic education for the greatest number of possible careers," the very nature of industrial society undercuts the notion of parent as model or guide: "The more confusing specialization becomes, however, the more indistinct are the eventual goals of initiative; and the more complicated social reality, the vaguer are the father's and mother's role in it" (259). As the role of parents diminishes, schools—in what in Erikson's account represents an even more striking deviation from orthodox Freudian theory—assume an ever-more critical function in determining the child's eventual social position; indeed, Erikson asserts that the moment, coinciding with pre-adolescence, in which the child passes out from under parental control is "socially" the "most decisive stage" (259). Peers and teachers are not simply substitutes onto which the child displaces infantile libidinal striving; the school constitutes "a culture all by itself, with its own goals and limits, its achievements and disappointments" and it is at this stage that there develops "a first sense of division of labor and of differential opportunity, that is, a sense of the technological ethos of a culture" (259-260).

The question of integration intensifies in the subsequent phase which is that when properly speaking "youth begins." This phase, characterized by the polarity "identity vs. role confusion," which was in fact to become the focus of virtually all of Erikson's subsequent research, represents that moment in which adolescents commit themselves to a particular life course. In this moment, the adolescent subject is poised on a threshold from which he re-assesses his childhood ("in puberty and adolescence all samenesses and continuities relied on earlier are more or less questioned

again" [261]), but precisely in terms of what the society itself seeks and is prepared to accept. Here, the adolescent experiences a gap between developing self-image and the lack of defined role as he/she experiences the extended education and training needed to function in an ever more technologically complex world; thus, the adolescent must defer the assumption of a "final identity." It is in this context that Erikson introduces the concept of a 'moratorium'—in part prescriptive, one which calls for greater tolerance in evaluating the progress and achievements of young people growing up in a period of rapid social change. If there is much that is "paternalistic" in the concept, it is one which also calls for those in positions of authority suspend moral and other judgments. Erikson's concept of the moratorium is essentially cautionary. With a glance back at the roles played by the *Hitlerjugend* and communist youth brigades, Erikson notes that adolescents are particularly susceptible to the lure of ideological appeals. The adolescent mind is "an ideological mind—and, indeed, it is the ideological outlook of society that speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by his peers, and is ready to be confirmed by rituals, creeds, and programs which at the same time define what is evil, uncanny and inimical" (263). Erikson refers to the "revolutions of our day" which "attempt to solve and also to exploit the deep need of youth to redefine its identity in an industrialized world" (263) and of "the dangers which emanate from human ideals harnessed to the management of super-machines, be they guided by nationalistic or internationalistic, communist or capitalist ideologies" (263). The adolescent thus confronts not only the task of resolving immediate personal issues of occupational choice, but of negotiating his way through a proliferating array of competing value sys-

tems.

The emergence from what Erikson perceives as the essentially ex-
perimental phase of adolescence coincides with the assumption of long-term
commitments. The sixth stage ('young adulthood') entails entering into per-
manent relationships with others:

> Emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, (the
> young adult) is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of
> others. He is ready for intimacy, that is, the capacity to commit
> himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the
> ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they
> may call for significant sacrifices and compromises. (263)

In a further critical revision of the Freudian model, however, Erikson
asserts that "it is only now that true genitality can fully develop" and "ge-
nital libido" can achieve "heterosexual mutuality" (264-5). Criticizing
psychoanalysis for "not always (having) indicated all the goals that genital-
ity actually should and must imply," Erikson (with an implicit dig at
Wilhelm Reich) sees psychoanalysis as "going too far in its emphasis on
genitality as a universal cure for society and has thus provided a new
addiction and a new commodity for many who so interpret its teachings"
(266). The potential for a genuine "convulsive-like discharge of tension
from the whole body" (265) cannot be achieved when one's sense of self has
not been confirmed by society, when one has not yet established a position
within adult society which allows for a sense of security or belongingness.

But if normal development is ultimately a function of recognition by

and acceptance into adult society, Erikson's model begins to suggest that final identity is in itself a state which can be achieved only with reference to the young. The defining concern of adulthood is that of "establishing and guiding the next generation" (266), or what Erikson labels "generativity." Significantly, this entails the contrary of what one might normally expect in the relation between parent and child:

> The fashionable insistence on dramatizing the dependence of children on adults often blinds us to the dependence of the older generation on the younger one. Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of. (266-67)

Those who fail to sustain this "generativity" often come to regard themselves as children:

> Where such enrichment fails (...) often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment ... individuals ... often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own—or one another's—one and only child: and where conditions favor it, early invalidism, physical or psychological, becomes the vehicle of self-concern. (267)

By asserting that transition to full adulthood entails conferral of recognition by the young, Erikson begins to anticipate from yet another angle an aspect of generational reversal: adulthood defined in terms not of

tasks—occupational or otherwise—but of how the adult is viewed by those for whom he/she has putative responsibility—which, as I have argued elsewhere, becomes characteristic of the postwar representation of parent-child relationships.[10]

In making adulthood a matter of 'recognition,' Erikson has recourse to the same terminology he deploys in his account of the adolescent and his/her transition into adult society, and the implications are inevitably the same: in this instance, that youth possess the authority and perspicacity to judge of adult achievements.   While Erikson's model of the life course and developmental process, beginning with infancy and culminating in 'maturity' (it is only in the final stage that Erikson speaks of the possibility of "ego integrity," a state in which the subject accepts his achievements, disappointments, the unique life that only he could have led), Erikson's schematization of the life cycle, in establishing youth as arbiters of adult accomplishment, begins to suggest that the process of identity formation, at least in the American context, was in fact in crucial ways made dependent on and a function of those who, in a certain sense, did not yet possess an "identity."   To the extent that adults are themselves implicated in a society which increasingly seeks to hold open and maximize "choices," they come under the sway of and are themselves assessed in terms of that which would resist final commitments and choices; an "identity" ever more intensively conceptualized in terms, paradoxically, of voiding precisely those commitments commonly taken as necessary for the securing and maintenance of an identity.   In pointing to the inner logic of Erikson's model, I am also suggesting that the fluidity and the issue of identity associated with adolescence remain, for Erikson, principal characteristics of the Amer-

ican 'character' into adulthood and maturity.

Notes

1. For discussion of Freud's influence in America in the postwar era and what he calls "The Golden Age of Popularization, 1945-1965," see Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, pp. 276-299. In part, Hale argues this popularization had its origins in the Second World War: "The Second World War brought psychoanalysis to a position of ... prominence in American psychiatry. Precisely the types of illness in which psychoanalysts specialized—the neuroses and psychosomatic disorders—took an unexpectedly heavy toll among American servicemen. For these illnesses which seriously impeded the war effort, the traditional hospital psychiatrist was ill prepared. The psychoanalysts seized this unique opportunity to apply their theory and therapy. Many of them rapidly rose to positions of leadership in the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force and taught the young physicians who filled the ranks of service psychiatry" (187).

2. Marcuse, Horkheimer and Fromm's studies on the 'authoritarian perso- nality' first appeared after the group had emigrated to the United States in *Studien ueber Autoritaet und Familie*, published in 1936. Herbert Marcuse would, of course, with the publication of *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and its adaptation of Reich's emancipatory psychoanalysis, go on to become a key figure in the sixties youth movement.

3. The most complete account of the postwar 'domestic revival' remains Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound. American Families in the Cold War Era.* After noting that American birthrates had been in decline

for more than a hundred years and that this trend was reversed by the 'baby boom' of the postwar era, she observes that "viable alternatives to the prevailing family norm were virtually unavailable" (15).

4. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity. Youth and Crisis.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1968. 32

5. Kenneth Keniston. *The Uncommitted. Alienated Youth in American Society.* New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1965. 5.

6. Peter Blos. *Son and Father. Before and Beyond the Oedipus Complex.* New York: The Free Press, 1985. 136.

7. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1963. (1950) 270. All subsequent page references to Erikson are to this volume and will be indicated parenthetically following the citation.

8. For extended discussion of Erikson's work and the origin of the term 'identity' in its current usage, see Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels. Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*, in particular his chapter, "Identitarian Though and the Cold War World," 1-51. Medovoi notes that the term, as used by Erikson, was first deployed in connection with a phase in the process of growth and development, and only subsequently took on its broader meaning in connection with race, gender, class and sexuality. Medovoi notes, however, that "While race, gender , and sexuality have come to represent the manifest content of modern identity activism, age has remained latently present, a structuring element in the post-New Left political unconscious" (3).

9. Philip Wylie. *Generation of Vipers.* New York: Pocket Books, 1962. (1942). Wylie was to write in relation to what he called the "Cinderella myth" that American men had "turned over most of our fixed

wealth to our women. Woman spends it. The absurd posturings of chivalry serve to bloat the nonsensical notion of honoring and rewarding women for nothing more than being female. Cash is heaped at the feet of the sweetheart, the bride, the wife, and especially 'mom.' Since money does represent a crystallization of human energy, this gave females an inordinate power" (46). The influence Wylie ascribes American mothers would later be adduced by Erikson and others for the high incidence of "shell shock" and "combat fatigue" in the Second World War.

10. For discussion of 'generational reversal' and the 'postwar family paradigm' see Denis Jonnes, "Transgenerational Subsystems in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction." in *Reading the Family Dance. Family Systems Therapy and Literary Study.* Eds. John V. Knapp & Kenneth Womack. Newark: U Delaware P, 2003. 276-303.

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