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SOCIAL ADULTHOOD: TOWARD A COMMUNITARIAN CONCEPT[i]

Before I launch into a discussion of social adulthood on the eve of a new beginning, a new century, and a new millennium, I should note that these are unusually preliminary comments even in an area in which caution about generalizations always is necessary. The reason is that there is surprisingly little empirical evidence or even theoretical speculation on the issues at hand. There is very little to build on or to build with. Some casual observers have made much out of the fact that shows such as "Seinfeld"

have made stories about masturbation and bathroom jokes standard fare among adults on TV, that Al Gore describes himself as a Deadhead, and the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers have recycled every hit song, clothing style, and TV show of their youths.[1] John Bly tells us that Americans these days are only half-adults.[2] "Growing up goes on and on and on," and that can't be good if "[a]dolescence means drugs, violence and unwed pregnancies, not to mention bad haircuts, big clothes, loud music and pierced everything."[3] But such informal observations do not provide a sound basis for a serious analysis; hence the very preliminary nature of the thoughts that follow.

Some commentators have argued that the extension of the signs of adolescence, concurrent with the deferral of adulthood, and a reversion to adolescent behavior after a temporary fulfillment of adult roles, are forms of adaptive, prosocial behavior. They

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[1] Michiko Kakutani, "Adolescence Rules!," *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 May 1997, 22.

[2] John Bly, *The Sibling Society* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996).

[3] Cynthia Crossen, "Growing Up Goes On and On and On," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 March 1997, B1.

have further suggested the very social role of an adult has lost a clear definition. I argue below that these contentions are in part correct. I suggest, though, that there are strong indications that some manifestations of over-extended adolescence are damaging to those involved and to their communities. The key is to establish what criteria might be employed to distinguish prosocial from dysfunctional expressions of extended adolescence, and in the process attempt to characterize social adulthood in a postmodern, good, communitarian society. Answering this question requires a re-examination of the concept of the "encumbered" individual and a discussion of the qualities of a responsible person.

The Over-Extended Adolescence Theorem

The simple version of the theorem that over the past decades a growing number of Americans have deferred maturity, or repeatedly abandoned it even at a rather mature age, is that this escape from adulthood is but one reflection (or an integral part) of the deterioration of the American social fabric, of our creation of a "nation of Peter Pans."[4] The basic idea is that many millions of Americans extend the phase of life in which they engage in adolescent behavior, behavior that might be considered appropriate for a learning and transitional period, specifically for those younger than 18 or 21, but that is viewed as problematic when extended into later years, especially beyond the mid-twenties.

Observers who present this theorem argue that Americans manifest their over-extended adolescences in the following behaviors:

--Over-extended singlehood, which entails long periods of dating, short-term and unbinding relationships, and sexual experimentation (including flirting with homo- and bisexuality, group sex, or other "non-standard" sexual practices) by persons who long

[4] Margaret Gramatky Alter, "A Nation of Peter Pans," *Books and Culture*, January/February 1997.

have matured biologically, reflecting a stunted ability to make interpersonal commitments. Median first-marriage age is at one of its highest levels, 24.5 for women and 26.7 for men, versus 20.8 for women and 23.2 for men in 1970, when first-marriage age was at its lowest this century.[5] In addition, data highlighting the all-time high rates of divorce for American couples need not be repeated here.

One leading psychiatrist has suggested that some people engaged in extended adolescence are reflecting a parental deficit, in that they either had only one parent, or had two parents who were preoccupied by roles and priorities other than child-rearing (especially their careers), which lead to a love-deficit. Those so harmed seek to compensate by searching, vainly, for the kind of love only parents can provide.

--Over-extended education and training, as seen in the increase in the proportion of college students who take five years or more to complete their bachelor's degrees, who add one graduate or professional degree on top of another, or who simply continue student life as non-students. These individuals are seen as attempting to remain in a dependency role, as psychologically unprepared to assume responsibility for taking care of themselves and for living autonomously. This behavior may be related to or characterized by prolonged reliance on parents, as described below.

--Extended dependency on parents for income and/or living arrangements, as well as a continued mix of rebellion and psychological dependence on parents. Many young adults return to their parents' homes after losing their first jobs or ending their marriages, turn their children over to their parents to raise while they themselves revert to adolescent behavior, and frequently seek parental guidance and funds even when they are away from home and living on their own. As the Chicago Tribune noted, when Gloria and Michael Stivic of "All in the Family" moved in with her parents "they caused

[5] Marcia Mogelonsky, "The Rocky Road to Adulthood," *American Demographics*, May 1996.

enough fireworks for a TV show"; today, "boomerang kids" are far more common, with more than one-fifth of 25 year olds still living with their parents in 1996, compared to 15 percent in 1970.[6]

--Refusal to attend to children they sire. Emerging adults are abandoning their children, giving them up for adoption, or maintaining minimal contact with them after divorce; this especially is true about fathers. "For the first time in our nation's history," David Blankenhorn reports, "Millions of men today are voluntarily abdicating their fatherhood . . . Tonight, about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep in homes in which their fathers do not live. Before they reach the age of eighteen, more than half our nation's children are likely to spend at least a significant portion of their childhoods living apart from their fathers. Never before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers."[7] Financially, "deadbeat dads" have failed their children as well.

--Rejection of authority figures, either by rejecting all authority figures as authoritarian or suspect, or by worshiping one, such as a cult or gang leader. Americans' "tearing down of public figures with the ready help of the tabloid press, and the flocking to antiestablishment talk radio" are fueled by American's "early adolescent" state of defiance, a National Public Radio commentator tells us.[8]

--Reluctance to accept or vie for a regular job, by working in political campaigns, following musical bands, or hanging out in marginal artistic quarters.

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[6] Jon Anderson, "Boomerang Kids: Tension Moves In as Changing Times Send More Young Adults Back to the Nest," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 June 1991, final edition, 1; Mogelonsky, *op. cit.*

[7] David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 1, 23. See also Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., "Divorce and the American Family," in *Annual Review of Sociology* 16, ed. Judith Blake and W. Richard Scott (Palo Alto, Calif.: Annual Reviews Inc., 1990) 379-403.

[8] Kakutani, *op. cit.*

--Unsatiated "wunderlust," expressed in extended travel around the world, especially in risky places. Nepal was the rage for a while. While three months of travel after college might be rewarding and even functional, continuous travel may reflect an inability to "settle down" and assume adult responsibilities.

--Experimentation with or continued use of a variety of controlled substances/drugs, and excessive consumption of alcohol; living in a counter-culture of herbal therapies, pseudo-psychological analysis.

--Engaging in manners and using language considered inappropriate for adults in the given culture, such as using foul words and exchanging tasteless jokes, engaging in pranks, and wearing hair styles and clothing associated with teenagers. Judith Martin, aka Miss Manners, bemoans the fact that "we now have the equally unappetizing spectacles of small children and grown-ups unsuccessfully imitating teen-age dress, speech and social rites."[9] Our "cultural meltdown" has been precipitated by adults who would "rather die than appear uncool."[10]

--Watching TV obsessively, being absorbed in video, computer or other games. Today, Americans watch 10% more television than in 1990--almost 15 hours per week. Meanwhile, the time Americans spend playing video games has been increasing at an annual rate of more than 7 percent in the past few years.[11] And The New York Times recently has highlighted the gaming habits of America's professional and emerging professional classes, which include laser tag for lawyers and online computer games with names like "Warcraft" for computer experts and law students.[12]

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[9] Judith Martin, "The Terrible Teens," *The Washington Post*, 17 November 1985, H1.

[10] Mona Charen, "Cultural Meltdown: A Nation Without Grownups," *The Washington Times*, 25 May 1997, national weekly edition.

[11] Christopher Parkes, "Traditional Media Stay in Fast Lane," *Financial Times (London)*, 29 July 1997, London edition, 3.

[12] Seth Schiesel, "The Ins and Outs of Playing Games Online," *The New York Times*, 7

These behaviors largely fall into three categories: A) behaviors that may be age-appropriate (for instance, dependence on parents) but are problematic if extended beyond a given age; B) behaviors that are mildly antisocial but are tolerable as part of a transitional separation from parents and an identity development process, but also are an indication of personal difficulties if extended beyond that phase, and are an indication of psychological and social difficulties if not outgrown by large numbers of members of a given community or society. Sexual experimentation is a case in point; and C) behaviors that reflect regression after some adult roles have been assumed.

A methodological aside

All the indicators used to assess the scope of over-extended adolescence, like much of social science evidence, are subject to different interpretations and indeed to controversy. Often now there are reliable figures related to such contentions, for instance measures of the extent of the use of foul language. If such data were collected for a specific age group, say those aged 21 to 35, and somehow demonstrated that the use of such language is greater than before, the question of which decade or group to compare the current usage to, that of the 1950s rather than 1960s or 1940s?, still would stand. And, as there are in the said age group both over-extended adolescents and "normal" adults, how can one determine who in that group is using the immature words? All these issues can be coped with, although not necessarily surmounted. However, this would require very extensive data collections and analysis and methodological asides. None of these are available or provided here. One hence must treat all the listed indicators merely as preliminary suggestive observations and not as hard evidence. One should note, though, that when several indicators of the kind listed here point in the same direction and are on the rise, they usually end up showing that there is indeed a

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July 1997. Also, Bruce Weber, "How to Succeed in Business: Blow Off Steam Like a Child," *The New York Times*, 10 August 1997. Both available at www.nytimes.com.

trend, although its scope and precise nature may differ from the one initially inferred.

Counter Arguments

A major objection raised by various critics to the resistance-to-maturity thesis is that it is made outside socio-historical context and that far from being dysfunctional, criticized behaviors are adaptive to new social facts or reflect the liberation of the individual from undue social restraints. For instance, social scientists who share this perspective point out that people live much longer now than they used to when the social roles they now are said to be reluctant to assume were fashioned. These social scientists point out that married life used to last, on average, only twenty years or less, when the average life span was forty or fewer years, and that even then marriages frequently were terminated by the death of one spouse, followed by a transitional period, and sometimes by remarriage.[13]

> The legalized rigidity of the family and the social norms defining acceptable behavior for adult members will continue to come under scrutiny and attack as a result of its perceived failures. Extended life has added as much as a quarter of a century in close living to many marriages . . . In effect, the decline of premature death has fostered the development of high rates of divorce and separation. With the new potential for a forty- to fifty-year average duration, the institution of marriage is in the throes of some substantial changes.[14]

In contemporary America, the sequence of marriage, divorce (and the "regression" to adolescent behavior), and remarriage, each of which may last as long or longer than a single marriage in earlier ages, is seen as adaptive to our longer life span.

Similarly, deferring marriage, extending education and training, and finding the first "serious" job or position at a later age, which are seen as signifying a reluctance to mature, are said actually to comprise a more or less proportional extension of

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[13] John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).

[14] Holger R. Stub, *The Social Consequences of Long Life* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1982), 135-36.

adolescence as other phases of life are extended. If maturing at 18 was expected when the typical life span was 47, maturing at 25 or older can be expected when our average life span is 76. The problem, these critics argue, lies in the lag in the societal definition of adulthood and in role expectations that are behind the times, rather than in maturing persons themselves: "It may be time to redefine the meaning of being 'grown-up.' If we continue to apply the same standards used to identify the transition from childhood to adulthood among baby boomers, we may discover that Generation X will never grow up," says psychologist Ross E. Goldstein, a specialist on generational transitions.[15]

Above all, the reluctance to commit to one job, workplace or even occupation, the return to the educational and training womb after having held a job, and dependency on partners or the state, reflect changes in the socio-economic world, as well as rapid technological changes, in American society. Young people no longer can assume that if they acquire a specific skill and work hard and loyally for a given corporation, their "future" will be secured (including not merely income but also the sense of identity and competence that comes with holding a steady job in a single organization and moving up in the ranks), the way say a steel worker or even a worker at AT&T, IBM, or Delta could have assumed but a few decades ago. "The age at which you are truly established and can support yourself keeps lengthening. I have graduate students who are in their late 20s and are still a ways away from being able to support themselves," reports a professor of clinical and developmental psychology at the University of Virginia.[16] Acquiring a variety of skills, and above all, a readiness to return to the educational and training womb, again are seen as adaptive behaviors.

A return to, or a later departure from, the nest need not be characterized as dysfunctional behavior, critics point out. Residential independence long has signified a

[15] Mogelonsky, *op. cit.*

[16] Crossen, *op. cit.*

move to adulthood, but while this decade's young adults are leaving home later than their parents, they are not moving out later than did their grandparents. Leaving home later, and returning home after a period of time away, is not necessarily a repudiation of adulthood, but may be a sign of maturity as young adults take steps to plan their careers and independent lives, saving money in the process.[17]

Last but not least, some of the so-called over-extended adolescent behaviors actually are the reflections of an affluent society, a society with the money and leisure to afford the luxury of prolonged adolescence.[18] It is a society in which many youngsters, supported by their families, or by working only part time, can afford to spend large parts of their time being socially or politically active, volunteering to serve in Peace Corps or AmeriCorps or City Year, traveling, or dabbling in creative but only marginally remunerative careers.

In short, to these social scientists deferred and intermittent adulthood seems adaptive rather than dysfunctional. And to the extent that there is a problem to be faced, it lies in the society that churns jobs, downsizes, and reduces loyalty, even among would-be dedicated employees.

The Stage Theory of Psychological Development

To sort out the valid aspects of each perspective--of those who are concerned about over-extended adolescence and those who see it as adaptive--I turn to examine the psychological and sociological assumptions of underlying concepts of maturity. Behind the resistance-to-maturity thesis there is an often implicit, occasionally explicit,

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[17] Mogelonsky, *op. cit.*; Frances (Kobrin) Goldscheider and Julie DaVanzo, "Living Arrangements and the Transition to Adulthood," *Demography* 22, no.4 (November 1985); Frances Kobrin Goldscheider and Calvin Goldscheider, *Leaving Home Before Marriage: Ethnicity, Familism, and Generational Relationships* (Madison, Wisc.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

[18] See, among others, Crossen, *op. cit.* and Gerard Seenan, "When Youth Comes of Age," *The Herald (Glasgow)*, 3 June 1997, 8.

specific, and well-known psychological theory. The theory is based on the notion that normal development entails a natural sequence of stages, according to which children move from being highly dependent creatures to being rebellious adolescents who disassociate themselves from their sources of dependency, to adults who are able to act as autonomous, self-guiding persons.[19]

While numerous social scientists have embraced one variation or another of this stage theory (the differences among them are not addressed here, nor are their critics or their relations to discussions of biological maturations and the effects of earlier maturations on extended adolescence), one element of the work of the renowned psychologist Erik Erikson is particularly relevant to the discussion at hand.[20] Erikson expected adolescents to pass through a period of "moratorium" in which they would suspend their final commitment to a job, but assume various adult roles on an as-if basis, as if these were their final choices. Thus, a high school student one week may pretend to herself and to others that she plans to become an physician, ask others about that life, perhaps visit a clinic, read some books, and try to imagine and feel what it would be like to become a doctor, only to reject this role and then "try out" the role of an executive, and so on. Similarly, another form of moratorium is the intense commitment youngsters demonstrate in their romantic loves; their frequent notion that their current love will be their mate for life, when this mate often is dumped after a relatively short period and soon replaced with another "total love." As Erikson sees it, the adolescent is in the process of learning adult roles and choosing among alternative

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[19] See, for example, an entry on adult socialization in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 14, David L. Sills, ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968), 555; Guy Claxton, *Live & Learn: An Introduction to the Psychology of Growth and Change in Everyday Life* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 182; Douglas H. Heath, *Maturity and Competence: A Transcultural View* (New York: Gardner Press Inc., 1977), 4.

[20] See Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1964).

roles by acting as if he or she had assumed them. The said moratorium thus is functional; there is no reason to be alarmed that the young person acts, for a brief period, like one who has chosen a course only to abandon it and try another--as long as such a moratorium is not unduly prolonged. Over-extended adolescence thus is deemed an incapability to end a moratorium.

Autonomous, Encumbered, or Interdependent Person?

The various stage theories of psychological development are not completely clear about what they consider the "end" state, the stage at which maturity is reached, at which one may be considered a social adult. Most contain the notion, though, that an adult must be able to function autonomously; Ellen Greenberger provides but one example.

> We shall refer to this requirement of adults as the *capacity to function adequately as an individual*. It is a conception of maturity that has a history in several disciplines. In the biological tradition the concept of maturity centers on the ability of the individual (and thus the species) to survive. From a psychological perspective, a major aspect of maturity common to diverse development theories is growth from a condition of helplessness and dependence on others to a position of competence and autonomy.[21]

An autonomous person is viewed as one able to be self-guiding, to have a sense of self-identity and direction, and at least the level of skills and ego competence needed to sustain themselves economically and psychologically.

Underlying at least some of these theories is an individualistic social philosophy especially challenged in recent years by communitarians--the image of a person as a free-standing agent, unencumbered by social bonds or culture, relying on the agent's reason and preferences to determine his or her course. One of the many depictions of this image of the person, by a scholar who does not share it, is by Ferdinand David

[21] Ellen Greenberger, "Education and the Acquisition of Psychosocial Maturity," in *The Development of Social Maturity*, ed. David McClelland (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1982) 157. Emphasis in original.

Schoeman who writes that individualists portray the actors as "cognitively and morally autonomous beings who are able to sort out issues for themselves . . . This autonomy is expressed in the principle that one should judge and act only on the basis of reasons that a fully reasonable and a rational person would consider relevant . . . a rationality that can be explicated without reference to a particular culture."[22] True, one can conceive of an autonomous person as one who is both able to guide him- or herself and be well-integrated into a community; however that is not the way many stage theories characterize the mature person. At least, it might be said, these theories have committed the sin of omission even if they have not positively considered the social integration element and rejected it.

Some individualists recently have protested, arguing that communitarian statements about their positions are incorrect. They contend that they do not see individuals as atomized, autocratic, and all living in log cabins on their own, and stress that they see individuals as cooperating with one another.[23] They miss the essential point, however, because they continue to see mature individuals as entering cooperative or contractual arrangements and commitments on a strictly voluntaristic basis. That is, their social narrative depicts individuals who primarily are able to sort our their preferences, unencumbered by others or culture, and who then work out--relying on their reason--shared social arrangements that suit their needs and interests and respect their rights. These indeed are actors capable of cooperation (especially if one assumes that they have naturally complimentary interests, as individualists have from John Locke to David Boaz) but not of bonding; they can join in economic transactions and markets but not in communities; and they can follow their own formulations of the

[22] Ferdinand David Schoeman, *Privacy and Social Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4. See also Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[23] David Boaz, *Libertarianism: A Primer* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

good but are not imbued with those the community formulates. Above all, these individualistic conceptions, to the extent that they deal with community and culture at all, treat them as externalities, as part of the environment, which one may choose to adapt rather than fight, should this suit one's calculations, but not as factors that contribute to the formation of the self and sustain, through non-rational processes such as internalization and affection, a person's conscience.

While individualist social philosophers usually avoid the discussion of socialization (because it makes it very difficult to avoid the question how a person's preferences are formed by external forces), individualist psychologists do not. Without necessarily being aware of the social philosophical roots or implications of their work, major parts of American psychology (including psychotherapy) have been dominated by the notion of a person who grows to become an autonomous person. Parents and other socializing agents play a role in initiation the process, but maturation entails detaching one's self from these bonds and developing internal guidance systems. Psychotherapy enters precisely to help the person who still is dependent, or who has disassociated in non-wholesome ways, to complete the detachment. It follows that for them the end state of a mature person is one in which individuals are able to make choices to meet their "immediate needs and agenda[s]."[24]

The communitarian critique of individualism fully applies here and is paralleled, and to some extent preceded, by sociological and social psychological criticism of what appropriately is called individual psychology. (Note that just as individualism has been dominant in other areas, neoclassical economics in American economics for instance, individual psychology has been much more widely practiced and influential in the United States, at least between 1960 and 1990, than social psychological and allied branches

[24] William J. Doherty, "How Therapists Threaten Marriages," *The Responsive Community* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 33.

of sociology, and individualistic psychotherapy has been practiced more widely than group and marriage therapy).[25] Without repeating here the well-known communitarian arguments, their social psychological implications for the issue at hand need to be explored.

The basic communitarian observation is that adults--and not just children or immature adults--are emotionally involved with one another, are affected deeply by those they affectively bond with-- members of their immediate families, networks of kinship and friends and communities. These affective bonds, in turn, serve to build and sustain commitments of the members of the community to the group's shared formulations of the good.[26]

Moreover, the said bonds and cultures profoundly affect a person's preferences, not only during the maturing process, but also as the actions of a mature person. To give but one example, relatively recent increased moral criticisms of those who drive drunk, have produced subsequent changes in behavior, not because millions of Americans individually decided that they ought not to drink and drive, or have taken note of new penalties for those who drive under the influence. (These are rather few and far between). Millions responded to the shift in the culture, led by a small social movement spearheaded by mothers and by students against drunk driving, that has rendered many expressions such as "Have one for the road" culturally unacceptable and likely to evoke the moral censure of one's friends. The movement also has fostered moral sentiments captured in slogans such as "Friends don't let friends drive drunk," and increasing approval given to those who declare that they are the non-drinking, "designated" driver of a given occasion. It follows that communitarians (along with many

[25] Doherty, *op. cit.*

[26] Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), Chs. 4 and 5.

social psychologists and sociologists) view the mature person as someone who continues to be dependent. The mature person is envisioned as one who continuously seeks and requires the profound approval of others, and is deeply moved and affected by them, as he or she affects other community members in return. The image of a peer group writ large is particularly appropriate.[27]

One problem this communitarian characterization of a mature person runs into, as the over-extension of adolescence serves to highlight, is that it does not provide a clear criterion of reaching adulthood. Adults undoubtedly are encumbered, but so are teenagers and even younger children. The question that must be addressed is what kind of "encumbering" makes for an adult in a communitarian society?

To deal with this issue the term encumbering needs to be re-examined briefly. The dictionary defines "to encumber" as to "impede, hobble, or impair."[28] While this may well not be the meaning Sandel had in mind when he introduced this term,[29] it is difficult to escape the linguistic connotations; in effect the term has individualistic overtones because while it recognizes that people are profoundly involved with one another, it views such involvements basically as negative entanglements. And it seems to follow that the less encumbered a person is the more she or he is able to follow his or her own preferences if not self-formulations of the good. Viewed this way, the main difference between a communitarian concept of maturation and that of individualist psychology is that a communitarian would recognize that such liberation is much less possible than an individualist would assume.

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[27] See Dennis Hume Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[28] *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged edition (New York: Random House, 1996).

[29] If one examines Sandel's discussion of the encumbered person (*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 172), it seems quite clear that this is an unfortuitous choice of the word rather than a misconception.

Communitarians need a different concept of an adult person, that of a person who requires a careful balance between being nurtured by others and being detached from them; between being imbued with the community's culture and being able to chart one's own judgements; between dependence and independence. I refer to this person as "interdependent," a term that makes up in accuracy what is lacks in elegance. This conception recognizes that the communitarian person faces pitfalls on both sides of the social equation: a person can defer adulthood or lose it by being too dependent on others, as well as by being too detached from others. The communitarian person seeks a delicate balance between involvement with family, friends, and community members and development of self, of personal interests and preferences. The communitarian person learns to cope with the tension between involvement and separation and acquire an ability to balance the two.

From the viewpoint just articulated, an over-involvement with one's family (or peers) is a reflection of not having sufficiently curtailed involvements, manifested, for instance, in very frequent calls to home, reliance on one's parents, older sibling or friends for making most choices, seeking college or work close to home, and above all returning to live at home (unless truly driven by economic considerations). At the same time, excessive detachment is reflected in becoming immersed in one's career or studies to the point that bonds with family and friends basically are severed. (The situation is ameliorated by the development of involvement in work-related peer groups, though those truly detached do not cultivate those either). Granted, as with all concerns with "excesses," for instance, excessive consumption of alcohol, there is not a precise point at which what might be wholesome turns damaging. Nevertheless, we can determine when a person is, say, calling home regularly versus when the same person is calling home twice a day, and cannot make a step without consulting the parents.

The communitarian person constantly balances not merely the demands of, but also the keen desire to be involved with, others with his or her own demands and desires--to the

extent that these are not complementary.

In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney provide a conception of an autonomous person who in many ways satisfies the concept of a mature person from a communitarian perspective.[30] They contrast this concept with that of the other- directed (conformist) and inner-directed (individualistic) person. As others have pointed out, their characterization of the autonomous person is much less clear than that of the types to which against which it is contrasted. They define as autonomous persons those "who on the whole are *capable* of conforming to the behavioral norms of their society . . . but who are free to chose whether to conform or not."[31] And, they add, "[T]he definition of the autonomous refers to those who are in their character capable of freedom, whether or not they are able to, or care to, take the risks of overt deviation."[32] Moreover, the authors correctly stress that the autonomous person is an ideal to the extent that it is impossible to escape the requirements of the external culture: "[N]or could an autonomous person be completely autonomous, that is, not irrationally tied in some part of his character to the cultural requirements of his existence."[33] The main way this characterization differs from that of the interdependent person is that is assumes, as the term implies, a much higher level of self-control. Influenced by psychoanalytic conceptions, the autonomous person as seen by Riesman and his colleagues, is one who exhibits heightened self-consciousness: "The individual striving for autonomy also needs a great deal of self-consciousness to differentiate

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[30] For a recent discussion of this work, see Adam Wolfson, "Individualism: New and Old," *The Public Interest*, Winter 1997, 75-88.

[31] David Riesman with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 287. Emphasis in original.

[32] Riesman, et. al., *op. cit.*, 295.

[33] Riesman, et. al., *op. cit.*, 288.

between actions he takes because they will be tolerated and those he takes because he really wants to. Indeed, it is just this type of heightened self-consciousness that, above all else, constitutes the insignia of the autonomous in an era dependent on other-direction."[34] This notion both makes the mature, autonomous person excessively individualistic, involved only to the extent they she or he chooses to be so, and sets up a model few can follow. As the authors of *The Lonely Crowd* themselves report, "[I]n our interviews of over one hundred fifty people, only three or four have turned up who might possibly be classified as autonomous."[35] Many more people can be interdependent, and achieve this status through a combination of modalities provided them by their culture and inner development, but not necessarily through prolonged psychoanalysis or its equivalent (if there is such a thing). Granted, a detailed and empirically grounded examination of these processes is not provided here.

If one uses the model of the interdependent person as a criterion to assess the indications of over-extended adolescence, one finds that not all the symptoms reflect the same kind of deficiency. Over-extended singlehood (referring not to those who do not marry but to those who do not evolve lasting relations) more is a sign of excessive detachment, while a return to the home (especially if not driven by economic necessities) is more a reflection of excessive dependency. Drug and alcohol abuse, especially if extended, are signs of detachment because while they may be rooted in peer culture, they are corrosive to relationships and involvements. Reluctance to terminate campus life and assume a working position is a mild form of excessive dependency, while "wunderlust" is a mild form of detachment.

Within History

The historical and social forces that have promoted over-extended adolescence

[34] Riesman, et. al., *op. cit.*, 305.

[35] Riesman, et. al., *op. cit.*, 305.

are rather familiar. They include the weakening of what I have called elsewhere the moral infrastructure of the society, the familial and communal bonds and institutions (which include schools, voluntary associations and places of worship) that sustain the moral order of the society, and the decline of the old social formation of the good not being replaced by new shared ones. These forces, discussed elsewhere in considerable detail by others and myself,[36] cause both a loss in opportunities for wholesome involvement with others and of pro social values one needs to internalize, and disrupt the processes of the needed detachments and proper disassociation and distance-building. Thus, a young person today can yearn for the love and codes parents did not provide, and seek in unwholesome ways to compensate for these, and/or cut him- or he self off from others, less they frustrate him or her the way the absent or preoccupied parents and siblings did.

Assuming the data about "time squeeze" are correct,[37] and given the fact that both members of couples are working outside the household at different jobs with different schedules and demands, as well as the high level of geographic mobility and the declining ability to rely on continuity at work (including the relations it provides), people seem to be left with less time and energy to relate to one another or to work out the difficulties their over-extended adolescences have left them with.

It follows that for adolescence to be properly terminated, as it still is for those millions of Americans who live in well-nurtured communities,[38] at least a measure of

[36] Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, Ch. 3.

[37] See, among others, Laure Leete-Guy and Juliet B. Schor, *The Great American Time Squeeze: Trends in Work and Leisure, 1969-1989* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1991).

[38] See, for example, R.J. Sampson, S.W. Raudenbush, F. Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multi-Level Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science* 277, no. 5238, 15 August 1997.

regeneration of communitarian fabric, of the moral infrastructure, will be required.[39] "Regeneration" does not refer to rebuilding the institutions, bonds, and values of the 1950s, but building institutions that can sustain new but affirmative and morally accountable relations and cultures. Thus, peer marriage may replace traditional marriage, but people whose relations are transitional will face difficulties in terminating their adolescence. And for some, professional or ethnic or work based communities may replace residential ones, but mature behavior still is less likely to be found among people who live in isolation.

All this does not mean that a young person needs to passively await societal regeneration to be able to mature properly. First, a societal regeneration itself is dependent upon groups of people coming together to fashion new shared formulations of the good and work on their embodiment in new or reconstructed social institutions. Second, there are limited, but far from trivial, opportunities for those who understand the need for a delicate balance between dependence and independence to work on moving faster and better toward their own points of balance, best achieved when they do so in twosomes or larger groups than when completed on their own.

[i] I am grateful to Barbara Fusco for research assistance.

[39] Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, Ch. 3.