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THE
OPPRESSION
OF YOUTH

TED CLARK



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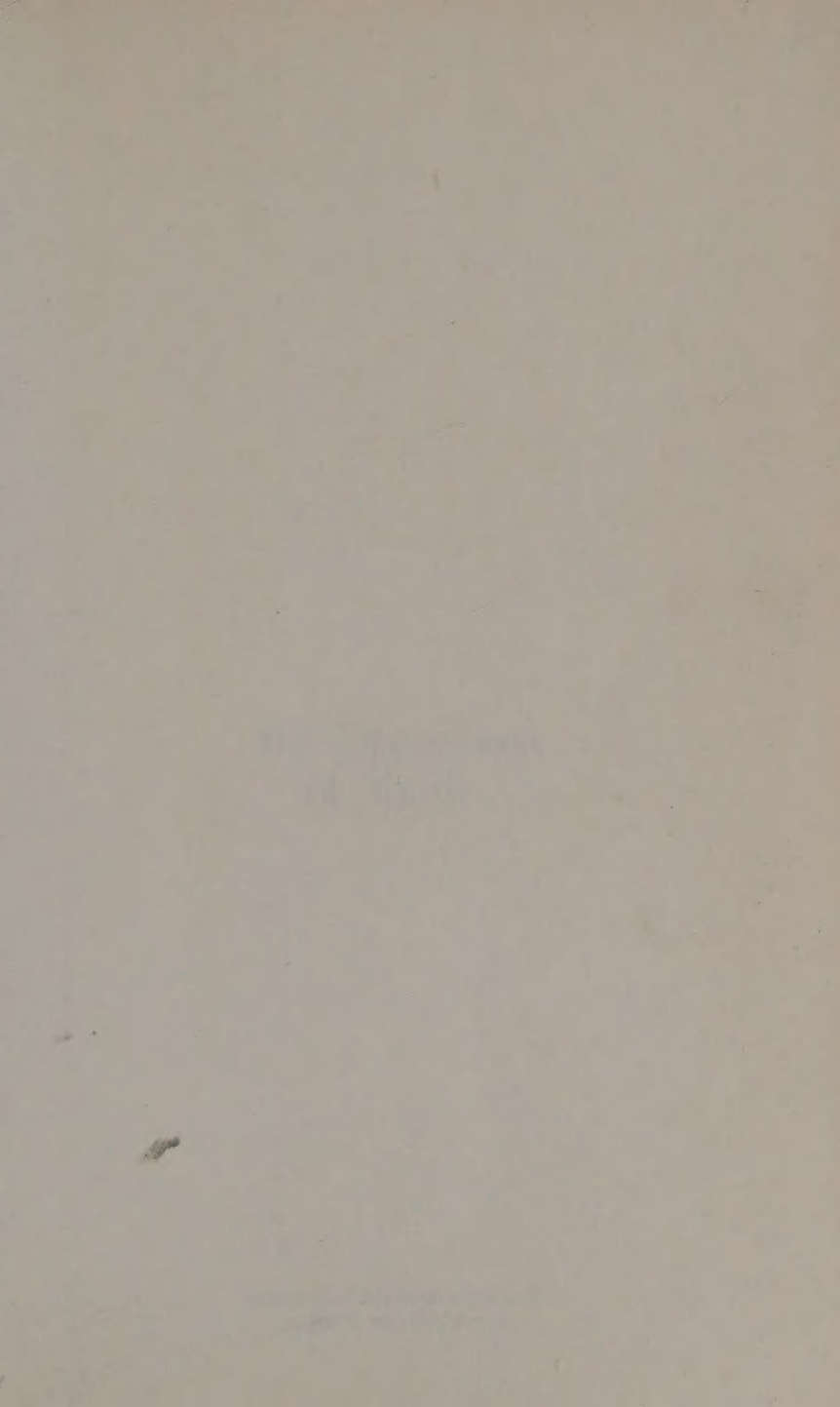
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THE OPPRESSION of YOUTH



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PREFACE

The Oppression of Youth grew out of my desire to describe a basic source of many of the problems of young people. As a therapist, a friend, and a onetime teen-ager, I have known and experienced many of these problems both directly and indirectly. As an adult, I have, unfortunately, contributed to others' problems by doing some of what I describe in this book. My intention, and I think the intention of most adults, has not been to hurt youth but to help them. However, I have come to understand that intentions and actions are not necessarily the same thing—we must look at what we do.

Many, certainly not all, problems confronting youth are, I believe, the result of oppressive relationships with authority. For some, the conflicts become internalized battles between "shoulds" and "wants"; for others, the conflict with authority figures is more direct. It is fashionable to pass off young people's conflicts with authority as a characteristic of "adolescence" or as a "phase of development." I believe the responses of youth, while often problematic, are justifiable in the sense that behavior and attitudes are attempts to cope with the abuse of power by adults who attempt to control and shape children and youth. The responsibility for young people's

difficulties does not lie with the fact that they are young but with adults who are terrified of children.

Adults hate and fear young people or what young people might do or become; this is an inference I make from the way many adults deal with young people. I assume in this book that terror and hatred are the underlying motivations for many of the attempts to impose limits on young people that conflict with their own desires, needs, and feelings—and often disregard them. The opposite of oppression—letting young people be, guiding and assisting them but not violating their integrity as human beings—may not solve all of their problems. I am romantic enough to believe that it will at least give them a fighting chance to deal with the real problems of living and relating instead of preoccupying and debilitating them with forced choices reflecting the needs and conveniences of adults who happen to have power. To achieve this end we must stop blaming young people for what is really a consequence or product of our treatment of youth.

Many will object to this book. I can anticipate some objections. For example, one objection will be that I imply that the problems of young people are primarily the fault of adults. Without playing with words, yes, after careful consideration, I believe that the burden of proof is with adults. Young people do often collude with and take advantage of adults; but they were taught these patterns of interaction, first, through the models of how adults relate to one another. Also, some people will feel I have oversimplified the problems of youth in reducing them to one factor: oppressive relationships with authority figures. I agree. In this book, I have focused exclusively on problems that stem directly from oppression, and I avoid discussion of problems young people may be dealing with in an unoppressive, or relatively unoppressive, environment. At the same time, I am arguing that many problems are the direct result of oppressive relationships; perhaps these problems are complicated by other factors, but they are necessitated by oppressive relationships.

Arguments like these are never a matter of fact or fiction;

they are only a matter of judgment, evidence, and logic. I use my judgment, offer evidence, and believe I have argued logically, as well as passionately.

THE OPPRESSION OF YOUTH

Everyone agrees that young people are often unhappy and discontented. Adolescence itself, the age from puberty to young adulthood, is assumed to be a natural series of identity crises involving emotional turmoil and conflicts with parents and other authority figures. The signs of discontent are clear; everywhere one sees alienated youth. Symptoms of discontent and emotional conflicts include drug use, running away from home, unwanted pregnancies, the spread of venereal disease, withdrawal from all sexual relationships, delinquency, shoplifting and vandalism, and school dropouts. The most serious signs of difficulty may be chronic boredom coupled with despair; passivity, the capitulation to pressures to say and do nothing that makes large numbers of young people appear to be content simply because they do not dissent; and the egocentric attitude of many young people, their turning inward in an effort to gratify their needs at the expense of cooperative community-of-interest relationships with each other. Indeed, widespread anomie is seen in increasing rates of alcoholism, suicide, and other signs of endemic social problems for youth. The controversy is not about whether young

people are troubled, but about *why* and about what can be done about it.

My observation of young people as clients in counseling relationships, as friends, and of myself as an adolescent is that a good many of the troubles of young people occur in their relationships with authority figures. Indeed, authority may be the single most problematic area of social living in a society where the leaders are continually demonstrating a lack of integrity and an eagerness to abuse authority for the sheer pleasure of exercising arbitrary power over others, as well as for personal gain. I believe that as a class, young people are systematically and totally oppressed. This creates problems for each adolescent whenever the imposed, coercive limits conflict with personal desires or values.

Psychic oppression is the attempt to cope with fear and anxiety through the sacrifice of both personal freedom and the ability to make choices and assume personal responsibility for these choices. Interpersonally, oppression, in that it offers control as a means of gaining a predetermined, orderly, predictable society, is an illusionary solution to conflict. Politically, oppression is the use of power to impose on individuals limits that are self-perpetuating and to restrict entire classes of thought, feeling, and action in an attempt to make dissent, even rebellion (social change), undesirable, unthinkable, and impossible.

In the frantic pursuit of mastery over others or its correlate, submission to authority as a means of avoiding risk and responsibility and attendant fears and anxieties, people have turned against young people, in effect hating them. Converting socialization into a coercive, oppressive depersonalization of the individual, society has attempted to eliminate the fear young people engender; this fear lies in young peoples' potential for social change. Such change would eliminate the structure of society as older people know it and depend upon it. The structure of society is, to some extent, an externalization of the mind, and therefore radical social change threatens the struc-

ture of the self itself. It appears that during a time of social upheaval, when men and women are losing control over their own lives and social systems, young people must be prevented from making—even advocating—changes.

In other words, young people are being victimized as part of the attempt to maintain the illusion that people in power are controlling the social forces all of us experience as largely out of control. The social phenomenon of a society seeking to structure itself and perpetuate this structure is creating innumerable personal conflicts and tragedies for a powerless class: adolescents. Whether the conflict between arbitrary, self-serving limits established by authority figures and the values and desires of the individual occurs within the psyche, between the adolescent and his peers, between the adolescent and her parents, or between the adolescent and social authorities makes little difference. Many of the crises of youth come not from innate developmental changes, but from the nature of the limits and the means of imposition of these limits that young people experience from childhood on.

“Adolescence” is a social fiction, an arbitrary concept, a myth. The concept of adolescence is so widely accepted and dignified by social scientists, that practically everyone assumes that there actually is such a period of development with unique physical, psychological, and social characteristics determined, in some mysterious way, by the biological changes initiated by puberty. The myth obscures the point of view that the behavior and attitudes of youth are a product of the relationships the youth has had with others, particularly those with authority and power. The task of adolescence, then, is to bring inherently unstable impulses into line with socially acceptable limits. The use of control over youth is rationalized this way, as necessary to the development of the individual. Adolescents, in a common phrase, need to be protected from themselves. Adults controlling youth therefore avoid having to take personal responsibility for the oppression of young people under the guise this oppression is the necessary duty of adults; it

prepares young people to be acceptable members of society. What adults do to youth is ignored. Whatever is done "has to be done" for the youth's sake, is necessitated by the youth's inability to master his or her own impulses, and neglects irresponsible, inappropriate, and damaging behavior by the adult. Others have mentioned this:

Often a technical term is invented in order to create a social condition and a social fact; such has been true with respect to the term "adolescence." The idea of adolescence as an intermediary period in life starting at puberty and extending to some period in the life cycle unmarked by any conspicuous physical change but socially defined as "manhood" or "womanhood" is the product of modern times.¹

The history of "childhood," a socially defined role with a prescribed status in society, has been traced by J. H. Plumb back to the early seventeenth century. He mentions that "our own attitudes toward children not only differ widely from our fathers' and grandfathers' but differ immensely once we push back into the early nineteenth century and beyond. . . . Even the idea of childhood itself—is a European invention of the past 400 years."²

The development of the roles of both child and adolescent is part of a process of institutionalizing limits on classes of individuals that reflects solely the needs and desires of those in power and the needs of the social system per se. It is interesting to note that the consistent attempt to compel young people to act the role of either child or adolescent (because that is how they are going to be seen and treated regardless of how they behave) is based on values which have been passed down from the 1600s!

By 1600 a new attitude was growing, based on the concepts that *childhood was innocent* and that it was the *duty of adults* to preserve this innocence. The child, surely, was a prey to passion and to irrationality, but just as innocence could be preserved, so passions could be repressed. The protected child could be guided by remorseless effort into the world of rational behav-

ior. . . . In many educational establishments discipline was becoming extremely stringent and the dangers of childish sexuality legislated against. . . . There was a steady separation both of the sexes and age groups. . . . Increasingly, the child became a special creature, which required separation and protection from the adult world.³ (emphasis mine)

Moral qualities attributed to young people gradually became "innate" conditions based on their phase of development. For example, over a period of time, the *belief* that children were "a prey to passion and to irrationality" became the *assumption* that children and adolescents were *naturally* impulsive and irrational. What began as the religious beliefs of the leaders became the moral duty of people. Adult behavior—specifically sexuality, the use of alcohol, smoking, and gambling—was assumed to be corrupt and harmful. Such a moral dichotomy encouraged adults to feel privileged and righteous and also created the urgent necessity for even genuinely loving parents and teachers to suppress young people. This state of affairs was a major cause of the creation of the hierarchy of the secular state, with children being one of the groups at the bottom, subject to the whims and desires of adults; they, in turn, were fortified with religious and secular authority to exercise power over children. The oppression of children was self-serving; it allowed the people who engaged in behavior that comprised community standards to pass their sense of shame and guilt onto another group in the guise of protecting them from vice. Finally, adults had a legitimate reason for going to any extent to inculcate community standards in children. The process of socialization began as an attempt to define community standards—and hence the society—by prescribing the limits on children and youth in terms of ideological values that had no basis in the real behavior of the adults.

Parallel with this developed the cult of the Infant Jesus, which symbolized childish innocence. . . . By 1700 . . . the child possessed his own literature, books carefully pruned of adult sophistication or broad humor, but also especially written for the

young mind. . . . In the eighteenth century this new vision of childhood became the accepted social attitude of the affluent classes. Among the poor the old attitudes lingered on—poverty bred proximity. . . . This period also witnessed a revolution in . . . the education of children . . . many of the assumptions that we regard almost as belonging to human nature itself were adopted during this time.⁴

This largely European phenomenon provided a precedent for early America's creation of "adolescence." David Bakan has traced its development, his thesis being that "the invention or discovery of adolescence in America was largely in response to the social changes that accompanied America's development in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and that the principal reason was to prolong the years of childhood,"⁵ thereby keeping young people subject to both parents and social controls. He examines the economic, political, and social development of the United States to discover the roots of society's motivation for inventing adolescence in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

From the days of the early settlement of America to the second half of the nineteenth century, America suffered a chronic labor shortage. It sought to overcome this labor shortage through slavery, the encouragement of immigration, and industrialization . . . with the development of urban-industrial society, the nation became possessed of new contradictions characteristic of modern technological society, most serious among them the presence of a large number of persons who were mature by historical standards but immature in the new context.⁶

At an age when they would be accorded adult status by European standards, young people were not desirable as adults in America. Young people had no viable role in the emerging society. Even then, adolescents were a cause for alarm to many adults.

The low level of "morality" of the new occupants of the burgeoning cities was a matter of frequent comment. Drinking, sexual immorality, vagrancy, and crime were not only intrinsically threat-

ening to orderliness, but were also particularly distressing influences on the young. . . . Not the least of the dangers was the presence of un-American ideas and ideologies brought by the new immigrants, which were considered threatening to the basic fiber of American life.⁷

The old fear: corruption of the innocent; the old solution: repression and oppression, principally through the invention of a legally defined period following puberty (until then young people were still children) up to an arbitrary age, say eighteen or twenty-one. At least young people now had a *place* (although this place was forced upon them), even if they had no function or meaningful connection with the social system.

Young people were considered a potential threat to the established social order because they had a capacity for change without the learned defenses (limits) against change that society would force them to develop as they matured. Because of the intensity of their sexual desires and their need to learn to cope with the stresses of a boring social system, people were inclined to experiment with limits and with various forms of stimulation, including sexual relations, drugs, and rebellion—youth being no exception. In addition to a compulsory school system to socialize young people (mold them in the image of the social needs of the system), America developed a juvenile court system to discourage and punish any youth who went too far in the judgment of authorities. Bakan notes:

Among the acts reported under the heading of juvenile delinquency may be found the following: immoral conduct around schools, association with vicious or immoral persons, patronizing public pool rooms, wandering about railroad yards, truancy, incorrigibility, absenting self from home without consent, smoking cigarettes in public places, begging or receiving alms (or in the streets for purpose of).⁸

The school system was supposed to control young people, keep them off the streets, and, it was hoped, socialize them into roles appropriate to industrialized America; the nineteenth and twentieth century also saw American courts impose

arbitrary limits on young people who deviated from any social norms—or who merely appeared to be about to do so. For example, until recently, Connecticut had a statute that referred to “manifest danger of falling into vice”; this phrase meant that any youth who the court felt *might* get into trouble could be adjudicated a delinquent. Schools oppress, courts repress. The absence of any constitutional rights for youth until extremely recently is one sign of this repressive function of the courts.

The effort by community leaders, the school system, the police and courts, parents, and even mental health professionals (who, under the guise of helping youth, often attempt to manipulate them into adjusting and accommodating themselves to socially normative conventions and attitudes) to pressure young people into accepting the values and limits of adults as authorities without regard for the actual behavior or attitudes of adults as people forces young people into deep conflicts. They must choose between pervasive authority and their own individual desires and values, which they often have not experienced enough to trust completely. When they cannot disguise or conceal their deviance from social conventions, they often discover that the anxiety of adults to help them only expresses obliquely the hatred that many adults have for youth.

Edgar Friedenberg, a man sympathetic to young people, comments on this situation: “A detached observer of the behavior and attitudes of school personnel, juvenile court officials, and so forth would probably conclude that, on the whole, these individuals dislike and distrust youngsters more often than they like them. They are often disturbed at the prospect of being involved with young people in any situation that is not under their quite complete control.”⁹ Once the social system’s emphasis is on control over youth, the question becomes how do authorities exercise this control? “In today’s society they will probably have to be ‘nice to the kids’ despite their fear and hostility; but they will most certainly try to maintain by seduction and manipulation the dominance they previously achieved by coercion and punishment.”¹⁰

I have demonstrated how the myth of adolescence in America was originally preceded by the European response to children based on the moralistic assumptions of the prevailing social classes. Later, Americans enlarged the stereotype of "child" according to the needs of the emerging industrial society, extended the restrictions of childhood to cover the ages of twelve and up, and began the oppression of youth. This oppression was covert, for instance, in schooling (socializing systems), and overt, as in the repression by the juvenile court system and, of course, the police (social control).

The myth functions to mystify the relationship between young people and adults, which is often one of master-slave, authority-subject, and oppressor-oppressed. By creating a socially defined phase of development and obscuring the social needs that led to this concept, social scientists foster and continue the belief that adolescence is a unique phase of psychobiological development. They intend people to assume that the characteristics attributed to youth are biologically determined and hence are *not* socially created by the way society deals with youth. Attributes such as "poor impulse control," "weak ego structure," "identity crises," "instability," "incomplete personality development," "irresponsibility," "immaturity," the incapacity to cope with sophisticated subjects like sexuality or drugs, and youth's lack of judgment are all passed off as a *function of age*. Not one of them is; they are all the result of how young people are treated by society. Thus, certain aspects of prevalent behavior are singled out as bad in one group (youth) and ignored or accepted in another (adults); once youth are put in this position, the designation becomes self-fulfilling.

Take, for example, poor impulse control. What is an impulse? The usual connotation is that of an emotional drive rooted in the biology of the individual. Maturation is considered to be the process of mastering these drives, while immaturity is considered to be action without thought or reason, and such action is therefore irrational. One can see that most of these

terms are tautological; they grow out of a single assumption: The task for people during their development is to limit their behavior (suppress any drive) to the standards established by the society. This is a socially defined task that appears to be based on an assumption about the emotions: they are considered destructive and dangerous to the self and to others. Certainly they can be. If a child runs out into the street to catch up with a ball, he could very likely be hurt or killed. But this isn't an example of the lack of impulse control as much as it is a question of judgment. The facts warrant caution in entering streets; the child didn't take into consideration any possibilities other than catching up with the ball. When this paradigm is stretched to include sexuality and hostility and aggression, the basic issues become clearer. Poor judgment is attributed to anyone who tends to express feelings or do things that we feel are undesirable. That is all. It may be that there is empirical evidence to support society's current belief that behavior or expression is undesirable or that other people share the same standards. It is assumed that what is undesirable and unacceptable is also harmful, but this is not necessarily so. Furthermore, many people of all ages act without considering all the consequences of their acts; but it is young people who are singled out as characteristically "impulsive." Thus, any inopportune action by young people is emphasized in order to distract attention from similar behavior in adults.

Characterizing the motivation for a certain behavior as "impulsive" or a youth as having an "impulse disorder" is purely evaluative. The authority figure can find no good reason for the behavior. The implication is the youth is out of control. Any youth in this position finds no support or confirmation for his or her point of view and behavior and if he or she accepts the adult's perspective, may even believe himself or herself to be out of control. Youths begin to suspect their own feelings, their own reasons, their own capabilities to take care of themselves. As young people wake up to the fact that they *can* take care of themselves and make decisions they can live with—if

they are given or take the chance—they will perceive their oppression. They will stop colluding with their oppression.

Just as overcontrolling a youth is oppressive—that is, preventing a youth from determining his or her own attitudes and behavior—so is undercontrol or permissiveness. Permissiveness “lets” the youth do or think what he or she will, as if the adult can stop the person but does not. The implication is the adult is in control but chooses not to exercise the control. From this light, permissiveness is another form of adult rejection of the competence and capability, especially the capability to learn from experience, of the youth. Ironically the overpermissive adult feels powerless, despite the implication to the youth that the adult has the power. The youth often tries to provoke the adult into using this power (which the adult really believes he cannot do) in order to establish limits and test the youth’s capabilities. Only by going to extremes can the youth believe he or she is really determining his or her own behavior and thoughts.

By invalidating unacceptable behavior in youth, adults do not have to face the issues themselves and, by implication, the possibility of having to make changes. For example, the attempt to define drug abuse as primarily a problem of young people based on the nature of adolescence distracts people from the social conditions that underlie this phenomenon and the fact drug abuse is a pervasive social problem affecting all ages. Young people are turned into scapegoats for being young, and the conditions contributing to their dilemmas are never dealt with directly by the people responsible for these conditions. Furthermore, by defining the aberration as inherent in adolescence, society implies that any youth, by virtue of their age, is capable of “catching the disease of drug abuse.” This view justifies extending society’s prescription for deviant behavior (that is, stringent methods of social control and increased socialization) over every young person regardless of whether or not the youth uses drugs. Since the deviant behavior in question is primarily the breaking of a limit considered

to be an important value to the established social order and authority, the "treatment and prevention" is a disguised attempt to indoctrinate young people in the sanctioned value so that they will be less inclined to choose alternative values. The myth of adolescence includes characteristics that can be perceived as the "cause" of any deviant (socially unacceptable) behavior, and therefore this myth can be used to justify increased efforts to indoctrinate young people and "treat" (read: punish) others on a widespread basis whenever it appears that a significant number of youth are exploring activities unacceptable to established authority. The attributes applied to the period of development arbitrarily defined by society as adolescence contain within them two aspects: (1) the implication that they are a consequence of biological traits unique to adolescents and children as a result of their age; (2) it is assumed that the following characteristics are implicit in the attributes: (a) the young person may do something undesired by an adult, (b) the young person is not able to choose by himself to do the right thing, (c) the adult can determine when these characteristics apply and when they don't, (d) the adult is allowed to determine whether the child is to be blamed (for not being more mature) or ignored (as immature—"What do you expect from kids?").

As with any stereotype, the myth of adolescence contains within it socially ascribed characteristics that allow society to condemn or ignore young people, to punish them as a group or as individuals, to invalidate whatever they do, and it allows authorities to avoid their own culpability, or the culpability of the social system, by creating the conditions that young people respond to by deviance. Furthermore, it allows the deceptive impression to be made that young people's problems are due primarily to their age or to a dysfunction of the process of "normal" psychobiological development rather than to interactions with other people concerning a specific issue. One can better understand the social function of the myth of adoles-

cence with the help of William Ryan's concept, *blaming the victim*.

Victim-blaming is cloaked in kindness and concern, and bears all the trappings and statistical furbelows of scientism. . . . The new ideology attributes defect and inadequacy to the malignant nature of poverty, injustice, slum life, and racial difficulties. The stigma that marks the victim is an acquired stigma. . . . But the stigma, the defect, the fatal difference—though derived in the past from environmental forces—is still located *within* the victim.¹¹

This concept is matched by the comparable treatment of young people who, often, are the product of broken homes, disturbed families, poor schooling, or "faulty socialization" but who are somehow *not* disturbed or delinquent. If children and youth have dangerous impulses, it is society's duty to protect them from the results of these impulses and to teach them to control them. To say that the teaching (socialization) process is faulty, because of family conflicts or schooling deficiencies, does nothing more than explain why a particular youngster (or many) has difficulty avoiding immoral, unacceptable behavior—for example, sex and drugs.

The "wrongness"—whether delinquency or disturbance—is thought to be in the nature of the adolescent, and society's failure lies in not teaching—forcing—the youth to repress his impulses and desires within socially acceptable limits. Social control attempts to make up for this failure by imposing more intense and rigid limits on the youth than are normally expected in either the family or school, all for the good of the young person.

First, identify a social problem. Second, study those affected by the problem and discover in what ways they are different from the rest of us as a consequence of deprivation and injustice. Third, define the differences as the cause of the problem itself. Finally, assign a government bureaucrat to invent a humanitarian action program to correct the differences.¹²

The social problem: young people. The differences: adolescents are immature, lack control, and are irrational. This is a tautology as one can see: adolescence is only meaningful as a period of development before maturity (adulthood) and therefore adolescence is synonymous with immaturity and so on. Using the word *adolescent* to characterize an adult's behavior is explicitly a judgment that the behavior is not acceptable, desirable, or responsible. The differences are a cause of the problem: if young people weren't so immature, so lacking in judgment, and so irrational, they wouldn't need to be controlled and protected. Finally, create a school system to socialize them if you cannot be sure that the family will do this properly, a court system or mental health programs to control the ones the school misses, and federal programs if the courts and psychiatrists, schools and families, fail to prevent immoral behaviors such as drugs, runaways, and the like.

Obviously the myth of adolescence defines adolescence as essentially a form of emotional disturbance, a period of innate unbalance, and a time of poor self-control, inadequate ego boundaries, and so forth.

By stressing . . . the presumptive emotional instability and unformed nature of people of that age—the work of Margaret Mead and others suggests that such phenomena of adolescence may be extrinsic rather than intrinsic—Hall [G. Stanley Hall] and others tended to put a *gloss of psychopathology* on this age period. Since it has long been a principle in our society that persons regarded as psychologically pathological are to be relieved of rights, the effect of this literature has been to serve the general disability of persons under legal ages.¹³

The stereotyped characteristics of "adolescence" are implicit value judgments based on the ideology of American society, which determines the validity or lack of validity of whatever the youth has done, a determination that excludes the values of the youth. Many times these judgments are *against* the interests of young people. Because adults can minimize the seriousness or validity of any young peoples' behavior—passing it off as a

result of the fact that they are adolescents—they can allow young people some leeway in testing limits or even in standing up to authorities. This minor or minimal testing is self-serving for authorities however; nothing is just given to youth. The authority figure retains power because he or she is “letting” the young people do whatever it is they are doing. Second, the authority figure is allowed to retain a liberal, benevolent persona—a nice guy image—despite his or her reliance on power to control and oppress youth. Third, if the young people get out of hand—too dissenting, too disrespectful, too demanding—this state can be used as a justification for applying more and stricter controls and for avoiding whatever situational legitimacy the kids may have, all the while taking credit for having “tried” to be nice, tried to be reasonable. Youth’s behavior is often thrown back at them as proof of how immature, impulsive, irrational, and demanding they are—a no-win position for the young people.

It must be understood that adults generally oppress and repress young people for the best of reasons, and with the best of intentions. For example, when a young person is told he should “grow up,” it is said to him because the adult sincerely believes he has the moral duty to raise the youth properly. The fact that this statement humiliates the individual is disregarded. The means are not justified by the ends, since the means are authoritarian and the end—maturity and independence—cannot be reached by such means. Only dependency, submissiveness, and docility are achieved through the constant and unrelenting control of young people. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the primary motivations of adults are economic, political, and social, not the desire to act in the best interests of the young.

There is no doubt that these [child welfare] movements were strongly motivated, at least on the conscious level, by humanitarian considerations. The rhetoric in defense of these three types of law was always cast in terms of the benefit and the saving quality that they would have for the young. The presumption that

the various child welfare laws were principally created for the benefit of youth must, however, be confronted with the fact that there has been only a small degree of legal attention to [these problems] in our society. . . . *The confluence of humanitarian considerations with the major economic, social and political forces in the society needs to be clearly recognized.*¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

Examples of the contradictions between the good intentions and the actual focus of attention and efforts are easy to come by. Increasing suicide rates and increasing incidences of alcoholism—both clearly destructive—are passed over by the majority of federal monies in favor of control of the use of things like marijuana and LSD. Federal monies go to the authoritarian drug programs instead of to crisis centers that deal with any problem young people bring up, rather than imposing problems on people against their will. The priorities are clearly not what is in youth's best interest, but what is the most significant threat to social morals, and what is the most effective form of social control.

If one assumes that the needs of the society, as it is conceived of at any given moment by an authority figure, should take precedence over the desires and wants of any individual youth, then oppression is a logical, even necessary, conclusion. By creating the "gloss of psychopathology" over all youth, oppression is facilitated. Pete Blos, an eminent psychoanalyst, does just this. Recognizing the fact that puberty* is occurring earlier and earlier over time, he writes:

We speak of prolonged adolescence as a necessary condition in an industrialized society. And even more so, an open, democratic society must, for its own survival, support educational upward mobility and accept the risks inherent in such accommodations. In this connection we must acknowledge the fact that without a high level of psychological differentiation, the adolescent is

*Puberty does consist of biological changes in the body, but the critical question is how does a society relate to this change in a young person?

neither able nor fit to cope with the differential learning required of him.

We have ample evidence to demonstrate that an acceptance of the young adolescent as a self-directing, sexually active "young person" interferes severely with the preparatory functions of this stage. We can say that ego building at this time augurs more promisingly for the attainment of maturity than premature id gratification. To extend adolescence downward will deprive adolescence of the psychic properties that will enable youth later to endure the period of that complex process of adaptation and prolonged dependency (schooling and financial support) which present-day society demands from an increasingly larger segment of youth. I submit that a prolongation, rather than an abbreviation of childhood is desirable, if not imperative. The young adolescent of thirteen—regardless of the status of his primary and secondary sex characteristics—is still, psychologically, a child.¹⁵

Underneath this jargon are some quite exceptionable ideas. First, Dr. Blos accepts as a starting point for discussing the needs of his clients the curious assumption that what society demands and expects are legitimate criteria for deciding what is important or valid for the individual. This is the philosophy of adjustment: the task of clients and therapists is to achieve an adjustment of the client to the limits and demands of the established social order, apparently without question.

Second, in determining what is best for the child by looking at what society will demand, Blos assumes the appropriateness (even the necessity, for example, "if not imperative") of imposing limits on the child, regardless of his own desires. That is what a "prolongation . . . of childhood" means.

Third, Blos sees no contradiction between the conditions necessary for "an open, democratic society" and the imposition of limits on children, regardless of their desires. One wonders if "premature id gratification" (in plain language fucking) is actually something people should give up so that they can learn the self-control and sacrifice necessary to endure extended periods of dependency on family and school authorities. Why not both? Is this a psychoanalyst talking as an expert, or as a moralist?

Fourth, the reference to being “psychologically a child” is stereotypic. The maturity of thirteen-year-olds certainly isn’t dependent on the development of their bodies. Who’s confused about that? Does Blos really want us to believe that all children who look like they can fuck really want to do so and will without adult-imposed limits? What they will do is dependent on how much responsibility, support, and experimentation they have been exposed to and on the maturity of the models around them. It varies from person to person. But rather than say we should try to help children mature as fast as they want to (no pressure), Blos comes down hard for imposing limits (the child role and status) on youth for even *longer* periods of time.

Fifth, and perhaps most pathetically, Blos seems to assume that it is possible to control thirteen-year-olds and prevent them from engaging in sex. In actuality, it is possible only to allow them to be who they are openly and without guilt or to force them to hide what they are like by insisting that any deviations remain secret. Considering the relative emotional and physical problems associated with sexuality, I think that therapists should be extremely concerned with encouraging parents to be open, supportive, educational, and nonjudgmental. If these attitudes are not helpful, why do we persist in seeing them as the crucial *therapeutic* attitudes to be adopted toward people in emotional conflicts?

Friedenberg writes, “Adolescence is not simply a physical process; there is more to it than sexual maturation. It is also—and primarily—a social process, whose fundamental task is clear and stable self-identification.”¹⁶ Adolescence must not be confused with puberty, which is only physiological change. Menopause doesn’t usher in any major developmental period in a woman’s life; puberty doesn’t do anything more than physically prepare the individual for copulation *and* conception, making his or her readiness more apparent through emerging secondary sexual characteristics. It is not the beginning of sexuality; people are always sexual. It is not the

beginning of identity; the personality is formed primarily between one and five, or at least the basic personality is formed. Of course, during the rest of the individual's life, he or she will modify these basic assumptions. Certainly, in every sense adolescents already have an identity when they reach adolescence.

When we describe adolescence as having the main purpose of developing a sense of personal identity, what are we doing? First of all, a judgment is being made about a particular period of people's lives. The purpose of this phase, we are told, is to develop a "personal identity," as if this were intrinsic to this age group. In fact it is neither intrinsic, nor is it actually the kind of identity being talked about. Young people in their families have a strong sense of personal identity, which is constantly confirmed by their parents and siblings. But this situation is changed for the young person after puberty. Societal authorities expect him to assume more responsibilities, to cope with sexuality and aggression along socially acceptable lines, and to fulfil the demands of society to achieve a *social role* instead of a *familial one*. Essentially, the youth is expected to move from a sense of self based on family authority to one based on societal authority. However, the social role is ambiguously defined. Furthermore, and unfortunately, society spends a great deal of energy defining the prohibitive limits of social roles while doing little to help the individual determine the *content* of a positive and socially sanctioned role.

The conflicts between the family's demands and the social pressures on youth are incredibly complicated and almost always in profound contradiction. Fantastic as it may seem, not only must youth begin, without much preparation or support, to change from child to adult roles in order to comply with the social imperative "grow up!," but they must *also* learn to distinguish between the rhetoric of the society and its real expectations and demands. Let us create some categories. The *family demands* will stand for whatever pressures parents and siblings are putting on the young person to comply with their

needs, expectations, limits, and demands. The *societal demands* will stand for the real demands, standards, limits, and so forth demanded of the youth by social authorities, including school officials, community leaders, influences through the media, and the peer group. The *societal ideals* will stand for whatever ideology is propounded concerning the maturation process and on which the demands are supposedly based.

Let us take the example of Ann, a young girl about fourteen years old. She had an "identity crisis" concerning her desire to go out with a boy of fifteen. It was an identity crisis because the previous instructions about dating given to her were all family demands. What should she do? She was not expected to date at all: "you're too young," "wait until you are older," "we'll tell you when we think you are old enough to date." She knew all this very well, and as long as her sense of self was based on her family role, she was fine. But she also knew that "people" expected her to "grow up." These people represented societal demands. They included, "what's the matter with you, are you a baby or something?" and "you've got to start going out with boys sometime."

If Ann went out with John, few societal authorities would be upset. If Ann understood "make your own decisions" literally, she might let John "go all the way." She would quickly find both her peer group—through the bad reputation tactic—and societal authorities—through allegations of immaturity, loss of control, and impulsiveness—didn't mean that she should make her own decisions at all. What they meant was: make the decisions *in terms of* societal rules and standards, not in terms of familial rules and standards. This conflict between societal ideals and societal demands is incredibly complex. Does society mean Ann should date? If so, is Johnny acceptable? What can she-they do, and what can't they do? Is Ann "old enough" to decide for herself? The point is that societal demands are vague and the limits are arbitrary.

If Ann is to "rebel" against her parents and try to get their permission to date John, is this being "grown up," or is it being

a “baby” since she still is letting them decide? If she decides by herself to see John, what will her parents do in reaction? Punish her? Threaten her? Capitulate? Depending on how strenuously Ann’s parents attempt to keep her in a child role, that is, dependent on their permission and punished for disobedience, Ann will have conflicts with her parents as she attempts to “grow up.”

The peer group is both a source of support—everyone is going through the same things—and a source of pressure and punishment. By establishing limits, young people protect themselves against the possibility that someone will go further than they dare and hence demonstrate their own fear, feelings of helplessness, and insecurity. Ann knows that some kids her age date and others don’t. It isn’t clear whether she will suffer criticism for going out with John—some girls who date early are considered “sluts”—or gain prestige: “Boy, are you lucky to be able to go out.”

Ann is also aware of the conflicting attitudes of society in general. Some adults permit and encourage children to date early, others don’t. Such limits are often contradicting, vague, subject to inexplicable changes. Ann is still under pressure, partly from John, partly from her own desire to go out with him, partly because she knows that she has to begin making these decisions herself, partly because she knows that if she breaks any of hundreds of covert limits that she cannot imagine, she may suffer negative consequences. Ann is also frightened about what she has heard about sex and doesn’t feel any sound and protective support being offered her—in fact, many people seem to assume the decision is an easy one. How will Ann decide?

Identity crises occur when the young person realizes that growing up means coming to grips with paradoxical injunctions offered by parental and societal authorities. On the one hand, parents expect obedience while, on the other hand, society, through teachers, peer group pressure, and its general pattern, expects the youth to become independent. Yet when

the youth makes a move that contradicts parental authority, the state is usually willing to support the parents, not the youth. Invariably, neither the societal authorities nor the parents approve of many of the desires or inclinations of the individual. The results are self-oppression, conflicts with authority figures, and concealment of illicit attitudes, feelings, or behavior. Every youth experiences identity crises, often to the point where real emotional disturbances result.

Many of the "neuroses" of adolescents are the attempts young people have made to resolve the complex situation they are in regarding maturation. They love their parents, or at least are dependent on them; this situation makes them vulnerable to demands couched in terms of rewards (for example, the use of the car and spending money). They periodically hate their parents, feeling smothered by their own dependency needs and the parents' implied willingness to respond. Youth want to become independent but are fearful of responsibility. They make "impulsive" or unconsidered actions but deny that the actions are self-directed to avoid blame. Youth want acceptance of the peer group and act according to group demands, while selecting peer groups who represent their own desires and needs.

Identity crises are further complicated by other factors. First, oppression from the child role is intense, and adolescence lends societal support, however tenuous, to breaking out of its confines. Logically the more oppressive the role, the greater the effort must be to break out, which in turn means a greater punitive and repressive reaction from family and authorities. Second, the lack of clear cut rules gives the young person some degree of choice, while the negative, extreme limits confine the choices to certain boundaries. This situation creates a desire for freedom by giving the individual a taste of it, while it is actually nothing but a more flexible version of the child role. The choice still cannot be made by the individual based on his or her feelings or on the realistic, probable outcome of the situation but is confined to the limits deter-

mined by societal authorities. However, the taste for freedom is not quenched, and young people tend to continue even prohibited behavior if they think they can get away with it. They usually can; subversion of societal authority is widespread. When it is so widespread that some young people become blatant, society "cracks down" and institutes even more repressive measures. Some young people are picked off as examples to the others. Third, identity crises are magnified by the stress authority figures use in promoting their injunctions. Fortunately, although early adolescence is a struggle, parents (at least many of them) accept the maturation process in late adolescence and let go. For those who do not, major family crises are generated. Fourth, the situation is usually a "no-win" for the youth. This can best be seen by looking at the choices open to Ann.

The most common choices girls like Ann make are: (1) She can defy parental authority, giving preference to feelings, peer group standards, and societal demands. Ann is left with guilt, shame, and probably conflicts with her parents if they discover, or she contrives to let them "discover," that she is doing what they disapprove of intensely. (2) She can avoid parental conflict by leaving home, often in a way that punishes the parents, for example, by becoming pregnant, running away from home, marrying someone to legitimize leaving, or simply avoiding home except to sleep and eat. (3) She can avoid the conflict by accepting the reason for the parents' claim to be legitimate authorities—that is, she is too immature to make decisions for herself. Her feeling of immaturity may result in the loss of self-esteem, of opportunities for participation in peer activities, and the sacrifice of her own feelings and desires. (4) She can confront her parents directly and attempt to reason with them. She is unlikely to succeed with this method, since the ground of her parents' action is fear and anxiety, and the confrontation often leads to a fight with all those involved being hurt. (5) Ann can join a deviant peer group that has a common bond, the rejection of parental authority—a counter-

dependent move, this may throw out the strengths of the relationship she has with her parents as well as the areas of conflict; she may conceal membership in a deviant group to avoid parental condemnation. (6) Ann can wait, passing the time until she is on her own, and at that point begin experimenting, exploring, and changing—a waste of time, a suppression of emotions and needs, and a poor preparation for the sudden “orgy” of freedom anticipated. (7) Ann can dissociate herself from her feelings, her parents, her society. In an extreme sense she can become schizoid. More often, girls and boys function adequately enough to avoid madness but live lives characterized by fragmentation, ritual-compulsive patterns, uncomfortable bodies (headaches, backaches, upset stomachs), preoccupations, rigidity, unsatisfaction, meaninglessness, and so on. If the crises are not resolved in childhood and youth, they often persist well into adult years, often for life.

The paradoxes thrust upon young people after they reach puberty are rarely constructive and helpful. Most youth are able to adjust to the demands well enough so that they are “let alone,” and within this tiny niche, they attempt to find a reason for life. They retreat into couples, struggling to gain a mastery over life through the possession and control of another, or into small groups, where their loneliness and impoverished lives are camouflaged. Few young people survive youth without emotional and psychic damage, without areas of experience within which they are terror stricken and helpless.

The best Ann can hope for is to be able to weigh all the alternatives open to her (surely the list is not all-inclusive) and make a choice that corresponds most closely to what she would like to do. Understanding the difference between the intrinsic risks involved in whatever she would like to do and the extrinsic risks created by the context adolescents are placed in by society would help decrease the anxiety. Supportive, noncontrolling parents appreciative of the complex process of sorting out one’s values amid the ideological confusion

and illegitimate authority characteristic of society would also help. Unfortunately, many young people simply avoid identity struggles and the necessary risk and pain involved in attempting selfhood. They allow their identities to be coopted by authority, doing whatever is expected of them in whatever situation they are in and failing to recognize contradictions of their own compliant personalities' deficiencies. Because so many young people choose this last alternative, adults—lacking personal relationships with young people where issues of development are explored openly—are too often able to persuade their children that everything is basically okay.

We are also assisted in ignoring the destructive context within which youth exist by the assumption that the degree of difficulty they experience in simply being themselves is an expression of the biological characteristics of puberty. Puberty does function as an overt sign cuing adults when to change their demands and expectations for youth, but in itself it is not necessarily a conflict-ridden phase of development. The demands of parents, societal authorities, and the tantalizing "world of adults" offer youth double-bind situations where the majority of decisions are likely to be emotionally damaging. We can now explore these decisions and the contexts more completely.

2

OPPRESSION by THE FAMILY

Our adolescents reflect the slow but ominous advance of a psychic contagion. . . . Into them we have bred our fears and insecurities, upon them we have foisted our mistakes and misconceptions. In our stead they are expressing the unrelieved rage, the constricting tension and the terrible frustration of the world they were born into.¹

Patricia is four years old. She is thin and blond with a perpetually sad expression in her eyes. She appears forlorn and delicate. She is quiet and withdrawn and stands off from adult strangers, although her attention is continually focused on them. She seems to want to be held and loved but at the same time is fearful and resists attention. Her stares are intense, even brave, as if she were daring anyone to hurt her. Patricia doesn't like to talk, and if anyone tries to talk with her, she becomes silent and tucks her head down. After a while, her mother, anxious to talk to me about her daughter, introduces her simply: "This is my daughter Patricia. There's something wrong with her."

What was wrong with Patricia? Mrs. B. was only too willing to explain what "wrong" was, and in tones of frustration,

resentment, and helplessness, she listed various faults she found with Patricia. "She still wets her pants like a baby and sulks in the corner whenever you so much as look at her. She fights with the baby and does anything else she can think of to annoy me." Mrs. B. apparently felt constrained to say *something* nice about her daughter. "She does play very quietly by herself sometimes." Patricia was, of course, taking this all in. By the expression on her face I guessed she understood most of it, certainly the fact that her mother hated her.

Several things seemed obvious. Patricia was unhappy and frightened, probably most of the time. Her mother acted as if Patricia was an enemy, *trying* to make things difficult for mom. Mrs. B. also made a clear distinction between the baby, who was two, and Patricia "acting like" a baby at four. This made it clear that the mother expected and demanded Patricia to "grow up!" (she punished Patricia's babylike behavior much of the time) and, in our terms, to change roles. This pressure was stressful to Patricia, who was literally being forced by her mother to act in ways she did not feel and accept. Mrs. B. evidently felt that good behavior was merely leaving her alone, not being a bother. Patricia was an irritant. Mrs. B. defined playing off by herself—"she has many 'imaginary' friends and seems to enjoy herself"—as healthy and desirable, while expressions of frustration and rage were "sick."

I started to explore the transitional problems of moving from being an infant and receiving considerable attention and love from the mother to being a young child and, in this case, a bother to her mother. Essentially, Patricia must have seen growing up as a forced separation from love and support and as something she didn't want. The first thing Patricia said when I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up was, "I can't grow up." Not I won't grow up, or I don't want to grow up, but I *can't* grow up. Patricia felt that something was wrong with her—one doesn't wonder where she learned that point of view—and that she couldn't grow up, quite literally: "Something is wrong with me. I can't grow up."

The formulation that seems to make sense, based on my observations of the mother with the baby (she is attentive, supportive, gentle, and mothering) and with Patricia (she doesn't look at her, talks about her as *if* she was not a real person, disparages her, and wants her to be different, alternately punishing her and rewarding her in this effort), is simple. Mrs. B. is an oppressed woman; she is a housewife with no sources of pleasure in her own life. She is deeply unfulfilled. Her only source of gratification is the fact that she is a mother. However, and this is borne out in conversation, she is a woman who is frustrated and angry—even filled with rage—but who *fears* anger, hostility, and rejection from others. Perhaps they hit a responsive chord in her own attitudes and feelings, which she represses. She continually denies wanting to spank her children and protests, "I would never hit them, no matter what." She admits, later, that she *feels* like hitting them sometimes but fears losing control and hurting them.

Her fear of rejection coupled with her rage and frustration create a need both to avoid and deny hostility while still expressing her feelings in some indirect way. She chooses to gratify her need to love and be loved with babies because they do not reject her and do not express obvious hostility at her. Patricia is frustrated also because her mother fears and rejects her. She is not allowed to express her anger and rage to her mother directly. Her mother denies that Patricia is angry: "You must be tired. Go take a nap," and she denies any reason for her own rage: "I love all my children equally." Patricia is deprived of affection and of any feeling of value at the same time—she feels worthless. Her older sister, who is six, is in school and has friends of her own age. I noticed that the older sister does whatever her mother wants her to do; hence she avoids adding to her mother's chronic frustration, but she does so at the expense of a sense of love and affirmation from her mother for the person she is behind the facade of docility and obedience.

Patricia obviously resents being replaced as the baby of the

family. She expresses this resentment by "fighting" with the two-year-old "most of the time." Her mother punishes her for this display of aggression, and if she resists, her mother punishes her even more. "What do you do when she fights with the baby," I asked. "I yell at her." "What does she do?" "She yells at me. She's quite a yeller [a note of pride in her voice]." "What happens then?" "Oh, I get really upset and send her off to her room." "What do you want her to do when she gets angry?" "Oh, what's there to be angry about?" "Do you ever get angry?" "Sure, when she does something wrong."

Unable to express resentment to the baby without being punished, Patricia tries indirect means of expressing resentment to her mother. "She wets her pants every day. She picks at the couch. She messes up the house. She is constantly asking me to do things for her. . . ." Patricia has learned that a bad girl at least *exists* for her mother, while a good girl (to her mother) is someone who manages to disappear—to go off by herself and be quiet. Struggling to be loved—more significantly to *be*—Patricia must risk punishment. Her mother, needing a "legitimate" way of expressing irritation, often uses Patricia's infantile behavior as an excuse for raging. However, she occasionally gives Patricia affection, since she would like to pacify her. Also, she wishes, in the back of her mind, that Patricia were still a baby and therefore an object of love, not an object that can reject her (and apparently does—"she deliberately does things she knows will aggravate me, particularly when I am busy with the baby").

Patricia's strategies can be outlined. First, she attempts to be a baby. This includes being *helpless* ("she can't even dress herself"), wetting her pants, being a crybaby, and so on. When being a "good" baby doesn't work, or when she is particularly frustrated, she becomes a "bad" baby. She avoids responsibility for being this way by saying she *can't* grow up. Her mother colludes with this view by saying something is *wrong* with her. Her mother also reinforces both the good and bad baby by being alternately affectionate and punitive but always

by being willing to act as if the baby were real. Second, Patricia expresses the aggression that results from her frustration at being unloved and unwanted by her mother by attacking her competitor; she attempts to repress the baby—to make him hurt, and, eventually (wishfully), to make him go away. Third, Patricia expresses rage toward her mother by frustrating her. The bad-baby act and indirect messing or destroying areas and things important to the mother are just two examples. Fourth, Patricia, it turns out, is very affectionate in a nonverbal way with her father; when he is home, he expresses affection for her. Fifth, Patricia makes up imaginary worlds and friends to compensate for her loneliness.

What can be the results of all this? Patricia may develop further the sense of herself as a “baby,” a girl-baby or Daddy’s doll, which will complicate her relationships with men and women. Under stress, despite the physiological changes age brings, Patricia might continue to act like a baby, to whine, complain, cry, or make messes of things. She will think of herself as basically a bad person and as probably crazy. She will seek to recapture the affection her father gives her through similarly seductive appeals to men. Both mother and father will continue their patterns of response to Patricia rewarding immature, childish behavior and making her associate alienation, separation, and rejection, as well as being hurtful to people you love, with independence and self-hood.

The family as a social system and social institution is invariably oppressive—oppression understood as the frustration of growth, of learning, and of development of a person’s capabilities. The family is oppressive in a variety of ways and for different reasons, but basically it must be understood that the institution of the family reflects and reinforces, through the family processes and interactions with the child, the primary processes, assumptions, values, and patterns of the established social order, including all its contradictions and weaknesses. Even the apparent refusal to socialize the child, as in the schizophrenic family, functions to preserve the stability of

the family as well as to meet the needs of one or both parents. In such a situation, the child matures physically but remains at home. Eventually, the family's craziness manifests itself in the creation of a mad child-adult. But even in the avoidance of socialization, the family institution is still oppressive. The child's self is sacrificed in the specific case for the parent, in the general for society.

In discussing the dynamics of the family—how family members influence each other—we are talking about power. Paradoxically power often rests on being helpless, dependent, submissive to authority, confused, and/or unable to be free and personally responsible for oneself. Also, power remains unequally distributed because people are fearful, alienated, and therefore unable to organize. Profit is based on people's willingness to labor at unrewarding work for small amounts of the value of their work (relative to their actual product). Furthermore, consumption patterns (for example, eating) are instilled in children as a way of overcoming emotional emptiness, loneliness, and a profound feeling of being *worthless* as an individual and unlovable. Through oppression dynamics, the family as a social institution builds into the development of the young person the basic conditions necessary for him or her to be continually oppressed and exploited by society. The only reason people do not immediately perceive the nature of their condition is because the process of oppression is aimed not only at their behavior but at their consciousness as well. Therefore, the function of the family is also to communicate the values, assumptions, and despair that dominate and shape the consciousness in such a way that few individuals want to perceive, or are actually capable of perceiving, their oppression. Finally, because people *experience* oppression, the family must invalidate emotions and perceptions or persuade the individual that the experience of oppression is actually due to something wrong with him. Since the process of conditioning an individual for society is continuous from birth, most young people come to accept oppression as a natural state.

The oppression of children is not the deliberate intention of parents; it is simply the consequence of parents' attempts to control and mold children. Most parents do this because they sincerely believe it to be in the best interest of the child. The criteria for determining what is in the best interest of children is usually what will help them adjust to society best. If society is oppressive, then oppressing the child in whatever way possible is best for the child. Once one takes into consideration another value, that is, that what is best for a child is the fullest possible realization of his or her potential and individuality, then oppression becomes a maladaptive—even a destructive—thing to do. Oppression is the opposite of individual development, but it is not at all contradictory with the demands of a society centered on the values of power and profit. "The power of the family resides in its social mediating function. It reinforces the effective power of the ruling class in any exploitative society by providing a highly controllable paradigmatic form for every social institution."²

Patricia's family situation is not atypical. Each of the basic elements necessary for Patricia to fit into her society in terms of profit and power is already evident in her upbringing. She feels helpless, dependent, worthless, alone, lonely, and is hopelessly entangled with her mother as both a person and a model for authority (an authority figure). At *four*, Patricia has learned to invalidate herself—to feel fundamentally *wrong*. She is going to need help. If she remains within socially acceptable limits, she will be ignored. If she goes beyond them, she will be punished, or at least, having internalized the limits, she will punish herself through guilt. If her behavior is intolerable, society will isolate her in a room as her mother does, and define the absence of disturbing behavior as health. In every way, Mrs. B. represents in principle her society's main values. In her behavior, she manifests the other side of the oppressive dialectic in America. Mrs. B. excuses her oppression in the name of efficiency: "I have to do my work." It doesn't matter whether Patricia's feelings are abused or her

needs ignored because it is assumed that if she behaves properly her needs will be met. "I feed her, clothe her, love her," the mother intones. Efficiency becomes a primary value in a society desiring maximum control of its people. The emphasis is on the value of labor and production, not on the individual's feelings. Mrs. B. has power, but, more important, she has authority, because she is the parent. She doesn't, and isn't expected to, question her own motivations or actions, but she is allowed to, and does, question Patricia's. The relationship is master-slave when the emphasis is on making Patricia behave according to limits and standards endemic to the society (which is represented in her mother).

The paradigm of the oppressive family can be outlined in five categories: (1) the development of fear and anxiety; (2) the inculcation of dependency on authority figures; (3) the modeling of authority for the child; (4) the transmittal of values as rules and limits—shoulds; and (5) the internalization of the model in the child's consciousness.

Development of Fear and Anxiety

The basis for oppressive control of the child within the family is *fear* and *anxiety*. "Anxiety . . . can often be explained plausibly as anticipated unfavorable appraisal of one's current activity by someone whose opinion is significant."³ Harry Stack Sullivan's formulation implies that anxiety is related to the interpersonal relationship of the child to an authority figure. It is important because it suggests that the basis for the constriction of the self, the cooperation with oppressive authority, lies in the experience of anxiety. But I am here concerned with demonstrating the debilitating and limiting effects of anxiety in the early development of the child.

Sullivan distinguishes between fear and anxiety, not on the basis of the experience itself, but on the causes of the experience. He suggests "a discrimination between two tensions: the tension of needs, which can be satisfied, and which can be

experienced as fear of a danger of the need; and the tension of anxiety, which is brought about by the interpersonal situation."⁴ Fear, then, is created by any experience that either brings about the deprivation of needs or the expectation that needs will be deprived. Anxiety is related specifically to the relationship of one self to another; hence it is grounded in the basic need of people to be confirmed and affirmed by other people, particularly by their mothers and fathers.

This distinction is very important when we realize that *the fundamental motivation for oppression is fear and the fundamental reason for cooperating with oppression is anxiety*. We attempt to control and limit other people when our needs are directly threatened or appear to be threatened imminently. Since the object of our control is anxious about being *real* and *valid*, he will attempt to defend himself against threats of punishment (pain against the body or mind) and rejection (invalidation) by submitting to the control and limits. This submission involves a sacrifice of integrity. In the family, we can see the parents sending the child off to bed as a way of meeting their need for "peace and quiet," while the child goes, anxious to avoid punishment, threats, or hostility (angry rejection). The parents aren't interested in whether the child needs the sleep in this particular situation, although they may justify their rule by saying "children need to sleep eight hours." The child is going because of anxiety—to reduce the stress created by the possibility of punishment and rejection—not because he wants to go to sleep or because he needs sleep at that moment. The pattern is simple: the way to avoid anxiety is to obey authority. The way to avoid deprivation is to try to control a situation. To some extent this pattern works. The child gets sleep, the parents privacy, solitude, and peace and quiet, but at the expense of psychic damage to the child.

"Anxiety," Sullivan writes, "relates to the whole field of interpersonal interactions; that is, anxiety about *anything* in the mother induces anxiety in the infant."⁵ The child is capable of sensing anxiety in others, and the perception creates anxiety

in the child. The process may be generalized to include the fact that any strong feeling in one person is communicated to other people. Sullivan talks about this communication process. "*The tension of anxiety, when present in the mothering one, induces anxiety in the infant . . . a manifestation of an indefinite . . . interpersonal process to which I apply the term empathy.*"⁶ People communicate feelings to one another by recreating these feelings in other people. A depressed person induces people around him to feel anger and frustration; a lonely person makes other people feel lonely. The feeling is not created through the situation, but through empathy with others.

There are two significant intrapsychic processes that Sullivan suggests develop from the experience of anxiety: the fragmentation of the individual and the development of a system of learned defensive patterns. For an infant, survival necessitates the socialization process. People must interact with the child, not only in providing for physical needs, but in providing for psychic needs as well, or the infant will not develop properly. The infant is exposed, through these interactions, to three experiences: reward, increasing anxiety, or sudden severe anxiety. "*Good-me* is the beginning personification which organizes experience in which satisfactions have been enhanced by rewarding increments of tenderness, which come to the infant because the mothering one is pleased with the way things are going."⁷ The *good-me* continues to be the social persona, the line people offer to others, and the way the youth wants to be seen and wants to see himself. As the anxiety increases in any situation, the individual comes face to face with his negative side, "made up of poorly grasped aspects of living which will presently be regarded as 'dreadful,' and which still later will be differentiated into incidents which are attended by awe, horror, loathing, or dread."⁸ The *bad-me* is still within the individual's awareness, however much it is suppressed. The *not-me* are those facets of the personality that have been totally "forgotten" or repressed.

The consciousness is imprinted with basic assumptions about one's self and one's relationship with others that affect one's entire life. Each situation that creates anxiety will also touch upon the anxiety associated with the fragments of the personality Sullivan refers to as the bad-me and the not-me. This double anxiety increases the individual's fragmentation at the same time as it makes him so disorganized that he cannot integrate the experience. Learning stops. Growth is frustrated. The reality is misperceived, distorted to conform to the basic pattern of consciousness developed by the youth in infancy. The oppression of children leaves young people both totally unprepared for the demands of parental and societal authorities to become independent and submissive and compliant to the control of authority.

The higher the anxiety, the more likely the individual child will learn to simply *deny* or *repress* feelings, attitudes, and experiences. "Unless confronted by evidence produced by their children, parents often exert an unconscious pressure, requesting urgently that the child either forget or not understand what he has been exposed to, so that the image of themselves as free of sexual and aggressive transgressions is maintained."⁹ This is too limited a formulation. Parents terrorize children in the areas of sexuality and aggression in order to ensure that they "forget" (repress) or mystify both kinds of impulse. The use of the not-me response is deliberate, even though the parents avoid focusing on, articulating, or admitting to anyone—including themselves—the oppressive nature of their relationship to the child or youth.

The second phenomenon resulting from anxiety is the creation of the "self-system"; Sullivan uses this phrase to explain the ability of children to create an entire gestalt pattern out of fear and anxiety, superimpose this pattern onto their consciousness, restrict and distort their awareness, and thereby find some relief from fear, or anxiety, or both. The oppression gestalt is in many ways a similar formulation, although a dialectical one, whereas as Sullivan's pattern is simply one of cause and

effect. However it is only a development of the interpersonal nature of the self-system to (I believe) its logical conclusion.

[The *self-system*] . . . is purely the product of interpersonal experience arising from anxiety. . . . an organization of educative experience called into being by the necessity to avoid or to minimize incidents of anxiety. . . . its goal, the securing of necessary satisfaction. . . . Anxiety is also a very conspicuous aspect of the self-dynamism *function*. . . . Experience functions in both recall and foresight. Since troublesome experience, organized in the self-system, has been experience connected with increasing grades of anxiety, it is not astounding that this element of recall, functioning on a broad scale, makes the intervention of the self-dynamism in living tantamount to the warning, or foresight, of anxiety. . . . really a warning anxiety will get worse.¹⁰

Three points are of interest here. First of all, Sullivan's formulations are not political, although the interpersonal aspect *implies* that the concerns are political. *Political* is used in the broad sense of word, referring to the fact that the operations of self-systems are in principle the same operations used as methods or tactics by the state. The development of a particular kind of self-system, for example, oppression, is the learning in childhood of the basic tactics and maneuvers used by people with power to control others. Young people, having learned these behavior patterns, find nothing "wrong" in them being used by others—in principle. Only absolutely unforgivable results or effects, not the principles involved, are considered to be a cause for criticizing governments for their extremes—actions.

Second, the self-system restricts awareness. The individual develops what Sullivan calls "selective inattention" and filters out any information that does not confirm what he already believes to be true. The defensive, compulsive, and ritualistic aspects of the self-system are self-perpetuating and limit learning. The tendency is for the individual, particularly in high-stress situations, to rely on habit, to regress or fall back upon the earliest, simplest defenses: denial, projection (paranoia), and withdrawal into infantile behavior modalities.

Third, the self-system uses history, the previous experiences with anxiety, as defenses. The self perceives a new situation in terms of older ones, however distorted this perception may be. The misperception itself generates anxiety, and so it acts to keep young people out of new situations. The more anxiety is associated with particular situations, the less they can involve themselves in the experience. If they are not able, or willing, to avoid the experience outright—because of needs—they distort, minimize, and reduce their experience and their awareness of the experience.

Anxiety is related to *anticipated* rejection or to loss or catastrophe. Therefore, parents can increase a child's associative fears to areas such as sexuality by acting as if this area didn't exist. The child is left without specific prohibitions, but with a general apprehension toward sex. The closer he is to sexual experiences, the higher the anxiety. If the anxiety is so high that the individual can't experience sex except as the bad-me, that is, with guilt and shame, or even if it is so high that the person must avoid and deny sexual feelings, the results later in life will be emotionally disturbing.

In terms of intrapsychic development, the family leads to the development of a child whose consciousness and personality reflect the anxiety of the times as it is reflected in the parents, which in turn leads to the development of defensive tactics and maneuvers. These political behavior patterns, for *both* parents and children, reflect for the most part the dominant behavior patterns of the political relationships in the society. For example, oppression is the reliance on power for control and the means of inducing conformity to limits and standards that the parent has decided are important. This is similar to the reliance of government on power to control and impose limits on individuals in the society. The parent is an authority figure as is a judge, for example, but in a microcosmic institution, not a social system. The extent and degree of parental power, however, is considerably greater than the judge's, when the relative sizes of the institutions are taken into account. Chil-

dren use whatever means they have available to them to cope with parental authority. They may turn to another parent in a crude effort to balance parental influence or to outside authority as support, advocate, or jury. Children may withdraw and become apathetic, or they may become rebellious and outspoken. The significant variable is not the intentions or humanity of the authority figure, but the *degree of anxiety* prevalent in the family. The more anxious the family, the more oppressive and oppressed it becomes.

Fear and anxiety leave a person feeling helpless and alone. This aloneness has a particular characteristic; it is the result of alienation from others, not of free choice. Therefore, the individual is *lonely*.

The family form of social existence that characterizes all our institutions essentially destroys autonomous initiative by its defining nonrecognition of what I have called the proper dialectic of solitude and being with other people. The family, over the last two centuries, has mediated an invasiveness into the lives of individuals that is essential to the continued operating of imperializing capitalism. The family, definitionally, can never leave one alone, as it is the hypostasization of the ultimately perfected mass medium.¹¹

The choice to be alone is prohibited and precluded. Yet the individual is never *with* people, but is confined to the role of child. This role only brings him or her into contact with other people in roles. Contact with other people becomes synonymous with conflict and tension, or emotional distance. One learns to remain in this role. This situation extends itself to other fears—of not having a “girlfriend,” for example; the absence of a girlfriend leaves the person without a counterpart role to define and fulfill his manhood (an attribute of the role “man”). To want to be a man becomes a desire to fulfill the sex role “man” or to be left without reference points. The family’s substitution of *role* for *real* is devastating.

One’s self is never valid without a confirming complemen-

tary role. In other words, to be a “man” requires “having” a woman. To be loved requires a lover. To be a valid person becomes synonymous with having roles, and these roles always require another person’s cooperation. The basic dilemma is always the same. The more the sense of self is defined and confirmed through the complementary role, the less a person can be alone—the more one needs to be *with others in role*. This leads to a compulsive search for roles or, more precisely, for role relationships for one’s sense of identity and worth. We relate to others through a single paradigm, however, developed within the family. The parents create a viable and meaningful role for the child by acting as parents. Parents act as parents when they do what is expected of parents: take care of and *protect* the young. If this taking care of and protecting is confused with molding and dominating—a common confusion—the parent role becomes largely regulatory.

The child, meanwhile, is compelled to act like a child to be valid and to have a meaningful role in the family. To break role leads to being invalid and to a sense of anomie—to terror, aloneness, and alienation. The paradigm is one of *power*—the ability to control others or to impose limits on their behavior—and the relationship is therefore oppressive. In all future complementary role relationships, there is a search for a master-slave, oppressor-oppressed situation. It becomes normal to possess someone: *my child, my wife, my man*, and so on. It becomes normal to act in terms of pairs. *We’re going to the movies, we think that this is so, we like to do that*. It becomes normal to live life as a series of scripts, to play various roles, to play games in role relationships. It becomes normal to be defined in terms of stereotypes (“The marines will make a man out of you”). It becomes normal to use metonymy as a major figure of speech to describe people (“He’s an asshole. She’s frigid”), in other words, to let objects or parts that are meaningful only in their belonging to wholes be considered representative of the whole. We think of each other in terms of fragments. We objectify each other.

Dependency

The creation of anxiety and fear leads directly to states of helplessness. The individual is fragmented, defensive, and only narrowly aware of the world. People are perceived as objects or in terms of their ability or inability to play games. Time becomes an enemy, requiring diversions and activity lest the person have "nothing" to do and hence *nothing to be*. Each of the consequences of fear (which is itself primarily the reliance on power as a means of defense)—control, the imposition of limits or defenses on others and on anxiety-provoking situations—supports the established social order's fundamental purpose: survival. This survival is predicated on the lack of change; it means that people are not allowed to develop to their fullest potential. Development must be curtailed or channeled into acceptable patterns. One pattern is *dependency*; this state is grounded in fear, in anxiety, and in its resulting sense of paralysis—the sense of not being able to do anything, of helplessness.

The infant's objective dependence on parental, especially maternal, care promotes a dependent attitude toward reality and inculcates a passive (dependent) need to be loved, which colors all subsequent interpersonal relationships. This psychological vulnerability is subsequently exploited to extract submission to social authority and to the reality-principle in general.¹²

Cathy is twenty-one. She is still living at home. She is of medium build and height. The lack of expression on her face leaves her looking dull and uninteresting—in short, unattractive. On the other hand, she is neat and clean and dresses nicely, usually in browns and dark colors. She is dependent on her parents: "I don't know what to do without them telling me." She managed to attend college but only on the condition that she not leave home.

Her father controls her by handling the money and the car. "He never gives me enough to really get anything or do anything, just get a snack now and then or go to a movie." "Do

you resent that?" "No, why should he give me anything?" "Have you thought of getting a job?" "Yes, but my father won't let me. He says I have enough to do with studying, that that's my job." "Do you get paid for studying?" "No." "Then your father is preventing you from earning your own money while not letting you have enough money?" "He never lets me have any money without an explanation of what I am going to do with it. I wanted to get some clothes, but he said what I had was good enough." "Don't you want to get on your own?" "I can't." "Why not?" "My father says I am the most important thing in the world to him. . . ." "And?" "Once we had a fight, and he had a heart attack." "Then you think your leaving home will kill him?" "Yes. He'd be angry and have a stroke." "Do you go out much?" "When Daddy lets me use the car I go out." "Does he have to approve where you go?" "Yes, and who I see, and when I come back, and what I do there."

Cathy's mother is no better. She controls Cathy through remarks like "Don't ever leave home, it would break your father's heart. . . . It might even . . . God forbid . . . kill him." The most insidious effort is directed toward the eventual demise of the father, someday. Cathy's mother is gradually persuading her that her father is so upset with Cathy doing this or that "that I'm afraid . . . something will happen to him." She goes further, "I don't know what I'd do without the two of you. Promise me that whatever happens you'll love me and never leave me alone."

The inculcation of fear, the control of resources, and the association of any independent act with a deliberate attempt to hurt, perhaps kill, both parents may sound exceptional. It isn't too far removed from many dependent relationships in families. What is unusual is the attempt to base the "hurt" in a physically real sense rather than in purely psychic pain. More often parents personalize the struggle of children to become independent as a deliberate attempt to hurt the parent personally. Dependency leaves children devastated. They *experience* themselves as helpless and *perceive* themselves as destructive

to others if they begin seeking independence. A young woman I know is trying to grow within her marriage. The husband is responding with the message that he is being hurt, and her parents are also stating that she is being destructive *to them* because they care so much for her happiness. Obviously, "her happiness" is actually a stable and orthodox marriage rather than what is, in her mind, a necessary experimentation with herself and relationships with other people. This pressure is based, as with Cathy, on the assumption that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between independent acts and the hurt other people feel, when in fact the hurt is caused by the other people associating independent acts with loss—a loss of control over a possession that is "theirs."

Dependency is the assumption that if you behave according to the expectations of another person, this other person will respond by meeting your needs. The "good behavior" is itself a defense against anxiety (rejection), while the deprivation, or possibility of deprivation, of needs creates fear. It is a relationship to authority based on the mystique of authority figures. The fantasy wish that authority be all-powerful and the infant's experience that the authority is all power lend itself to the dependency assumption. But dependency would eventually be extinguished if authority figures didn't attempt to use whatever resources they control to imply they are indeed capable of meeting the individual's needs, providing he does what is demanded of him. Furthermore, parents deprive young people of the opportunity to mature either by pressuring them to assume too much responsibility and make too many gains or by pressuring them with limits to restrict their activities to well beneath their capabilities (Patricia and Cathy, for example, are both pressured to act as if they are infantile by the limits established by their parents). Every time a parent stops a child from doing something because she is "too young" or "not ready," the parent is frustrating the child's effort to mature.

Perls's formulation of the process (he seemed to speak in epigrams) is "maturing is the transcendence from environmen-

tal support to self-support."¹³ Parents, and other people with an investment in maintaining power or making profits, keep on frustrating needs, implying they can meet those needs, and then establishing the rules for "good behavior"—which boil down to buy this, do this, and don't do that. Then, when the needs are partially met, they offer more rules. Consumption, like eating, never satisfies completely for very long. Dependency and its passive-consuming function, unlike eating (which provides a source of energy), diminish energy and contribute to ever-increasing interest in doing less and less. That is why young people are inclined to spend more time watching television than they spend in school. That is why they hold transistor radios to their ears, blotting out consciousness with loud music. That is why millions of dollars are spent by young people on clothes, candy, soda, juke boxes, cosmetics, and so on. Dependency requires consumption since it implies that fulfillment comes through the *other*, not through the self. Eat, listen to experts, buy, memorize, behave—all are injunctions to let the environment support the individual. Dependency results in unending consumption: nothing is ever assimilated, nothing is created, there is no creativity. Dependency as a technique for oppressing young people, that is, for controlling them and for inducing them to accept—indeed, *need*—the limits authority provides as the path for satisfaction, is a vicious, self-perpetuating, debilitating strategy.

Dependency creates a sense of helplessness. It leads the individual to learn the required patterns of behavior to survive and to diminish fear and anxiety. At the same time, one's own feelings and desires must be suppressed. They cannot be trusted, since they often do not coincide with the demands of either parental or societal authorities. The individual doubts himself and eventually associates his fear and anxiety with the bad-me. Cooper writes:

This destruction of doubt sensation and of the experience of living in one's body originates in the need for *human grouping*, which is developed first of all in the family. One of the first

lessons one is taught in the course of one's family conditioning is that one is not enough to exist in the world on one's own. . . . This is alienation, in the sense of a passive submission to invasion by others, originally the family others.¹⁴

The Patterns of Authority

Parents are the basic model for authority. The child is totally dependent on them in infancy, and as the child matures, he is forced to maintain this dependency by law, by the economic policies of the society, and by social pressures through early adolescence. Because of this, a mystique of power develops, often carried over to other authority figures. The "benevolence" of the way parental authority is presented ("We do this because we love you") and the highly restricted experience and awareness of a youth within the family, create attitudes toward authority that are usually unrealistic and naïve. Furthermore, the mystique justifies cruel attitudes toward deviants; the child identifies the deviant as totally bad because his authority figure is totally good. Parents can do no wrong. Good and bad tend to be seen in absolute terms. You simply don't do what you are not supposed to do, or you *should* be severely punished for your own good. This is what many parents teach by example and strategy, and this is what young people learn—a pervasive authoritarian bias affecting their attitudes toward all aspects of social life.

The fact is that the family creates authoritarian-minded children through the concentration of authority and power in two, usually benevolent people who are simply, and absolutely, the last word. Young people are systematically indoctrinated in the good-me bad-me split from infancy. This dualistic moral fragmentation of the self is their most significant means of surviving in a situation where they are completely dependent on their parents. Parents' whims become incredibly significant threats, and the child must adapt defensively to whatever neurotic or oppressive strategies the parents use to control

them and to "bring them up properly." Young people assume that the way they are treated is right. They do not conceive of their parents as "bad"—only themselves. Children are simply stopped, abruptly, often without explanation: "just because . . ." So they assume that "criminals" or "bad" children should be stopped, constrained, and severely punished—the way most kids feel they would be if they were "really" bad.

Recently, a neighbor mentioned that each of his kids had been taught to avoid the water when they are alone—a reasonable precaution since they are all under eight. He wanted to tell me how he taught them. He called them over and asked, "What happens if you go near the water?" Each of the kids responded, "We get belted right in the mouth." They smiled and giggled, but the message was clear to them. Their father, who is a nice man, would only threaten physical assault if he meant what he said, which he obviously did. On a fantasy level, these kids might very easily assume that anyone who did something wrong should get belted. In practice, parents usually evidence so much concern when they actually do spank the child that it is clear that they are doing it from love, not hate. But in the minds of the young people, this distinction is absurd. Of course, they punish cruelly because the person did something wrong, not because of hatred or whatever. Of course, the person deserved to be severely punished.

"What accounts for the authoritarian animus among the young? They are, to begin with, preoccupied by human wickedness. They see men as tending naturally toward the impulsive and the anarchic."¹⁵ But of course. How do adults see children? As impulsive and needing to be controlled. What makes better sense than for young people to assume everyone is this way? The preoccupation is not due to any inherent attractiveness in evil, although this is present, but due to the fact that unless children make sure they know the distinction between good, bad, and totally unacceptable, their very survival is in jeopardy. This may sound like an extreme statement, but young people experience fear and anxiety as if their survival were *in*

fact jeopardized. They do not know that if they did continue to behave badly, even atrociously, they would probably not be killed. But the pressure and stress and the punishment would be continually escalated in an effort to force them to conform.

"A second source [of authoritarian attitudes] . . . is an ingenious belief in the goodness and justice of authority. The young adolescent will not spontaneously imagine that authority might be capricious, arbitrary, or mistaken."¹⁶ Again, the image of the parents' benevolence is deliberately fostered to convince the child (and the parents convince themselves) that the fact that they are terrifying her through threats, hurting her through physical punishment, rejecting her through isolation, depriving her through withholding, and confining her to her room as if she were a prisoner, is all, finally, for the child's own protection and benefit. Young people need to believe this to be able to survive the terror. They need the security of knowing that the punishment is related to bad (dangerous) behavior on their part, but they often assume that it is directed to them simply as *people*. They defend themselves by repressing the bad-me, unfortunately repressing their individuality and freedom as well.

"Another source of authoritarian attitude is the child's inability to grasp the idea of rights. It is too abstract, too evanescent a notion for the young adolescent fully to understand. It is only in the middle and, often, the later years of adolescence that the concepts of individual (and minority) rights are firmly entrenched."¹⁷ This statement again affirms the likelihood that young people's political beliefs reflect their upbringing. What rights does a preadolescent have? How can he develop a sense of "rights" when he has no rights to base the abstraction on. The experience of young people is that they are at the mercy of their parents. This may or may not be based on firm, clear agreements. Usually it is, since the family seeks a homeostasis, a tensionless environment, as do most bureaucracies (the family is the paradigm, and its actions are influenced through the involvement of the parents in society). The parents come

home so drained or the boredom and ritual of housework so depletes their energy that they seek peace and quiet: *order*. But in broken homes, or when the family is in continual conflict, limits may be arbitrary and thus may create considerable stress. Regardless, in neither case does the infant or child have "rights." Whatever the parents say, goes, or the child must conceal, deny, or risk punishment and rejection.

Finally, the child's authoritarianism can be seen to stem from a certain conservatism of mind, which leads him to view values and institutions as fixed and immutable. He does not readily imagine those processes of change, planned and unplanned, which characterize social and political phenomena. . . . Perhaps the clearest expression of this disposition is to be seen in the moral absolutism we mentioned earlier.¹⁸

The institution of the family is essentially conservative, even reactionary. It is a withdrawal from interpersonal relationships and activities, a retreat, a private corner of the world where even the most deprived and weakest of people can exercise some power, express some frustrations, and escape from some tensions and pressures. The family is an escape from reality; it is isolationism. The ideal family has its "own" home rather than an apartment, which has "too many" people around. It has a "private garage" and is located in the suburbs, where each house is separated by some ground (the more the better) from other families. Children are expected to believe that the nuclear family is self-sufficient. It's true, parents have jobs (even if Mom's is as a house servant), and the kids have school and neighborhood friends. But the family symbolizes the center, the source, the "home." For most children, the family is the major constant in life. The world is viewed through the restrictive awareness of the parents' *Weltanschauung*: parents control and limit the child's experience to what *they* consider appropriate.

Of course, one may find that his or her family life is not an unpleasant experience. Individuals within a family may be quite pleasant, supportive, and unoppressive. They may define

their activities in the role of parent, child, or relative as clearly as possible and make minimal demands on each other beyond what are really necessary for mutual coexistence. Limits are necessary, of course; but beyond certain explicit and entirely appropriate limits that everyone in the family complies with to be safe or that are especially appropriate for specified periods in any person's life (don't play with matches), limits are negotiated. Parents accept the boundaries of their children and expect respect for their own, and they do not enforce limits with humiliating, painful, or terrorizing tactics. The child learns the critical difference between limits that are part of the social contract necessary for people living together and limits that are one-sided expressions of an authority's subjective needs (regardless of intentions) and that are forced upon him by the unequal distribution of power within the family. It is also possible that one remembers the family as positive because he or she has forgotten what were probably subtle manipulations to begin with, and because he or she has repressed enough of his or her self in childhood never to know that anything was missing.

The Transmission of Values

Parents transmit their *Weltanschauung* through various means; these include gestures, attitudes, words, how they structure the home environment, and the limits placed on the child. But more important, in areas where parents want to insure that the child learns what to do and what not to do, what to believe and what not to believe, what to feel and what not to feel, they inculcate rules (moral imperatives: oughts and shoulds, ought nots and should nots). The simple rule is given the child: for example, don't let people touch you *there*, or don't use drugs, don't smoke, don't drink, etc. Then a punishment is added, an "or else." The punishment may be actual or implied through threats. Since threats, particularly threats in which the parent emphatically communicates intense fear,

create anxiety, the rules carry fear (associated anxiety). If the child so much as begins to think about doing something prohibited, he will experience anxiety.

Parents also communicate—and this is truly significant—*meta-rules*. These are rules about how to deal with rules. For example, a common meta-rule is that the child should want to do what he should do, because it is good for him. Even if the child's feelings run toward violating a rule, he will want to believe that his authentic feelings are in favor of the rule. This leads to the apparent contradiction of someone doing something that violates a rule and then claiming he didn't want to do it. By attributing the "cause" to external forces ("They made me do it") or to internal but greater forces ("I don't know what made me do it" or "I couldn't stop myself"), the child avoids personal responsibility, hence, he obeys both his desires—to do whatever was against the rule without feeling guilty and without violating the meta-rule. He wanted to do what was right, but he couldn't.

Other meta-rules include: (1) Choose the alternative or rule that promises the greatest satisfaction along with the maximum protection against anxiety. Lisa, a ten-year-old girl, was being felt up under her skirt by a friend of hers, a ten-year-old boy. Her mother discovered them and communicated verbally, and empathetically, that she did not want Lisa to do that anymore. She must tell her friend not to touch her. Lisa liked the feelings created by the situation and wanted to enjoy herself. A general injunction covering such experiences was "Go out and enjoy yourself." But it didn't promise any protection, evidently, from her mother's fury and fear. So, despite the loss of satisfaction, Lisa stopped her friend from touching her. (Actually, she let him touch her constantly, but she always stopped him fairly quickly. She was following the injunction *stop him*, but she was timing the stop to allow him some pleasure, and herself some too.) (2) Use the ambiguity of the rule to allow yourself the greatest pleasure with the maximum safety. (3) Interpret any statement as a rule if the parent appears to be either

undependable (varying in anxiety and fear level and, hence, likely to be arbitrarily strict and lenient) or extremely upset. If in doubt, interpret everything literally. Figurative interpretations are too ambiguous to be safe.

Behavior that is contradictory on one level becomes merely paradoxical when the meta-rule is exposed. Why should anyone do something he doesn't want to? This is an apparent contradiction. It is safe and useful to assume that people always do what they want most, modified by efforts to preserve their safety; or simply, given alternatives, the individual always does what he wants. However, to avoid punishment and minimize anxiety, the individual will create a paradoxical solution such as the following: I will do what I want to do, but I will deny that I want to do it. This will allow me to avoid responsibility and, therefore, blame and guilt. I will do what I want, but I will make it appear to be something that it is not, I will do what I want, but I will act as if I am not doing it. I will do what I want and claim that it is what I was told to do or not do. The various arrangements between rules and meta-rules are interesting, and they expose the fact that human behavior appears contradictory only when the dialectic between the rules and the rules about rules is not taken into consideration. Then it becomes paradoxical but clear, even humorous.

The attempt to impose recipes for living on the child is an impossible task. When one looks at the magnitude of the problems we have in racism, ecology, nuclear armaments, the population crisis, and the decline of the city, one can see that it is arrogant for contemporary society to assume that it knows what is necessary for happy, meaningful, and viable lifestyles. The cities present young people literally with a problem of survival, particularly since they are often, together with blacks and the elderly, the only ones out on the streets. What do middle-class Americans, raised in affluent and protective environments know about getting ripped off, drugs, prostitution of teenagers, sexual promiscuity, and poverty? Who can claim that they know what children will need to know to survive in

America? We all know what we believe they *should* know but not what they really need to know. Furthermore, the exploration of inner space, although off to a bad start, has really just begun. Who knows what the expanded consciousness will be like, or what it will be capable of feeling or believing? Parents are not prepared to tell their children what they should or should not be. Children are under enough oppressive pressures from society as it is without their families to contend with leading the way with a consistent moral indoctrination from infancy, no matter how subtle and manipulative the "persuasion" techniques. The "liberal" parents are, for example, the most manipulative, since they define freedom as something they give to their children. They control the *context* rather than the *content*.

Internalization

Taking the patterns of oppression and the tactics of the oppressive parent and the oppressed child—the inculcation of dependency; the use of fear and anxiety to control the child and create a basically oppressed personality, fragmented and lonely; the basic authority paradigm; the indoctrination of the child in social values, parental neurosis, and frames of reference (meta-rules); and the constriction of the self and the repression of awareness and emotions—as a complex *family pattern*, it is a startling thing to realize that the entire pattern is *internalized* by the child and constitutes the larger part of the child's consciousness throughout life. In this larger sense, the entire pattern of the family, including each of the factors I have outlined, exists within the mind of every child.

The *family as a system* is internalized. Relations and operations between elements and sets of elements are internalized, not elements in isolation. Elements may be persons, things, or part-objects. Parents are internalized as close or apart, together or separate, near or distant, loving, fighting, etc., each other and self. Mother and father may be merged as a sort of fused parental matrix, or be broken down into segments that transect the usual

personal partitions. Their sexual relation as envisaged by the child holds a sort of nuclear position in every internal "family." . . . Members of the family may feel more or less in or out of any part or whole of the family, according as they feel themselves to have the family inside themselves and to be the set of relations characterizing the internal family of other members of the family.¹⁹

The internalized family persists into adulthood, dominating the real situation the individual is in. Experience is distorted and interpreted in terms of the family paradigm. In large corporations, for example, there is the "home office," and in schools, there are "home rooms." Authority figures are often "paternalistic" or "matronly." In such a way, language and colloquialisms reflect the persistence of the family model. But in a more chronic way, we are afflicted with parent imagoes and child imagoes. Our behavior follows "infantile" or "adolescent" modalities long after these roles have been exchanged for others. Critical conflicts in marriages and personal growth experiences are the result of unresolved conflicts of the primary "family," particularly of the parents of the individuals in the personal growth or marriage situation.

Mark and Linda came in for counseling. They were having difficulties in their marriage. Essentially, Linda had had a sexual relationship with someone else (so had Mark), and Mark was unwilling and unable to stop punishing her for the incident, which occurred during a brief separation. They had come back together, and now Mark's jealousy was making reconciliation impossible. They had been married almost ten years but were in their early thirties. A brief history shed light on the conflict and gave both of them insight into the ritualistic patterns they were compulsively locked into.

Linda discovered, after several years, that her father's death was a suicide, a fact her mother had kept from her (although not from Mark). Mark, assuming Linda also knew, had never mentioned it. The revelation of the fact that her father had committed suicide and that her mother had kept the truth from her but had shared it with Mark led Linda to realize what she

had always experienced but had failed to cope with directly: the estrangement between her mother and herself. Since she had always been close to her father, she realized how alienated he was, measuring his importance to his wife in terms of his property. Linda was suddenly afraid that her relationship with Mark was also devoid of real content and, instead, was based on a central concern of both of them, their own business. She separated from Mark to "test out" how she felt about him and, more important, how he felt about her. This separation was also motivated, and supported, by Linda's awareness of her oppressed status as a woman. However, it was her father's suicide that led Linda to enter therapy in the first place. In other words, Linda's problems stemmed from unresolved conflicts with her parents.

On a symbolic level, Linda was trying to get Mark to "kill" her off through his anger. In this way, she would be able to "undo" her father's solution to his dilemma and go beyond suicide to a healthier resolution. Mark was also living through his own family history. Brought up by strict parents who had totally oppressed him, making him their object, he had learned a way of living that demanded he possess his loved object. Mark knew better, but his awareness and his feelings both seemed to make no dent in his defensive-offensive behavior toward Linda. He continued to penalize her in every way for "hurting him," including having her repeat in minute detail every moment of her affair. He wanted to understand and assimilate what had happened but was unable to do so. His belief, which his parents had conditioned him to react in terms of, was that to be truly loved one had to be entirely and exclusively the loved one's possession. This was true for Linda, however untrue it was for him. He *knew* he loved Linda. What he couldn't and wasn't prepared really to believe was that Linda could love him even if, *especially if*, she was free of his domination and control. Without the need to be dependent on him, Linda could freely affirm her love, which was quite deep and genuine.

To realize and accept their mutual love was the first step toward making growth possible. For over a year before coming into counseling, they had struggled through the acting out of the complex family patterns with which neither had fully coped previously but had only acted in terms of without reflection. This amounted to a joyless, alienated, sexually distorted relationship (he merely masturbated in the act of lovemaking; she submitted without experiencing any orgasms). Without her finding out about her father, the "precipitating crisis," both would have continued their lives as *rituals* without meaning or joy. Many people, anxious and fearful of freedom and responsibility, conditioned from childhood to the dynamics and dialectics of relationships based on power and powerlessness, profit and consumption, and issues and modalities, cling to conventional patterns. Love is seen as an exclusive, possessive, dependent relationship, marriage as a socially sanctioned moral contract with legal referents, the nuclear family as an institution whose sole purpose is raising children to fit into the established social order. Manhood is seen as an expression of aggression and dominance, womanhood as an expression of passivity and subjection to powerful men through oppressed, second-class roles. What happens to the authentic feelings and desires of the human beings who have turned into mechanical conformists pretending to be brave while living in terror, pretending to be safe and secure while living in the most dangerous and violent era in history, pretending to be loving while investing everything in power and dominance over the weak and helpless? "If our wishes, feelings, desires, hopes, fears, perceptions, imaginations, memory, dreams . . . do not correspond to the law, they are outlawed, and excommunicated. Outlawed and excommunicated they do not cease to exist."²⁰

Power and Profit

American society is emotionally, psychically, and spiritually impoverished. The potentials of childhood are frustrated, and

the capacities of youth are restricted to patterns that reflect the ideology of the society. To understand these values we must understand the twin goals of upper-class America, power and profit, and we must also understand how these goals are furthered by the oppression of youth by the family and, in fact, determine that the family will be oppressive.

Power is based on the dialectical relationship between a master and a slave. This relationship is predicated on the supposition that the person in the slave role will experience himself as weak, helpless, and in need of the limits and power of the master. Young people are always powerless, because of their age and size, their lack of civil rights, the fact that they have little or no independent access to resources, and the legal and social authority given to parents to ensure that they have the power and legitimacy necessary to control children. Controlling children and imposing limits on them is done in private and, therefore, except in unusual circumstances, without criticism.

Within the family the child has three major tasks, for which she receives no rewards, except, perhaps, a feeling of a job well done—which it usually isn't! (1) to fulfill the needs of the parents by growing up adjusted to her society in a way that is considered successful, by growing up to be happy (most parents genuinely want their children to be happy; but they think that only they know what is necessary for the child to be happy, for instance, the successful completion of school), by expressing the unfulfilled needs of the parents—that is, by being extensions of the parents in achieving what they could not, by being a "good" child they can be "proud" of to fulfill the parents' roles as parents; (2) to become socialized according to the primary needs of the established social order; (3) to be "normal" and, therefore, to progress from the role of a baby, to the role of a child, to the role of a teen-ager or adolescent, to the role of a "young" adult, to the role of an "adult" in sequence according to the cues of the societal and

familial authorities and within the limits established by these authorities.

The child is controlled and limited, shaped and conditioned, with these goals in mind. Each is predicated on the false assumption that adults always know what is best for children and must indeed protect children from the consequences of their own emotions. Fragmentation of the personality, the inculcation of anxiety, and the resulting helplessness leave youth vulnerable. The alienation and loneliness created by the fragmentation, the sense of worthlessness created by the rejection of the individual as a *whole*, and the inculcation of dependency condition the child to authority patterns that are fundamentally conservative and reactionary. All this serves to facilitate; indeed necessitate, young people's reliance on power throughout their lives. For most, since real power is denied, the reliance is on the illusion of power (people with no power tend to take it from weaker people by dominating them, just as mothers without really meaningful responsibility tend to take responsibility from their children and assume this responsibility for their children's lives). The illusion of power conceals, in part, the actual powerlessness of most people in our society as a social fact and as a psychic experience. Americans, by and large, are oppressed.

Children are brought up in the family to fear instability and change. Many desire order, and, even more, they desire structure. Most people become literally insane in unstructured, leaderless groups, in which no one creates order and structure for them. Structure (limits, organization, programs, processes, rules) protects the individual from the terror and anxiety many of us continually experience without being able or willing to focus our awareness upon it. Unstructured groups lead people to realize how dependent we are on external organization, which is so omnipresent that it is easily overlooked and dismissed.

Profit requires people, many people, to spend money to

consume products that cost far less than they sell for. No one can *work* at a job long enough to accumulate several hundred million dollars, or even tens of millions. He must *control* the resources, the production, and sales of the products. Wealth and power go hand in hand. The society needs to perpetuate consumption of relatively inexpensive, profitable items—preferably items that quickly lose their value or need to be replaced periodically. The family raises consumers. The fragmentation of the self that the family produces, the division between the me and the not-me particularly, is a good example of how this happens. The person's sense of being whole, complete, real, and ontologically valid is diminished, in fact, by definition, and in terms of the experience of the self, ended. The fragmentation of the self necessarily leads to feelings of being incomplete and emotionally repressed (depressed, empty, emotionally dead, apathetic, bored, without energy); products aimed at making a person come alive, feel energetic, and "be more of a person" are therefore appealing and desirable. Furthermore, the fragmentation is the result of *anxiety*, which is created by rejection or the fear of rejection. Products that appeal to anxiety, such as insurance, mild drugs like cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana, and escapist (entertainment) media, like television, movies, and the popular-music industry are immensely and, unfortunately, chronically popular.

The fear of rejection is immense, particularly for young people whose experience as children leads them to fear, rightfully, not being acceptable and attractive to their peers. Young people are taught to experience themselves emotionally, passionately, and impulsively, as ugly people. They have been taught to reject their bodies, primarily their genitals—all this as children. The agonies and embarrassments of adolescence stem from a family background replete with rejection, invalidation, and hostility. Products that pretend to minimize these anxieties, ranging from hair sprays to vaginal deodorants, from mouthwashes to camouflage for pimples, from the latest fash-

ions to the last word in socially acceptable behavior, are consumed with an intensity that should shame America.

What Is the Result of the Family?

The typical American teenager has few opinions that are based on personal experience, reflection, or scholarship. Rather, his opinions are what the young person believes will be acceptable to authority. She or he is dependent—on structure, on authority, on her or his parents, on lovers, on her or his peer group, on rituals and games—but she or he is rarely self-reliant. She or he is a person trapped in a sexist role. She or he has few goals, and the ones that they have are usually along the lines of “I’d like to travel” or “I don’t know if I want to go to college yet.” She or he is chronically bored: “There’s nothing to do.” She or he is unable to point to anything they do that is meaningful to her, to him, or to others. Their idea of fun is “hanging around” or “going over to each other’s houses and listening to records.” She or he is practically illiterate when it comes to the fundamentals of art, social sciences, economics, law, philosophy, literature, and science. Few can think. “Like a magpie, the child’s mind picks up bits and pieces of data. . . . But without the integumental function that concepts and principles provide, the data remain fragmented, random, disordered.”²¹ The average teenager is even lacking in fundamental knowledge about his or her own body.

The average teen-ager? Nice kid. What’s not to be nice in insipid conformists? They are in the image of their parents. The so-called “greening of America” was a description of the activities and ideals of a very small number of young people, standing so far out because they *acted* rather than submitted; it is a distortion of the truth to suggest that their behavior is typical of most young people today. Teen-agers are often superficial and want strict limits from authority. They lack imagination and creativity and seem to be oriented toward finding out what is

expected of them and doing that. The clearer the expectations, the happier—at least the more content—they are.

Under the mask of this essential psychic-social capitulation to the pressures of oppressive families and society, young people are often lonely, desperate, confused, and despairing. They lack a sense of self; they have nothing to say. Their conversation is impoverished. Beyond the colloquialisms, useful in expressing *moods*, young people simply can't converse.

One is immediately refreshed by the minority of teen-agers who are behavior problems, deviants, disturbed, or in other ways "poorly adjusted." Here the problems of man, the major issues of society are reflected in struggle and conflict! Even the delinquent who is hardly verbal is a powerful and intense individual despite his reliance on intimidation, resistance, and exploitation. Because of this, the "pathological" case is easily romanticized, and the very real suffering overlooked or minimized. The rebel has resolved nothing.

Youth themselves, and what has been done to them, are the logical extension of the forces of the family, the microcosmic institution that reflects the major social processes and values of the established society. The result of youth's oppression within the family is a tragic loss of human potential. We must view the damage directly, not contenting ourselves with assuming that if young people are not in a desperate crisis, they are okay. Until families respect and confirm children and youth as individuals and nourish this specialness, accepting the risks and difficulties, America will continue to obliterate youth.

3

OPPRESSION by THE SCHOOLS

"Education is only the image and reflection of society."

Emile Durkheim

Schools are oppressive. The effects of this oppression are uniformly negative, although they vary in intensity from one young person to another. The oppression of the schools serves the interests of those in power and those who profit, but it also serves the interest of defending society from youth—who are perceived as threatening hate-objects. Schools are oppressive, and one form of any oppressive structure is the "bureaucracy." However, an attempt to change the structure of schools without addressing the nature of oppression and its manifestations in interpersonal and intrapsychic relations will only succeed in recreating, more subtly, oppressive situations.

In order *really* to change the schools, one must fully comprehend the process of oppression as a defense against fear occasioned by the possibility of change. Otherwise, only changes in style and content, not fundamental changes in

underlying values, quality, and priorities, will be attempted. Furthermore, unless the self-interest of society, in terms of either the pursuit of wealth and power or the preservation of wealth and power, is recognized, schooling will continue to manifest oppressive patterns, despite differences in appearance and content and will, more importantly, fail to develop in young people the social or political consciousness necessary for real growth. In short, personal growth is mutually interdependent with social change. It is not one or the other, or even one before the other, but both simultaneously and dialectically. Young people must grow as individuals, develop supportive relationships with other people, learn the ability to think about society critically (“crap-detecting,” as *Teaching Is a Subversive Activity* puts it) and to change their society (environment), all in a continual dialectical process.

“Bureaucracy in a city school system is bureaucracy. Its main goal is to survive, not to humanize or educate. In fact, there’s very little talk in public school about children learning.”¹ Bureaucracy is the predominant form in which the values and priorities of the society are manifested. When we keep in mind that we are examining the basic social values implicit in school bureaucracies and the effects of these values on students through the effort of society to control and mold students in terms of these assumptions, then we can take the bureaucratic form of schools as a useful starting point. Schools, like all other institutions in the society including the family, have three priorities. The first is to defend against fundamental (radical) change that will disrupt the established social order and cause people with vested interests in the status quo to lose these interests. Young people are considered to be the primary threat to society in terms of their *potential* for radical change and social disruption. This fear is best expressed defensively by taking the offense—controlling young people and imposing values on them. The school has as its primary obligation to society the control of young people and the imposition of values and limits on them that are consistent with the needs

and desires of the society. Its second priority is to exert control over people and situations. This is an expression of *power*; thus, its concern is to maintain and perpetuate existing methods of controlling people and to make the goal of obtaining power (hence cooperating with people who have power) central to the society and, to some extent, obtainable by a few. The third is to instill in people a need to consume so that a few can profit. A few students may be rewarded for their cooperation by achieving progress within the system with some small degree of affluence and the promise of more.

My argument is as follows. Schools are *first and foremost* institutions designed to defend against change, in other words, to control students and to instill in them patterns that are intended to prepare them to desire power while accepting passive-dependent attitudes of submission to those in power and to prepare them to desire to profit while instilling in them a need to consume. The rhetoric of "education" is a mystification of this process, designed to create and sustain the illusion that schools are for the benefit of students and are there to educate them. It distracts people from what schools *really* do and persuades them to cooperate with the schools, even when their *experience* of schooling (either in terms of its effects on students from the viewpoint of concerned parents or in terms of its effects on the students themselves) is negative and contrary to their desires and feelings.

Schools' emphasis on order, efficiency, and control over students achieves the "end" of oppression: the imposition of values and limits on students through the inculcation of dependency, the manipulation and frustration of needs, the oppression of students' consciousness, the inculcation of "appropriate" values, the frustration of enduring, meaningful, and intimate relationships among students and among students and teachers. The latter is achieved by frustrating students' ability to organize and dissent, encouraging alienation and estrangement, avoiding processes through which young people could develop skills for group situations, and, finally, by

developing and manipulating fragmented, fearful, and anxiety-stricken youth with the aim of inducing compliance and conformity.

The beginning of compulsory education and the development of a public school system were deliberately instituted for the purposes of defending society against young people's real or imagined potential for disruption and social change and of molding the young people to fit the needs of the society. Childhood, in Europe, had ended around twelve. Now it was being extended by society to cover the years twelve through twenty-one. The only task for young people in this age group was to prepare themselves for their proper role in society as an adult. Schooling was not simply a way of getting the young person out of the way; it also ensured his or her proper socialization.

In order to socialize the young person—without any attempt to rationalize this as in the youth's interest or well-being—courts allowed public school officials extraordinary powers over students. An unclear but definite line was drawn between parental control over the young person and the schools' influence. The contradictions between traditional American values as described, for example, in the Constitution and the actual practice of the state regarding youth is of great interest. Even now the "needs" of the "state" take precedence over the rights of the individual and particularly over his or her pursuit of happiness. These matters that are according to David Bakan of such "vital importance to the democratic state," furthermore, must have been related to the development of industries, since the colonialists who founded the democratic state did not see fit to make schooling compulsory or to put it under the control of the state. The contradictions are even more evident *within* the school system.

School authorities have been granted considerable powers that they can use at their discretion. The student can be suspended, expelled, or punished in other ways (in some

states corporal punishment is still legal). These sanctions may be applied to students whenever the principal or teachers interpret the behavior of the student to be against school policy or capable of leading to disruptions in the schooling process. Recently, a young woman was sent home because she was wearing a skirt the principal deemed too short. Hair length, attitude, demeanor, the exercise of free speech, freedom of the press—all are aspects of student activities that have resulted in suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary activities, including the “bad record that follows you wherever you go.” School officials are virtually free of citizen control because, with rare exceptions, parents know little about what happens in school, accept school officials’ interpretations of events over their teen-agers’, and when they do become outraged, there is little they can do. Recently, a woman discovered that her son had been absent from classes for fifty-two days. The school only notified her when they decided to expel the boy. There was nothing she could do but suffer in outraged indignation and despair.

In short, the complex interaction between the wealthy, the wealthy and powerful, and the powerful (the private sector and government) led to the development of the public school as a total institution, protected from the public that it pretends to serve. The school begins as a totalitarian institution, in which the principal or superintendent has arbitrary powers of punishment and expulsion over students; these powers are not connected with specific rules, but with whatever the authority figures determine is in the “best interest” of the school, as it is interpreted by the principal. Boards of education tend to be conservative and often reactionary. What happens within the school system is largely kept out of the public eye through the propagation of the myth that education is a matter of expertise; this explanation neglects the value-choices that are inherent in any school curriculum, materials, processing of students, or relationships between students and school offi-

cials, value choice that reflect political ideology, not pedagogy.

The infringement on students' rights has recently gained some attention, largely through the efforts of students to *gain* these rights. The contradiction between the operations of the school system and professed democratic values is shocking.

Schools are certainly oppressive. The totalitarian aspects of schools are only the most obvious manifestations of the systematic efforts of the process of schooling to mold young people and at the same time to frustrate real learning and personal growth to whatever extent is possible. We must not fail to realize that the school, as does the family, prepares young people for living in a totalitarian society in three ways: by frustrating individuality, by inculcating passive-dependent behavior patterns, and by damaging the integrity of the ego. Furthermore, we must remember what Charles Silberman points out in *Crisis in the Classroom*: "schools form almost a subculture of their own. Schools differ, of course. . . . But the differences tend to be differences in degree, not in kind; in any case, they are relatively trivial compared to the uniformities and similarities."² These similarities are to be found, I believe, in the systematic oppression of youth. Furthermore, it is my belief that this oppression is deliberate, even though it is uncomfortable enough to the public to warrant concealment by school officials under the pious, benevolent "for the good of the student" rhetoric and under the myth that schooling is synonymous with learning. It is deliberate because the major economic, political, and social source of power by far in society is geared toward increasing the effectiveness of the "socialization" (molding and oppression) of youth. I believe that it is clearly self-serving and is at the expense of *everyone's* potential and humanity.

The inevitable consequences of America's obsession with power and profit (consumption and affluence) will lead, as the Hegelian dialectical structure promises, to its opposite, powerlessness and moral, political, and economic bankruptcy. Cer-

tainly, much of our social system is repressive, unstable, out of control, destructive, immoral (or amoral), violent, inhuman, dehumanizing, corrupt, and depersonalizing. But in examining the effect of the schooling in the United States, we must be content with observing its effects on young people and its degenerating effect on learning as a social process as well. Ivan Illich writes: "The very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes and treatments and professions are 'academic' or 'pedagogic,' and others are not. The power of school thus to divide social reality has no boundaries: education becomes unworldly and the world becomes noneducational."³

Illich is describing what might, in psychological terms, be called the development of a psychotic society—psychotic in the sense of being paranoid, delusional, fragmented, and unable to discern the boundaries between fantasy and reality. In political terms, what is being discussed here is the alienation of consciousness that leads to the development of a false consciousness and to a society of oppressed people. However one chooses a metaphor, the reality remains the same. I would go beyond Illich: higher education serves a definite political function in rationalizing the existing social system, it is done under the pretense of social "science" and "objectivity." Illich is saying that education has proved helpless—in many cases uninterested—in creating conceptual frameworks and political networks useful in bringing about radical social criticism and meaningful social change. The academic community, by and large, functions as a means of mystifying social reality and of facilitating the development of power and profit in both the public and private sectors.⁴

The result of the co-option of the academic community through the funding process and the withdrawal of the academic community into intra-school concerns, such as professional advancement, relationships between and within departments, competition between disciplines, the control of

students through the selection process, the maintenance of departmental "standards" including the pressure on publishing, and other often counterproductive interests that border on both the irrelevant (to real concerns) and the absurd, has been the creation of an incestuous, irrelevant, impotent education process. Furthermore, the tendency of the educational system to "observe" and "study" society rather than to interact with the society has led to the assumption that whatever happens in school is learning, while watching television, employment, sex, conversations and relationships with friends and acquaintances, and "outside" reading are not "learning." In order to be credited, learning must be credentialed and hence controlled by established authorities. A few schools and colleges are beginning to move away from this naïve, dangerous, and socially debilitating assumption about the nature of society and the nature of schooling.

The priority of power leads to a preoccupation with the manifestations of effective power: order, control, and efficiency. Silberman observed these three phenomena in his study of schools and was outraged. Perhaps it was because his view of a democratic society led him to infer that schooling was reflective of democratic values. Anyone who is aware of where the funds for schools come from and under whose control school systems operate would be surprised to find anything other than bureaucratic values and undemocratic processes happening.

The preoccupation with order and control is an expression of governmental or political manipulation of the school system to move students toward the role-related behavior necessary for the continued operation of increasingly large social bureaucracies, primarily corporations and systems. One may assume, if one ignores schools' traditional relationship with business and government control, that the preoccupation is based on the size of the schools. The size itself of many schools simply reflects the attitude of government and business that

schooling should be as inexpensive as possible: education is not a priority to either government or business. Furthermore, in large groups it is easier to shift people around, to break up natural social groups, to prevent alliances between teachers and students, to interfere with lasting and intimate relationships, and to accustom students to operate with large institutions so that they will rarely question the necessity of government or business dealing with the public through equally impersonal and destructive systems.

The principal is rarely an educator. He or she is an administrator, whose primary function is to moderate the conflicts of interest between the board of education representing business and government, the parents, and the teachers. High school students are often irrelevant to the system—they have no influence in determining the priorities that control their lives. The administrator must be sensitive to political issues, or he or she will be out of a job. The teacher is, in part, an extension of the administrator. Having the ideal of “teaching” students, many teachers become disillusioned by the primary task imposed on them: control. Control becomes the sign of a good teacher. Creative chaos—that is, movement by students, activity, verbal debates, and excitement—is a sign that the teacher is failing.

Conflicts among students and teachers and the school system are usually co-opted if they cannot be summarily dismissed or devalued. In New Haven, dissident students have the opportunity to participate in “high school and the community.” That this participation offers the individual considerable autonomy is the price the student body of the high schools pays for the further disintegration of their “body” into smaller, isolated fragments, into special interest groups with little to bind them together into a political whole. Yet the school system continues to demolish young people, while the privileged few try their best to minimize the personal anguish they must endure to become “educated.”

Time

The students' week is divided into five school days and two days off, and they look forward eagerly to any other days off, and especially to vacations. Students seek to escape the stress and tensions of the day-to-day environment of the school rather than to do any particular thing with their free time. Each school day is further divided into various "times": time to get up, time to leave for school, time to go to homeroom, time for the first class, time for the next class, time to leave class, time to eat, time to study, time to leave school, time to do homework, time to go to bed. The student's time is entirely defined for him or her according to the school's schedule, and so is much of his or her time at home, through homework. Absence or misuse of time is eventually punished, unless authority figures have granted exemptions for one reason or another.

Each "time" is essentially a source of pressure, particularly "exam time" or "report card time." This stress is psychologically oppressive, and the fragmenting of students' lives that it produces can be reflected in a fragmentation of their consciousness. They must "be on time" and always be "conscious of what time it is." Time isn't just an objective limit; it must be imposed on the feelings of the individual. It isn't a matter of when you *want* to get up, or of whether you *want* to study or *want* to leave a class, but a matter of *must*. If one is late, authority figures demand an accounting—some justification. This constant concern with being disapproved of is the cause of *unrelenting* anxiety. Times off, such as vacations, are temporary and all too short periods of no stress or anxiety. Anxiety itself is paralyzing; therefore, to avoid anxiety individuals attempt to live according to the schedule. They become conditioned to the schedules imposed on them and become anxious whenever there is the possibility of change or disruption.

Schools are, particularly for middle-class students, modeled after corporations. Fixed schedules, regular attendance,

homework (assignments), fixed places at desks in large groups, performance graded by the teacher or manager, taking breaks and lunch by clocks with no reference to personal desires or needs—all are characteristic of bureaucracies. Just as most middle-class students will probably make it to the executive level in bureaucracies, they are now being acculturated to executive privileges. They can avoid the standard schedule as long as they abide by the one they determine. They can work in small groups, getting to know each other better, in more relaxed, informal surroundings. They have a slightly higher status than lower-class students and greater access to the schools' resources. They make decisions within the context of the schools' priorities, and they have the illusion of greater control over their work. *Tracking* these students ("the fast learners") is a way of inducing them to consider themselves as special and brighter, with more to offer as leaders. In short, schools have been undergoing a transition recently from a straight factory-business model to a more refined upper-and lower-level bureaucracy that rewards the students most likely to participate in rebellion successfully (because of their advantages such as reading, speaking, and writing skills and their sense of self-worth) with subtle advantages that separate them from conditions they would find intolerable.

Movement

The schools control every movement of the individual, in the most literal sense of the word. Therefore, everything the student does must be examined from the point of view of whether it is the right thing to do at the right time. The controls and limits on the young person's movements are determined exclusively by the whims and desires of the authority figures. The right to this degree of control is an incredible source of arbitrary power in the role of the school official and it is anxiety provoking for the student. Even going to the bathroom, and

taking time in the bathroom, is subject to the limits of the authority figures. Literally to *do* anything, including relieving himself, the student must gain the permission of an authority figure.

This confined movement is, of course, the quintessence of oppression. The student cannot even look through his desk, books, or clothing without having the teacher comment on his "disruption" or lack of attention. The oppression of movement naturally determines behavior in the sense of attitude, expressions, gestures, body movements, talking, and looking. The student learns to act as *if* he were paying attention while engaging in fantasy. He learns to look in the right direction, have the correct expression on his face, and so on. The stress created by this limitation of movement is noticeable in the school corridor during the three to five minutes when students are allowed to talk and move (always heading in the direction of their next place). Just moments before a class ends, the restlessness is considerable, and students strain to get out of their seats and into the halls.

Place

"Know your place" applies *literally* and *figuratively* to students. The student is assigned a seat in each class to facilitate the process of seating at the beginning of class, to give the teacher a chance to learn names more easily (associating to a seat or from a seating chart), and to impress upon students the importance of having a place. Young people get very upset, visibly anxious, if anyone takes "their" seat, or even if chairs and desks have been moved by a custodian or someone else.

In the metaphoric sense as well, students have a well-defined place in the school structure. They are assigned a class by age, a ranking in the class by grade, a track, and a role. This role may be class "wit" or "an A student" or "an under-achiever." The importance of *status* and consequently *prestige*

is thus thoroughly ingrained in students. They not only know their place, but they are under pressure to improve their positions by being "upwardly mobile." This "placement" of students, also a goal of the high school in reference to colleges, is so insidious that it is assumed to be a "natural" function of schooling.

Complementary Roles

The role of student or pupil is meaningless without the corresponding role of teacher. The connotations of each role, in terms of power, status, expertise, and consequently in terms of the student's self-image, are important. Schoolteachers are very powerful. They can grade students, embarrass them, humiliate them, and create anxiety at will. They are, because of their importance to the quality of the students' performance (teachers grade students in terms of performance and behavior), always an object of fear and anxiety. Students are petrified of the possibility that their teacher will not approve of them; for a few students, this fear assumes a counterphobic form: they assume that the teacher will disapprove so they act however they want. They are "discipline problems" in the jargon of the school. One assumes that "discipline problems" do not learn, but studies demonstrate that after making a distinction in class between social-control times and teaching and learning time, "discipline problems" actually seem to learn faster. This discovery has interesting consequences for blacks, who are considered to be "slow learners" and "behavior problems."

Once we realize that the role of teacher is invested with terror-creating capacities—at all times teachers create anxiety—it is easy to see why people would want to be teachers or to reach the equivalent junior executive level in any other bureaucracy. Schools make it clear that one attains these roles through achievement. The executive level is a club to which one gains access through pleasing people already on that level and

getting their approval in the form of "good grades" or a "good recommendation." How many schools ask for recommendations from fellow students, friends, parents, and younger brothers and sisters, for example?

The teacher-student duality reflects the difficulty of assuming that learning is directly and necessarily related to teaching. Grade school and high school teachers rarely have extensive background in the subject they teach, and the study of teaching per se is notoriously inadequate. Many teachers are under-prepared in the subject matter and, consequently, are limited in their approach to teaching the subject. Students can spot the defensive teacher very quickly, although there is little they can do about the situation. Often, to disguise their own lack of knowledge, teachers create tests that stress miniscule pieces of information to make it clear to students how stupid they are. Students are in a bind when teachers depend on the students for their own professional identity, and they are likely to obscure or confound students when their identity is threatened.

Second, the dualism assumes that the relationship between student and teacher is primarily a learning relationship, when, in fact, it is primarily a conflict based on unequal power, control, and the imposition of limits, values and judgments on students by teachers. No evidence suggests that teachers "teach." It is only an inference based on the fact that they are "teachers" and have "students." Much evidence exists showing that teachers are, in fact, not able to teach, in the ordinary meaning of the word. Learning occurs through what students *do*. The best that teachers can do is guide the self-directed, freely chosen course of activity that a person makes—an extremely important aid if available. A clear indication that learning is false and counterproductive is the assumption teachers have that learning facts, as proven by the answers on exams, is equivalent to learning something. Yet facts are usually only helpful or useful when they are within a concep-

tual framework that interprets them and leads beyond what is then "known" to what is unknown. The ability to ask questions is as important to learning processes, if not more so, than the ability to memorize "answers." But rarely do exams ask students to give questions. By being questioned, students are forced into a passive, submissive relation to authority.

Third, the mystique of the teacher as expert leads to the obvious but dangerous corollary: students are dumb—"blank slates" who must be taught more and more. Knowledge is infinite so education must be perpetual; no one is ever beyond school. The role of student leads to feelings of incompetency and stupidity, just as the role of teachers leads to arrogance and pedantry, self-righteousness and rigidity in the firm conviction that they (the teachers) *know* something. These feelings of superiority are offset somewhat by the inferior position in the school of younger teachers vis-à-vis older teachers and administrators. Students can only feel superior in terms of looking down at "freshmen," which of course they are prone to do.

Complementary roles in schools are, therefore, productive only in terms of creating anxiety, encouraging attitudes of stupidity, incompetence, compliance, and conformity to the whims and desires of the teachers in order to succeed in becoming a teacher or something comparable, and encouraging unrealistic appraisals of teachers. In short, we have here the creation of the mystique of authority figures as experts—powerful, competent, knowing, and without fallibility—separating students from teachers (by role). The student is also separated from other students through competition, envy, or feelings of superiority (compensatory). The mystique of authority figures is grounded in infantile appraisals of parents as omnipotent and reinforced by the distance between students and teachers. Teachers never *do* anything except be teachers. They lecture, grade, listen, advise, manage, and control, but as people, with failings and inadequacies, they rarely reveal them-

selves. Teachers who do fraternize with students may easily run the risk of losing their jobs for impropriety. This mystique, coupled with the anxiety associated with the teacher's power to approve or disapprove, accept or reject, reward or punish, is the basic psychological model with which young people greet the "real" world. When they obtain (as some will), comparable positions, some may reluctantly conceal their "humanness," but most will long since have learned that it is part of the game, part of the reward of being in a powerful position: one is allowed to *appear* powerful, at least.

Time, movement, place, and the role of the student all contribute to the ubiquitous oppressiveness of the schools—all are aspects of the schools' concern for order, efficiency, and control. Each generates chronic anxiety, which at times is experienced intensely as panic or fear. Each contributes to the creation of feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, a need to conform, incompetence, stupidity, helplessness, and dependency. But the relationship of inequality between students and teachers (this paradigm is critical for understanding how schools create people inclined both to seek power and to be willing to conform to people's demands who act powerfully) is central to the overall development of the student as *dependent* on authority as well as structure—time, place, role, limits, and rules for behavior and movement.

Docility and compliance are strategies that reflect *dependency*, the assumption that if one behaves well, according to the standards of the people in authority, all needs will be met (as has been discussed previously). The converse assumption is that disobedience will lead to the frustration of all needs and perhaps to punishment as well—catastrophe. Dependency in schools is achieved through the following process. First, school is made compulsory; students *have* to attend school. If they do not, they find earning a living, gaining respect, discovering meaningful vocations, and having a satisfactory life extremely difficult. Society is informally arranged to punish peo-

ple who do not attend *and comply* with schooling, and in some states these are actually formal punishments (legal sanctions).

Once in school, the child is told that school is the only way to achieve *whatever* he or she wants to do, to be, to have. Therefore, if the student is not willing to give up all chances at reaching any of his or her goals, he or she must attend school. This gives students an "opportunity" to convert *have to* to *want to*. Naturally, since school serves the interest of those in power and those who control the means of production, resources, and, indeed, the entire economy, the "reality" of the "real world" necessitates that the child achieve diplomas and credentials as a *minimum* for economic survival on all but the lowest of levels. The youth who is naïve enough to leave high school or college and try to find a job finds out that it isn't what you can do that counts, but playing the game according to the rules. The game is attending and finishing school. There is no other way to demonstrate ability, since without at least a high school diploma finding work is practically impossible, and when one does find work, it is not of the kind where competence can be demonstrated. Without experience (previous work) or credentials, the *opportunity* to succeed is forbidden the individual. Experience is not possible without a diploma. Society assumes that a diploma assures some minimum capabilities and gives the person who has one an opportunity to show what he or she can do—within the limits of whatever work doesn't *require* an advanced degree of some sort. Society therefore also assumes that the lack of appropriate degrees is, a priori, a lack of ability. "If he could do the work, why doesn't he have a degree?" Our social system compels schooling, as it also shapes the process of schooling.

If the potential to earn a decent living is not enough to encourage dependency on the schooling process, schools build in various ways of perpetually stimulating needs. By rewarding achievement and punishing failure (always defined by the school authorities), a status and prestige system is

created. Failure to comply leads to rejection and invalidation. Therefore, the anxiety aroused is a source of pressure on the student to achieve at least a middle C. Students who "fail" suffer low self-images and rejection by others (except other failures as we will see). In order to make the threat real, *someone always fails*: classes are evaluated according to artificial norms or means imposed according to the teacher's judgment on the overall performance of the class. Everyone who gets 59 out of 100 percent fails, while anyone who gets 60 out of 100 percent passes—even if the highest grade is only 92. Or the teacher can impose a "curve" on the class and say that 92 is an A, 59 a C, 45 a D, and 44 an F. Many times the difference of *one* question means the difference between entire letter grades, which are averaged out as something like As = 90s and Bs = 80s, so that in the final total, one point can have the effect of *ten* final grade points. On a transcript, the C is considered poor if you want to enter graduate school. Graduate schools tend to look for mostly As and Bs, in the major field particularly—very demoralizing, the rating game in schools.

By creating artificial needs like wanting good grades or making approval from teachers based on one's academic and behavioral performance, schools manage to create a means of both frustrating most students and rewarding a few (sounds like America, doesn't it?), but, nonetheless, everyone is always concentrating on the exams, obedience to teachers, and the future capability of earning a living. Competence in school is, therefore, directly related to the ability of a man to provide for a wife; hence, even the sexual attractiveness of a man is tied into good grades. Rather than try and fail, which means risk taking, many boys pretend to try so that whatever they get they know is actually below "what I could really do if I tried," thus avoiding risk and still appearing to play the game.

The creation of dependency facilitates discipline and allows considerable freedom in manipulating students. At any moment, the student is running the risk that something he or she

does will frustrate a need. This fear is not mere anxiety; it is a result of being terrorized. Remember that any failure, in grades or in behavior, goes on a record that "follows" the student for the rest of her life, particularly in terms of the "internalized" self-image of the person as a student. The sense of being average, or less than brilliant, or below average, or a failure is directly tied into this "transcript" in the mind. Perhaps, if dependency were only a means of ensuring performance, one could dismiss it as a necessary but unfortunate evil. But dependency doesn't motivate students to do well; if anything it helps them do worse because they feel helpless, resentful, and lacking in energy. Dependency is depressing and emotionally debilitating. Even if students were to do better at meeting the standards of their teachers, what about the cost in individual potential?

The dependent student is always on the defensive; she can never do well enough. She studies as hard as she is able to *make* herself. Grades are really misleading. They appear to conceal very great *similarities* in performance because they emphasize great differences, such as between an A and a C. These differences are more in the way people relate to As and Cs rather than reflective of what the actual point differences are. Furthermore, by taking a student and putting her in a class of people who get approximately the same grades, one finds that the differences are even more arbitrary and meaningless. An A in a slow learner class may be only a C in a fast learner class. Why should anyone be judged in terms of how well she does on a highly limited "test" in relation to a *class* of other people, particularly when one keeps in mind different tastes, interests, backgrounds, commitment to studying, psychological attitudes, personality, moods, and the expectation of the teacher about performance.

The answer is the need to prepare the young person for a role in a society that is based on criteria such as "following instructions," making choices ("judgment-level" roles as exec-

utives), and complying to authority figures. And this is based on *control* through the manufacture and artificial reward and frustration of unreal and irrelevant needs. We feel we must frustrate the individual's capacity for personal initiative, independent judgment, and a strong sense of self in order to minimize the potential of radical and disruptive change and to isolate "counterdependent" people from the others so that they do not "make waves." Deviance is rewarded by suspension or expulsion. If the student is having trouble "adjusting" to school, why prevent him from attending school? It would make just as much sense to recognize the school's responsibility in dealing with the problems keeping the individual from learning in what is presumably a school in its own terms. How can this be done if the person is taken out of class and sent home from school? The answer is, simply, *it can't*. The real purpose is twofold: to maintain order and to use the deviant as an example of what will happen to anyone who wants to act the same way: he will be punished, rejected, isolated; he will suffer a loss of prestige, stigmatization, and conflict with authority figures. Discipline in school reinforces the anxiety; hence there is conformity and dependency.

How can a group "achieve enough maturity to keep itself under control" if its members never have an opportunity to exercise control? Far from helping students to develop into mature, self-reliant, self-motivated individuals, schools seem to do everything they can to keep youngsters in a state of chronic, almost infantile, dependency. The pervasive atmosphere of distrust, together with rules covering the most minute aspects of existence, teach students every day that they are not people of worth, and certainly not individuals capable of regulating their own behavior.⁵

The school cannot achieve these aims, and with the exception of some few individuals, it doesn't want to. Moreover, it isn't supposed to. The school is supposed to protect society from the disruption of "unsocialized" students (and to identify early those youths who are behavior problems so that they can

be handled by social-control institutions and kept away from other youths). The school is supposed to keep students from growing up independent of the structure and authority of society so that they will both envy (and therefore emulate) people with power and *need* to submit to people with power. The school is supposed to keep students from being able to do-for-self so that they feel worthless and, therefore, unattractive. Thus, they will be natural consumers of products advertised as ways of "making things easier," or of adding to their attractiveness and value, for example, owning property. The school is supposed to keep young people dependent on the social system for feelings of self-worth so that they will seek the status symbols and positions of prestige in the social system that reward intrinsically meaningless work. The school is supposed to oppress young people. That is its *primary* and *exclusive* function as a social institution.

The fear of change is the basic motivation behind the repression of aggression—and of sexuality. Aggression is repressed by simply frightening students into docility. The amount of aggression that is generated is visible in the considerable damage done to the schools by students in acts of vandalism and in the many frequent school disturbances. By suppressing movement, aggression is, almost by definition, suppressed. The school offers three channels for the permissible expression of aggression and hostility: (1) self-contempt; (2) paranoia and distrust, and (3) repressed rage. Self-contempt reinforces the dependency on the rewards offered by the school system and, eventually, by the diploma; it prevents young people from taking themselves and their feelings seriously (if young people did take them seriously, their attitude could be the basis for dissent and rebellion); it reinforces the teacher-student paradigm, and, thereby, it increases the effectiveness of teachers' evaluations: failing hurts more, not working creates guilt, and good grades feel better.

Paranoia and distrust prohibit open, sharing, collaborative

relationships with other students; thus they encourage competitive, alienated relationships—all to the advantage of the school and society. Paranoia restricts a person's awareness and his desire for new or alternative experiences, and it makes him suspicious of "radical" ideas or "different" people. Paranoia leads students to believe they are "victims"; hence, they are helpless and at the mercy of the world, fate, and so on. It leads to despair; but for the school, its most important aspect is the surrender of the hope that could lead to utopian visions and to the desire and struggle for reforms or alternatives. By playing on students' fears and suspicions, administrations belittle free schools and justify conventional ones: "You will never get into college if you go to one of them." They threaten students with failure if they don't do what is expected of them and they capitalize on their fears by exaggerating the needs that schooling presumably meets, thereby increasing students' dependency on the system.

Repressed rage makes students ideal candidates for aggressive contact sports in school, for the military upon graduation, for reactionary and punitive political points of view, and for the kind of sullen and resentful but terrified student-deviant that gives authoritarian principals and vice-principals (and later other authority figures) an object of hatred and punishment. Repressed aggression exists as hatred, contempt, and disgust that school officials can often manipulate against particular points of view, or against the "self." Schooling indicates attitudes toward the self as a failure, dumb, and "out of it." More important, repressed aggression often emerges in sexual relationships. Sex is converted into combat.

Schools' conversion of sex into an issue of power makes relationships stressful, destructive, and often even impossible. This further contributes to the development of dependent relationships, where a person seeks safety and the fulfillment of his or her needs through the relation to the other as an object. A. S. Neill writes: "When children are free they be-

come wonderfully sincere. They cannot act a part. . . . To tell a social white lie is often a necessity but to live a lie is something that free people cannot do. And my pupils feel that to be a member of a crowd must involve living a lie."⁶ Schools' repression of sexuality is highly destructive to students as individuals and also to the educational process.

Young people must learn to act as *if* they were in solitude despite the close contact. Schools create situations where young people are constantly being told one thing but being asked to do another: "In order to learn how to think for yourself, you must do exactly as I say"; "In order to grow up, you must be told everything to do," and so on. The repression of sexuality lies not in the belief that physical impulses, desires, contact, and attractiveness must be denied, or at least dealt with as if they were not valid aspects of reality but kept covert and indirect. The repression of sexuality is founded on the unwillingness of the school to accept tenderness (responsiveness to people's needs), openness, sharing, intimacy, closeness—in short, any of the cooperative communal emotions whatsoever. It reinforces competition, isolation, and egocentricity (social irresponsibility), all of which schools desire because the potential of student dissent is minimized.

Young people are given *no* time in school to express themselves in terms of their feelings, to discuss and explore personal experiences, and to talk with each other about their problems. Somehow, self-expression and group discussions are not considered to be learning experiences. Ego development, personal growth, and whatever one calls development seem to be assumed to occur without the opportunity for the kinds of peer-group reflection schools could be providing. But the fact that repressing sexuality is another means of frustrating growth is secondary to the implication this denial of a large aspect of human experience has in communicating to young people the attitude of society to their bodies. Even more, by being unable to communicate freely, common bonds (mutual

oppression, for example) are never discovered. Students' paranoia makes them afraid of each other. Consequently, peer relations are distorted, and relationships become forms of withdrawal from others.

Being allowed to *be*—to affirm one's physical existence and feelings and one's relationship to others as people—is the antithesis of being a part of a crowd. Young people are in large groups within school, but except for whispers to one another or short conversations between classes, students cannot really act in terms of each other. They can only act, and behave, and express themselves in terms of the teacher, with the teacher's permission, or against the teacher's authority. Neill says:

This crowd psychology angle is important. . . . It is the violence that a crowd inflicts on its members that frightens, the violence of intimidating, of molding. . . . We are members of a crowd, a crowd that will not tolerate opposition. We must all dress alike, think alike, act alike. For the great law of any crowd is: Thou shalt conform. . . . Education therefore should aim at abolishing crowd psychology. It can do this only by allowing the individual to face life and its choices freely.⁷

The continual emphasis of schools on "classes" uses both contagion and anonymity to reinforce the sheeplike behavior of students. Large groups terrify people, and they seek dependency relationships with authority figures and the concealment of anonymity to protect themselves. The repression of sexuality further diminishes the individuality of students at the same time as the repression of aggression creates a simmering rage. Sexual frustration increases and intensifies the aggression because young people simply are not able to enjoy themselves, to satisfy themselves, to be pleased and delighted, and to play, in schools.

When children are free they are not cruel. Freedom and aggression do not go together. I have known a few children who were reared with self-regulation, that is, without fear and outside discipline and imposed morality. They seem to have much less

aggression than most children have. . . . I confess to being muddled about the whole affair of sex. I do not know if we all experienced Reich's perfect orgasm there would be an end to war and crime and hate. *I hae ma doots*. Yet it is true that people who have a pro-sex attitude to life are the ones most likely to be charitable, to be tolerant, to be creative.⁸

Students are not allowed to relate legitimately to others and share experiences with them. They are not allowed to have intercourse in the strictest sense of the word, and in the sense of *conversation*. During class, which is most of the day, young people are prohibited from talking with each other. Whatever they say must be to the teacher—with the teacher's permission to speak, of course.

Besides treating young people as objects to be manipulated, evaluated, lectured to, sent from here to there, placed here or there, and spoken to primarily when they do something wrong, schools oppress the minds of students as well. This is important, for the only lasting consequences of oppression, and, therefore, the most significant ones, are those effects the individual takes away from schooling in his mind. There are two categories of interest here: first, the various processes through which the thinking of the individual is oppressed and, second, the distortions of consciousness resulting from the inculcation of values or basic assumptions.

The first process for limiting the ability of students to think begins with the frustration of problem-solving abilities. The schools emphasize the fallacy of the "right answer." This is the single brief word or phrase that answers the question-problem. It is highly misleading; nevertheless, students are driven, through their conditioning, to search for the answer to dilemmas they face like: "I'm going steady with this boy. I want to go out with his best friend. What should I do?" Even the phrasing is reminiscent of "I have five apples. I lose two. How many do I have?" Young people do not learn how to conceptualize problems in a way that leads to methods for finding out

existing alternatives and making choices. Many young people ask "What do I want out of life?" "What do I want to do?" These are questions that cannot be answered. They assume a single, fixed, static answer, when, in fact, life is a continual process of discovery—of uncovering oneself.

Besides searching for the "right answer" in terms of a single, fixed, static entity of some kind, schools foster the sense of whatever answer students arrive at being "right." But "right" in school is not based on evaluative criteria derived from the youth's experience, but on what the teacher or authority figure accepts as the "right" answer. Students do not evolve a means of examining their beliefs and assumptions about what is right and wrong. More frequently, they rely on their belief about what other people think is right, or on the cues from any person perceived as an authority, or, finally, on the values inculcated in them as children by their parents.

Competent and, therefore, radical analysis is a method of problem solving that is the antithesis of the approach to problem solving in schools. In radical analysis, the basic assumptions, stated and implied, are unearthed and examined, and on the basis of this analysis, the logical development of an argument is understood and evaluated. In interpersonal conflicts, basic assumptions—that is, rules, beliefs, and unexamined interpretations of the other person's actions or expressions—are usually ignored. Furthermore, despite the fact that many problems are misstated and distorted because of the restricted awareness of the basis of the problem, what is even more constricting is the lack of ability of young people to develop imaginatively numbers of alternatives for any question and then the lack of energy and initiative to test these alternatives out pragmatically or through experimentation. Radical analysis involves a process of examining the method of argument as well. Schools do not require courses in logic, and young people are not taught to distinguish fallacious reasoning from logical argument. No wonder. They might become critical

of many of their teachers' arguments if they understood what counterfeit arguments were like.

By being conditioned to learn through memorization the answers *provided for them* by the teacher through lectures or books, students fail to learn how to develop conceptual frameworks or resource material for themselves. Naturally, the power of information and formulation is both mystified by authorities and withheld from most people. Rather, the results of what experts in any particular field have said, in the *vocabulary* of the discipline, is presented—even to novices in the field—as something to be memorized. Theories and formulations are therefore memorized as if they were facts—a regrettable confusion that leaves students believing “Anxiety is the result of the repressed contents of the id erupting into the ego” is a statement of *fact* rather than the stringing together of constructs referring to inferred psychological processes of which no empirical evidence or entity exists. This is a statement of *belief*, but psychology students are expected to treat it as a pronouncement about the nature of the mind. Phrasings like this may be helpful in trying to derive a shared understanding of behavior based on reasonable speculations about common aspects of people's behavior in similar situations, but they are worse than useless when committed to memory as dogma, particularly when the mystique of the discipline suggests that the dogma is revealed truth. Students must commit whole fields to *memory, uncritically, as fact, according to the demands of authority*. This is “learning.”

The essential oppression of consciousness is not only the emphasis on learning from authorities what are the right answers and, therefore, leaving the responsibility for failure to “intellectuals” while reserving success for the person's own efforts, the translation of “ideals” into “practical action” to the “realist.” This merely keeps from students the development of skills in problem-solving, leaving them dependent and—outside perhaps of the area of “specialty” they might develop

skills within, through habitual practice—feeling *powerless* even to cope with many aspects of themselves and their own lives. After all, skills in problem solving are essentially applicable to how we decide any conflict, dilemma, or problematic situation. It is not just a matter of having no genuine capabilities for dealing with subject matter in various disciplines. The basis for the oppression of consciousness is *the inculcation of basic assumptions* (many largely untrue or only partially true). This inculcation precludes the possibility that should the individual student manage to develop the ability to think well, his or her thinking will be confined to certain assumptions, below his or her level of self-awareness, about the *political* axioms the society functions on. It also creates the interesting, and tragic, proliferation of many fine minds who spend their whole lives trying to rationalize and articulate as reasonable (social) science, the “rightness” of what are actually political beliefs. Bruno Bettelheim’s attempt to rationalize rebellion as pathological, for example—though it is no doubt true for some “rebels” who are filled with hatred and wracked with loneliness—and Blos’s attempt to rationalize the oppression of children as in the interests of their mental health, using the confusing vocabulary of psychoanalysis and the mystique of authority, are just two of many examples of this pervasive trend.

Ivan Illich writes about the assumptions built into students’ consciousness in his excellent book *Deschooling Society*. He mentions the assumption that motivates many people to seek “teachers” whenever they have a problem, whether the authority figure is a policeman, a psychiatrist, or an author. What Illich does not point out is that the student *does* learn from the teacher; or, more precisely, he does not point out *what* the student does learn: dependency on and submission to authority; feelings of stupidity, incompetence, and helplessness; fear of failing in the eyes of authority; and the belief that to learn about something—in other words, to solve a problem—one *must* rely on “experts.”

Illich notes the fact that each of the basic assumptions, which he refers to as myth to connote the emotionally supported belief in these assumptions, is related to values that further the interests of the established social order, particularly those of vested interests in power and profit. "School initiates, too, the Myth of Unending Consumption. This modern myth is grounded in the belief that process inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand. School teaches us that instruction produces learning."⁹ However, it is not simply a matter of "de-schooling society" because each of these assumptions, at the point where any dissent or change becomes really effective (or appears about to be effective), will be defended with incredibly repressive measures by the people in positions of real power, that is, the industrialists, the military, the police, and the corporate elites. It is not in the interest of those controlling society to begin challenging or to allow effective challenge to the basic assumptions and corresponding methods of schooling.

The business corporations are necessarily interested in having young people conditioned to see everything in terms of quantity. "More is better." Illich notes that schools teach "the Myth of Measurement of Values. . . . The institutionalized values school instills are quantified ones. School initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself."¹⁰

It seems to be a basic assumption in the culture that if power and profit are the goals, anything one can use to get ahead—any method that reaches its goals—is legitimate. Competition, in terms of moving up within any hierarchy, is predicated on the fact that there must be people—more people—on the bottom. There must be an antithesis in terms of power-weakness and profit-poverty. Comforted by the widespread myth that in a democracy everyone has an equal chance to succeed—patently, obscenely untrue—or worse, that everyone would

want to do the same thing if given the chance (if I don't take advantage of this opportunity, someone else will), people strive to better themselves by ignoring the plight of others. This is a conditioned phenomenon. In any school class, students know each other by sight and name, in other words, as *objects*. They are taught to conceal their feelings from one another. So when someone does badly on an exam or is taken aside by the teacher and scolded, students either do not know, or else they feel embarrassed. Schools try to prevent young people from empathetically relating to another student's suffering; otherwise, children would naturally, spontaneously, try to be helpful. Competition is against the best interests of the human species because it creates a hierarchy of win-lose. More important, young people in free settings will play against the game, against a limit, against time, but never against each other. People strive to transcend their limits, but not, it is hoped, at the expense of another person's suffering.

The development of young peoples' consciousness is coupled with the frustration of viable alternatives; this frustration is manifested in three ways: (1) the inability to organize, (2) alienation and paranoia, and (3) lack of group skills. Each of these insecurities, when successfully instilled in most young people, prevents them from becoming a coherent, supportive, and effective dissent and social-change force within the schools.

The emotional experience of the frustration of needs and desires normally will lead people to develop alternative ways to find satisfaction, in the absence of anxiety and fear. Therefore, schools develop this anxiety and fear, and they create a system that atomizes the individual by separating him from other individuals. This prevents the student from developing the kinds of skill necessary to organize students effectively, since most students are unable to conceptualize any kind of group movement that would be different from their basic group experience—the class—which is stressful, oppressive,

and thoroughly alienating. They resist organizing because they fear any group experience oriented around a task; the only models they know for group behavior are either authoritarian or lacking in purpose (for example, the party), in which they are "liberated" by intoxicants, music, and the absence of pressure.

Second, students are never given the experience of organizing themselves. They are always being told what to do, when, and how. Therefore, dissatisfied students who attempt to organize generally do so by imitating the model of the teacher: this only succeeds in "turning off" the students in the same way teaching does. Common mistakes of adults are:

1. Lecturing students about their condition and the need for revolt and protest.
2. Attempting to get students to come to meetings to "get organized"—this smacks of the classroom, where nothing is ever done.
3. Telling students what they must do. Even when they *want* to be told, escaping responsibility for deciding is inevitably going to lead to a feeling of not being a *part* of what happens, not being "into" it. This creates, by definition, alienation and fragmentation.
4. When students are moved by an issue and do want to accomplish change, becoming overconcerned with *tactics*, which is analogous to teachers being concerned with syntax and grammar. It is the movement and the act that is fundamental, not its effectiveness a priori.
5. Falling into old patterns of obedience, docility, and being mystified by the authority figures. This co-option is made possible by confusing the rage resulting from the schooling with the need for clarity, direction, tasks, goals, and strategies for implementing the change process. Students often lose, not because they are wrong, but because they lack a plan even though they are right.

It is not correct that the system will change because students act as if authority figures can really change things: this is a tacit and incorrect affirmation of the myth that authority figures are powerful and capable of implementing changes when they are convinced of the "rightness" of the changes. Nonsense! Such a demonstration only involves itself in an interaction with the people who have all the experience and authority power from society on their side to impose limits and punishment—not to change the system. Most authority figures are as *powerless* as students in changing the system.

The inability of students, even well-motivated ones, to organize effectively to change schools is based on this students-as-powerless, administrators-as-strong myth. Students would be far better off forming strong but small support groups who are willing to work and organizing coalitions of students, parents, and teachers around *specific issues*. As small gains are made, people become more convinced that major gains can be made. The small groups can begin education—the raising of people's political consciousness—in atmospheres where there are no pressures or stresses and where people are not being given dogma, but being asked significant and meaningful questions. This kind of approach—respecting each person's thoughts, asking questions without formula answers, and maintaining close support groups so that no one feels helpless in any conflict—is based on one assumption: that change within schools can only come about meaningfully when *the social change process itself reflects alternative values and assumptions*, rather than when the means reflect the traditional emphasis on power relationships justified by the utopian end: changes in school.

The alienation of young people creates fear, distrust, and paranoia, all of which make change difficult if not impossible. Students in school are forced to become game players in order

to survive. This increases their cynicism toward the system, eventually leading them to dismiss the value and possibility of change. What's the use? "Almost from the first day, students learn that the game is not to acquire knowledge but to discover what answer the teacher wants, and in what form she wants it."¹¹ This understanding contributes to students' attitude that school is a prison and that they are just doing time. The sense of school activities being a way of passing time minimizes the sense of frustration by making students believe that things will be different (better) when they "get out." It leads them to think that change will only lead to disruption and frustration. They view any students interested in change with suspicion, even with fear. They "want" to play the game.

This paranoia of other students or, more particularly, of change, resulting from the competitive-impersonal environment, and the dependency on the system for as much homeostasis as a youth can generate through docility and conformity frustrate the possibility of students participating in sustained change processes or even of desiring them. Finally, young people simply cannot change even if they want to, since they cannot sufficiently unlearn the behavior patterns and assumptions that tie their consciousness into the school system despite their dissatisfaction, frustration, or hostility to the system—whenever it flares up.

Personal change, the raising of consciousness, is an interpersonal phenomenon. Social conditions lead many students into behavior patterns in which they take advantage of the vulnerability of others to vent their own hostility and aggression created by the system: scapegoating, rumormongering, sexual exploitation, social-caste exclusions, cliques, and envy all combine to contribute to the alienation process of one student from others—from all but their "best friends." Besides viewing other students as objects, competitors, or possibly exploiters, students simply do not know how to be helpful and supportive to each other in groups. They cannot, through the group

process, achieve the kind of personal and group development of their individual and shared consciousness that fundamental changes in school require of almost everyone.

Most students are not alienated and do not want power because they feel they would not know what to do with it if they had it. They have remarkable faith in the high schools' paternalism and see no need to question what their teachers are doing or why. . . . Unable to withdraw or rebel (this route leads to failure), these ambitious students seem eager to detect and perhaps even to fantasize, competence and concern among the staff. . . . As a result, schools are able to manipulate students into doing much of the dirty work of control under the guise of self-government.¹²

The final result: conformity. This is not to say that young people are not alienated. The paradox is that they are, in fact, so alienated that they cannot even conceive of alternatives. They are frightened—chronically frightened—to the point where fear becomes normal and only panic seems to be a meaningful term.

If one wishes to produce conformity for good or evil, the formula is clear. Manage to arouse a need or needs that are important to the individual or to the group. Offer a goal which is appropriate to the need or needs. Make sure that conformity is instrumental to the achievement of the goal and that the goal is as large and as certain as possible. Apply the goal or reward at every opportunity. Try to prevent the object of your efforts from obtaining an uncontrolled education. Choose a setting that is ambiguous. Do everything possible to see that the individual has little or no confidence in his own position. Do everything possible to make the norm which you set appear highly valued and attractive. Set it at a level not too far initially from the starting position of the individual or the group and move it gradually toward the behavior you wish to produce. Be absolutely certain you know what you want and that you are willing to pay an enormous price in human quality, for whether the individual or the group is aware of it or not, the final result will be CONFORMITY.¹³

This country is obsessed with power and with profit. It has

corrupted the ideals of the founding fathers in order to create an institution that has as its primary goal inducing young people to conform to the conditions necessary to perpetuate the economic and political system. This includes the development of a need for things to fulfill the individual who feels himself to be worthless and the development of a sense of powerlessness, which inclines people to seek power and to accept the power of others helplessly. This is a dependency relationship to authority figures that creates frustration. It leads, in turn, to aggression, which the system utilizes to maintain itself through wars, paranoia, which breaks down social relationships, terrifies people, and leads to increasing needs for structure, limits, protection, and powerful, benevolent leaders; and it also leads to self-contempt.

Schooling conditions young people to feel a need for authority and, in particular, for the system and its "benefits." It develops a process for solving problems that builds in a sense of personal incompetence and helplessness and a need for help from authorities. It conditions youth to values that are necessary to sustain the established social order and to increase the power and profit of the few. Anything that could lead to the development of social bonds between people is prevented by such strategies as the repression of sexuality, the isolation of the individual from contact with others, the debilitation of students' capabilities by withholding group experiences, and so on. The experience of groups which could lead to personal growth, the development of leadership qualities and personal initiatives, the development of organizing potentials and skills, the creation of a shared consciousness of the similarities between students, and the like are not allowed.

"There is a tendency," Laing writes, "for the false self to assume *more and more of the characteristics of the person or persons upon whom its compliance is based*. This assumption of the other person's characteristics may come to amount to an almost total impersonation of the other."¹⁴ It is hard to say

what is the biggest crime of our society toward young people. Is it the repression of sexuality? The channeling of aggression into sex roles (men "active," women "passive") or into wars, violence, self-contempt, and self-destruction? Is it the fact that young people are totally unprepared to assume initiative, and so young people are both *docile* and *apathetic*? Is it the oppressiveness of the school that leads to boredom, escapism, vandalism (of a few), school dropouts, "underachievers," and widespread drug use as a way of relieving anxiety and tension in classes or to prepare for exams? Is it the suspicion toward strangers, the fear of intimacy, the withdrawal into small groups or well-defined social roles, games, and rituals? Or is it the attempt, largely successful, of the American system and its twin gods of power and profit to force students into a psychosocial state of perpetual anxiety and fragmentation that compels them, by and large, to play the game, behave according to all the rules and according to social authorities, to desire profit but to desire consuming more, to desire power but to desire a totalitarian structure where all choices are eliminated more? The oppressed become the oppressors. The public opinion polls are merely mirrors for seeing the face of America: oppressed, desiring totalitarianism, and content with circuses.

What children need, even just to make a living, are qualities that can never be trained into a machine—inventiveness, flexibility, resourcefulness, curiosity, and above all, judgment. The chief products of schooling these days are not these qualities, not even the knowledge and skills they try to produce, but stupidity, ignorance, self-contempt, alienation, apathy, powerlessness, resentment and rage.¹⁵

The Hegelian dialectic again. As society has moved toward the very strategies of oppression that sought to freeze time, to block growth, to frustrate change, and to dominate the content and context of the learning process in order to further its ends, to perpetuate itself from generation to generation, to manifest

itself for all time, it has sowed the seedlings of change in the process. Soon we will come face to face with the effects of oppression—the system will collapse of its own internal contradictions in a paroxysm of rage, fury, and hate! Perhaps it is happening now. Humans will, one hopes, remember that they are human and cease to yearn for power and profit. What originally were values that led man to a high civilization are now leading him (one senses a determinism here) down.

We cannot expect many students to begin the process of rising from the ashes. "I do not think that youth has become defeatist; rather it is that society has reached a point of futility and cheapness and danger where youth, frustrated by the mundane standard of success, simply gives up in despair. . . . Youth is free to die but not to live and love. . . . I do not know the answer; all I know is that when children are free they do not kill life."¹⁶ We must face the fact that our schools are *oppressive* and that they are so by design—the design of a society concerned with power, profit, and the oppression of youth as a defense against the possibility of social change. The full enormity of the problem must be faced. It is not a matter simply of ending schooling, but of reeducating people to freedom. Personal changes lead to awareness of man's potential, to social criticism, and to social change, which leads to personal change. Being free is a matter of being free—not a matter of *being freed*, but of *being free*. Growth and change are the dialectic of life, love, sexuality, and freedom.

4

OPPRESSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUALITY

"The popularization of sex and the appearance of liberalism in attitude and behavior represent little more than flourishing defenses . . . against deeply embedded conflicts between the erotic instincts and the imperatives of a sex-denying culture."

Robert Lindner

"All real living is meeting."

Martin Buber

The oppression of young people, resulting from our society's fear of the potential for change young people represent and its desire to impose on young people the false consciousness necessary for a culture obsessed with power and profit to exist and perpetuate itself, is destructive and debilitating to youth. It is best exemplified by the repression of sexuality. We must understand sexuality in a broader sense than just the genital function. "Most people, especially those of the older genera-

tion, still think of 'sex' or 'sexiness' in terms of nudity, genitals, breasts, number ('how many times?'), pinups and dirty jokes. They see 'male' and 'female' as entirely separate and opposite."¹ Sexuality, in the full sense of the word, refers to mankind's instinctual drive to relate pleurably with others.

Repressing the Capacity to Relate

The sexual relationship between two people, in a situation lacking fear and anxiety and where the two people are not oppressed, is characterized by openness, tenderness, pleasure, and intimacy. Openness is the capacity to be oneself, to express oneself without the fear of being abused or the anxiety concerning rejection, and to play. Openness is a natural state; the individual must be taught to be withholding, distant, deceitful, and abusive to others.

In early infancy the child, according to Freud, inevitably takes his own body as his sexual object; in doing so, he plays with it. Play is the essential character of activity governed by the pleasure-principle rather than the reality-principle. Play is "purposeless yet in some sense meaningful." It is the same thing if we say that play is the erotic mode of activity. Play is that activity which, in the delight of life, unites man with the objects of his love, as is indeed evident from the role of play in normal adult genital activity.²

Tenderness is a quality of response or empathy between people. As with openness, the capacity for play, and being with and enjoying loved ones, tenderness is developed in infancy and must be cultivated. Tenderness is a responsiveness to the other's needs in a way that supports the validity of the person, even if the actual needs cannot be met by the lover. Tenderness is based on being open and empathetic to the feelings of the other and on being willing to receive these feelings and to respond to them. This response-ability (Perls's definition of responsibility: "the ability to respond, to have thoughts, reactions, emotions in a certain situation")³ is predicated on the freedom, psychologically and socially, to be oneself.

An open, tender relationship is implicitly a reciprocal relationship. If one person is anxious, frightened, tense, closed, suspicious, defensive, and withholding, his or her fear and hatred will be too anxiety creating for the other person to continue being open, supportive, tender, and compassionate. Instead he or she too will become withdrawn and defensive. Each will be expressing his or her "dis-pleasure" with the other instead of en-joining the other—enjoying the other. A relationship must move toward pleasure and tenderness, or it will become increasingly distant, uncomfortable, and threatening. The increase in anxiety will result in defensive processes and in an enveloping paranoia. The individual will experience no one as responding to his needs. He will imagine that this nonresponse means no one likes him. Or he will feel self-contempt from previous rejection and assume people will not want to respond to him with tenderness, so he acts as if he does not care, that is, uncaring, and is insensitive to the other. The process of disintegration begins. Sullivan refers to this in early childhood phases of development:

In family groups that are not estimable in the skill, ingenuity, and understanding with which they try to discharge their social responsibilities—the first instances of the *disintegration* of behavior patterns and patterns of covert process under the force of anxiety occur quite early in childhood. . . a situation in which a pattern of behavior in the pursuit of satisfaction, and the exercise of recall and foresight in connection with this satisfaction, are stopped. . . . Either there is a great deal of trouble, in the sense that the behavior is, in fact, not abandoned by the child, and more and more anxiety piles up in the personality, so . . . the *whole of living* is rather disorganized; or this *particular pattern* of behavior and covert process is disintegrated.⁴

In other words, as a person moves toward another, anything that generates anxiety or is rejecting creates a crisis. The individual moving forward is stopped; stopping her results in frustration, tension, and anxiety. This experience begins when parents impose limits on the child's behavior that has been heretofore aimed at pleasure and satisfaction. The prevention

of satisfaction is destructive to the particular way the individual is expressing her need and to the individual as a whole person.

Pleasure leads to fulfillment; displeasure to disintegration. In other words, the integrity of the individual is based on *reciprocal* relationships. Without open, supportive, tender, pleasurable experiences, the individual experiences crises and eventually a breakdown of her personality.

We can conclude that any relationship can be either helpful and supportive or rejecting and anxiety provoking. The individual either develops greater integrity, achieves satisfaction, is affirmed as a worthwhile person, and learns to trust others, or she learns nothing, begins to disintegrate, becomes frustrated, feels worthless, and becomes increasingly paranoid and, therefore, anticipates rejection from others, which leads to more or less permanent defenses against sexuality. In a positive relationship, people become increasingly intimate. In a negative relationship, people become alienated, estranged, and *objects* of distrust and fear. The relationships are *impersonal*, without feeling.

"Intimacy . . . means closeness . . . that type of situation involving two people which permits validation of all components of personal worth."⁵ Sullivan notes that an intimate relationship permits "validation," that is, the confirmation of a person's real being and the affirmation of his value (the value of a person must always be in terms of other people's evaluation of him). Conversely, the opposite of an intimate relationship, that is, one in which people are alienated from each other, results in feelings of inadequacy, unattractiveness, worthlessness, and, therefore, in feelings toward the self of contempt and rejection. This is the devaluation of the self and reflects the attitudes of the significant others in a person's life. The most difficult aspects of rejecting and impersonal relationships, particularly when the desire of the people involved is intense, are frustration and loneliness.

Frustration occurs when one's needs are rejected or not met through his experiences. The person is unsatisfied and lacking in pleasure. He feels empty and becomes aggressive. This

aggression may be directed at the unloved, devalued aspects of the self (the bad-me, the not-me); it will result in a characteristically apathetic, submissive individual. Or it may be directed toward others; this behavior results in a characteristically hostile, rejecting, aloof, and contemptuous person. When either receives affection or, most important, tenderness, he "warms" up to the person.

Loneliness appears to be the organism's response to separation; it is a need for love and sexuality. We often think of loneliness and aloneness as synonymous. Actually, aloneness, when it is by an individual's choice, is both a means of being in touch with oneself and creative (in the sense that our sexual needs take creative form, we become artists). People who are lonely are those who feel cut off from others because the situation is imposed upon them, either by other people's hatred or rejection or by their own inadequacy and worthlessness. Usually, we reject loneliness; however, for some loneliness is a sweet pain because it fulfills their paranoia (no one loves me) and thus offers an illusory sense of completeness. But it has become a characteristic of our society because it is a defense against our persistent and horrible belief that love is painful and destructive since it means *loss* at some point in time, and we fear this loss so incredibly that we would rather not have anything to lose in the first place.

The family and school severely cripple young people's capacity to relate in pleasurable and intimate ways. Fears about the opposite sex and about one's own sex are inculcated in children by stereotyping "maleness" and "femaleness." These sex roles become ritualized manners of thinking about and being with other people. Men, fearful of homosexuality, turn toward women as their sole means of emotional support and pleasure, while women are cultivated by society to be sex objects, passive and yielding to men. Furthermore, men learn to be competitive, dominating, and possessive as a way of defining their masculinity and value as a person. Women-as-objects compete with other women, and their competition undermines the possibility of intimate and supportive relationships

with one's own sex. In short, people are emotionally and psychically deprived by their inability to find intimacy and pleasure in their relationships with others. Instead, they find paranoia, power struggles, and disorganized and contradictory messages.

Frank and Irene, a young couple approximately sixteen years old, talked with me about their relationship; they seemed to typify the incapacity to relate well. "We're always fighting," Irene said, while Frank laughed. "He wants too much from me." I asked what they did for fun together—what they shared. "Not much." Then, as if realizing what she said, Irene continued: "We hang around together, go places. Sometimes we bowl or go to the beach. I don't know. Just hang around together." "And fight?" I asked. "Yes." "What do you fight about?" "Frank thinks I'm interested in Kenny. I'm not. . . ." At this point, Frank says, "Oh, yeah! Why do you smile at him everytime you see him?" "I don't! See what I mean?"

Their relationship is basically a struggle to protect themselves against the loss of whatever pleasure they find together. Later, Irene admitted that they spend most of their time, when they aren't fighting, making love. She had never had an orgasm and, indeed, didn't know what an orgasm was. I asked if her relationship with Frank cut into her relationships with other people. "Sure, we're going steady." "What does that mean?" "We spend all our time together." "When do you see your girlfriends?" "Oh, around. In school. I talk with them over the phone sometimes, after I'm in." Irene has been pregnant once, and she gave the baby up for adoption. She has had a few "steady" relationships, and her conversation shows that she is preoccupied by whomever she is going steady with at the time. In fact, unless she is asked questions, she tends to recite, verbatim, everything that happens in her relationship with Frank and because of her relationship with Frank.

The impoverishment of their relationship, their obsession with each other to the exclusion of virtually all else, is a ritual enactment of marriage as many young adults experience it. The struggle to control each other and to possess each other

prohibits any sign of vulnerability. They must be closed to each other to be with each other. Neither shares "weak" feelings or needs. Instead, they manipulate each other and erupt occasionally into a violent rage. Even within the relationship, Irene is treated as an other. She has been raped by Frank when she refused to have intercourse. "I didn't wanna." She was used to "having him all over me wherever we go," and "I know he sees another girl. I hate her. I told her, 'if you don't leave him alone, I'm going to tear your hair out,' and she knows I mean it too." "What do you say to Frank?" "Nothing, he might decide I'm too possessive and leave." "But he tells you you can't see anyone else." "Yeah . . . he does." "Is your relationship like those of other girls you know?" "It lasts longer. That's the only difference I know."

Repressing the Body

Martin Buber wrote, "The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being."⁶ Those whose self-interest, as they are inclined to perceive it, is in the oppression of youth will begin with the ground of being, the body. In fact, we cannot conceive of the destructive, insidious, pervasive effects of oppression without recognizing the systematic fragmentation and rejection of the body. Young people emerge from childhood with their basic attitudes toward their own flesh fixed in their personalities. They experience conflicts, crises, confusion, and fear because they have fragmented, alienated concepts of themselves through their self-body images, and repressed senses.

The repression of sexuality begins in childhood with the rejection and denial of the human body's natural functions and parts, specifically the genitals. Young people and children begin life finding great pleasure in their bodies. Long before their bodies are fully capable of the "genital function" of intercourse and procreation, children find delight and pleasure through touching themselves and others. Even language begins as a form of play. "Early babbiings are probably

not attempted imitations of adults' speech, but rather sounds the child makes for his own amusement. . . ." Left to themselves, children *always* have an active interest in the body, and they enjoy touching and exploring their own and each other's bodies.

In my experience, I have found four-, five- and six-year-olds enthralled with discussions and pictures of birth, with the wondrous bodies of older women and men, and with their own bodies. At seven and eight, children often play "doctor" as a means of exploring each other's genital areas, and girls and boys find a delight in touching vaginas and penises. I have known children nine and ten years old who formed couples and kissed, touched, and fondled each other in privacy. At twelve and thirteen, children become interested in the processes their bodies are undergoing to prepare them for bearing or creating children. Left alone, sexuality is a lifelong area of experimentation and exploration.

I have found many children frightened of their bodies and fearful of being seen, touched, or touching. I have found many children unwilling even to acknowledge their bodies. An eight-year-old I know is constantly exposed to sexuality as adults have intercourse frequently in her presence. She is unwilling to let anyone touch her. She is confused about what is expected of *her!* However, no matter what the child's feelings about sexuality are, at no time is she disinterested in her body, in other people's bodies, or in explorations of bodies. But back in the 1600s, it was determined that the body was a source of evil; and today most people still refuse to affirm and accept young people's bodies or their sexual interests in their bodies and their functions.

The rejection and denial of the body is learned from authority figures communicating the strongest possible attitudes of disapproval, disgust, and fear—*usually through empathy*—to children about their genitals. Children easily become terrified of these strong, often punitive attitudes of rejection and associate them with their bodies, at first, primarily with their genitals but later with the entire body. It is not enough to hide

under clothes, although this act in itself teaches children the broader lesson of camouflage and concealment of undesirable behavior, but children must *deny* the very existence of their genitals. They must act as if they had no genital areas. This is, in fact, a delusion, but young people cooperate because of their great anxiety about being rejected. They incorporate the negative attitudes toward the body and begin to find even their own bodies distasteful and repulsive. This sense of being physically unattractive persists through adulthood, making many people ashamed (or embarrassed—to be seen looking) of nudity and of their naked bodies.

The treatment of the genitals as objects of horror and hate leads to the child associating anything to do with the genitals as the “bad-me” or the “not-me” and thereby disassociating himself from the objects. This fragmentation of the self leads to an objectification of the genitals and the functions of the genitals. Later on, young people will learn to describe people in terms of these objects and the feelings associated with them, a figure of speech called *metonymy*: “He’s a shit” or “She’s a cunt,” and so on. The fact that the genitals are among the first objects to which strong moral judgments are associated, through the adult’s anxiety, fear, and personal disgust, leads to immense confusion in a child’s moral development as well as to personal crises when the youth is expected to do an about-face concerning bodies and sexuality later in life.

An additional difficulty is the confusion between the genitals and the three functions of genitals: *sex*, *waste removal*, and *pleasure*. It is not possible to distinguish, in any meaningful way, between negative attitudes toward the genitals (“Don’t touch yourself there”), the waste functions (“Shit and piss are *dirty*”), and pleasure (“Pleasure is bad and *dirty*”). Many adults believe that sexual pleasure is dirty and smelly, just as they believe feces and urine are dirty and smelly. We hear of “dirty old men” and “sluts,” and we can sense the association of the feces and the sexual. Furthermore, it is clear that society builds on the association between the sexual-that-is-permissible as clean and the sexual-that-is-not-permissible as dirty, in poor

taste, filthy, and so on. "Clean sex" is, of course, that which conforms to public mores and folkways. Similarly, defecation and urination are necessities, but they must be done in a bathroom, privately, not as a matter of pleasure but of function, and the individual "cleans up" afterward. There can be no sexual revolution without a corresponding development of more realistic attitudes toward waste. An aggressive society, psychoanalysts have noted, is bound to be "anal": messy, wasteful, dirty, and polluted.

Parents are inclined to want to dismiss the genitals and waste removal as delicately as possible. Since the child must be toilet trained (which is primarily the inculcation of basic attitudes about the body, cleanliness, privacy, exposure, and smells), parents feel they must, in order to be efficient, coin "baby words" like "wee-wee" and "poo-poo." They know that once the child is past toilet training, she will drop these words because of their association with infancy—with being a baby. Later, she will easily pick up socially acceptable euphemisms such as "going to the bathroom," "powder room," "WC" and "lavatory."

By removing the genitals and their functions, we have not only depersonalized people, but created "idols"—this can be seen in the difficulty people have in thinking about the fact that their favorite movie stars or anyone besides themselves fart, shit, piss, and fuck, much less enjoy doing these things. We also try to act as if these functions were not part of ourselves. We hide our humanness; we are embarrassed. Social life becomes a large shared delusional system. Censorship of literature is an attempt to clean up the society, to reaffirm the basic cultural values of antiseptic, mechanical, depersonalized, and asexual people. The tensions in the contradiction between what is socially acceptable and what is socially unacceptable create the basis for the entertainment media—they reveal only so much, leaving the rest for conditioned minds to complete. The pleasure in suggestiveness seems to come from the fact that we complete the gestalt; hence suggestiveness is based on sexual repression, not on sexual fulfillment.

Once we understand the confusion in moral attitudes, limits, qualifications, and double messages and the delusion system Americans create to defend themselves and their social system against sexuality, it becomes clear that young people have no basis at all for coping with the demands of puberty and adolescence, and we can account for the response of one twelve-year-old boy to another: "You have sexual intercourse by getting on the back of the girl and putting yourself in her asshole . . . at least that's the way I think it is done." The twelve-year-old did not know girls had vaginas, nor did he know what he felt about sex. "Well, I suppose it's okay, but it sounds kind of . . . dirty." "Why do you suppose people do it?" "I dunno. Maybe because they have to 'cause they're married."

The rejection of the genital area is not simply a matter of denying the genitals and their functions unless one has to go to the toilet. It also requires the systematic distortion and constriction of awareness of all the five senses, and it turns the person against the internal experiences of his own body. The child, out of fear and anxiety, must close off large parts of his consciousness; hence, he becomes totally oppressed. Each limit is conditioned in the child quite early in life and tends to act throughout his life unless he makes an effort to unlearn it. This unlearning *rarely* happens. Rather, young people and young adults learn to repress their conditioned responses to sexuality at the same time as they assume *roles* and *behavior patterns* through which they act as if they enjoy sexual relations. Invariably, people's enjoyment is restricted to the orgasm (if they have one) or to a relationship between foreplay (in the passive position, as in cunnilingus or fellatio) and fantasy (withdrawal into a more controlled and hence safer sexual world). It is particularly uncommon to find young people able to enjoy sexuality.

In place of sexuality—that is, openness, tenderness, pleasure, and intimacy—we find young people fucking each other to prove that they can "do it." We find young people submitting to sex out of loneliness and the fear of rejection: "I

was afraid he would leave me if I didn't put out." We find young people avoiding sexual intercourse; if they are honest, their not being "interested" means that they really don't enjoy it. Hopefully, many, but probably only a few, will unlearn negative, restrictive attitudes and limits later on. However, recent literature suggests that there is a widespread fear among married couples of engaging in "perversions" (any kind of exploration or experimentation) and that there are many married women who are completely unresponsive to sex, largely because of men who are only interested in satisfying themselves as quickly as possible and going to sleep. Furthermore, their fear and anxiety about sex leads them to be inattentive to any information they hear or purchase that contradicts what they already believe to be true. The people who want to listen are already listening; the people who are afraid are silent and withdrawn.

The defenses against the body start with sight. Senses must be understood on two levels: the physical and the metaphoric. Children are taught to avoid looking at their genitals themselves and to not let other people see them. Instead, they look at themselves when exposed, through the eyes of another person looking at them (self-consciousness), or they look at themselves from the viewpoint of authority (embarrassment). They have failed to measure up to the standard and, thus, they experience shame. Sight extends to pictures and other images, including words. Gradually, the whole world of vision becomes highly constricted so that the person doesn't "see" what is right in front of him. Furthermore, the child is taught to conceal himself—to develop a sense of privacy (related to "privates") in which he tries to avoid being seen by others. Concealment is a restriction on other people's senses. Some young people look, but only when they can conceal the fact that they are looking. Their sense of shame is not great because their own feelings are primary. However, they do feel some guilt, and this guilt is evident when they are discovered—hence the metaphors "naked truth" and "uncovering the truth."

Hearing is the second sense that is oppressed. One is not supposed to listen to sexual or excretory sounds. This prohibition is also extended to making sounds, including saying anything too directly related to the genital areas. Even during passionate moments, many young people constrict their sounds and movements, fearful of being heard even by their lover. Whispering is concealed sound, and it is popularly associated with "intimate" moments. One is allowed to say things to oneself (in one's mind) or, if they are unpleasant, to mutter them under one's breath ("Oh, I was only talking to myself"). The mind becomes cluttered with the unsayable. What cannot be said is infinitely more powerful than what is permitted.

The taste of the child is affected. One is told that excretions are "disgusting," and the child learns to throw up, or reject, the excretions. This gagging sensation is common with adults who must clean up someone else's messes. Disgust is a defense against the uneatable, and it is probably instinctual or organismic in nature. The response of disgust becomes associated with feces. Sex also becomes "tasteless" or "disgusting" as the reactions to food are generalized to the entire genital area and all functions. Eating sexually, in terms like "eat me" "bite my ass," "cocksucker," "you make me disgusted," and "you make me want to vomit," are metaphoric expressions for this early attitude. It also reflects the aggression behind the rejection and negative attitudes, which is considerable anger and hatred for the genitals and all things sexual. These learned attitudes make oral sex seem disgusting or unpleasant to young people, who reject many of the aspects of foreplay that could easily substitute for sexual intercourse for those who have many negative associations and fears concerning sexual intercourse, for example, unwanted pregnancies.

The child is not permitted to smell the genitals. Again, the genitals are considered to be unpleasant, smelly, even disgusting. This indicates how closely smell and taste are associated. The smell of shit or vomit (throwing up the contents of the stomach is essentially the same as excretion) is enough to

cause many people to want to throw up themselves. By teaching young people to fear smells, society is, of course, educating them to desire deodorants, perfumes, and other "cosmetic" products designed to allay their fear temporarily, while never dealing with the causes directly. This perpetuates the problem indefinitely and expands the cosmetic market.

Children cannot touch their own genitals (except for excretory functions in the bathroom or under the sheets just before falling asleep, hoping that they won't be caught). Being "out of touch" is an expression that connotes the strong effect the lack of touching has on relationships. Without tactile contact with people, relationships become based on looks and words. Both of the senses involved can easily become confused or distorted when they are oppressed and disconnected from the other senses. Touch becomes a fear-creating aspect of relationships. Unless the touch is a *gesture*, young people are terrified of it. Even parents are prohibited from touching their children unless it is a "show" of affection. Furthermore, the zones for social contact through touch—the hands, shoulders, and face—are well defined, and any touching of legs, necks, chest, back (without clothing), and genitals is considered to be taboo. The closer the touch is to the genitals, the more anxiety is created. Consequently, young girls (always in submissive, passive, object roles) are continually asking "how far should I let a boy go?" They are encouraged to set limits although these limits are, in fact, a fragmentation of their bodies and their senses, and repressive of both their desires and the boys' and, therefore, frustrating. Furthermore, the limits often lead to aggression: rape, extreme passivity, forcefulness, and in recent times, the boy "whipping out his thing," as one girl put it, and "telling me I had better take it!"

The limitations on touch are objective in sexual relationships and, therefore, become symbols of sexual repression. The young boy often wants to go beyond the limits as a "conquest" of a girl in order to "prove" himself a "man." The girl sees the violation of limits as a loss of control, a vulnerability that creates extreme anxiety. The limitations on touching are so

much out of proportion to the actual experience of touching that many times, being able to touch is "nothing" to the man or boy. He must seek new "conquests" in women or girls who won't let him. In this sense, touching and sexual intercourse will never be as satisfying as the manipulation and struggle involved in breaking down a girl's resistance—in going beyond the limits. Sexuality, when it is oppressed, is an issue of power; it is a struggle between two people to see who will dominate. The anxiety is so great for a few women that they desire to be "raped" so that they will "get the whole thing over with," or they arrange to be drunk so that the man they like will be able to "take advantage of them"; that is, they do not take the responsibility for choosing sex. Very few women either desire or are pleased by "rape," in the violent sense—that is, with the use of physical force. In the sense that they have had sexual intercourse pushed on them against their will and capacity to defend themselves against persistent onslaught, many women are raped. Oppressed sexuality offers the satisfactions of being dominant (overpowering or powerful) or dominated (secure, possessed—a man's woman), such as they are. The issue is so often conceived of in terms of a power struggle that the word for a man's inability or unwillingness to have an erection is called *impotence*, "without power." A woman is frigid; she is without responsiveness, in other words, she is submissive in the physical sense but resistive in the sense of withholding something from the man and, hence, not completely dominated.

The restrictions on touching have numerous destructive consequences besides turning sexuality into a power struggle. For one thing, people are adept at cloaking reality under words, while they are less so at expressing themselves deceitfully through touching. The combination of the two (touching and talking) is difficult to use for manipulative purposes, particularly if people learn to make the fairly simple distinction between sensuously pleasurable touching and caressing as an expression of tenderness. The first may come from the desires of one person, the second in response to the desires of the

other. Feelings are grounded in touch, and, indeed, the word *feel* can be used in either sense. To feel liked involves being felt or touched in a tender, responsive manner.

The disconnection of touching from other senses can also be awkward. Many people learn to talk and relate intimately on the abstract level, but since they postpone the physical aspect of this relationship, they suddenly find themselves quite awkward and immature in bed. If the relationship had been grounded in touching as well as in the other senses, it would have progressed as an integrated process aiming toward sexuality in the fullest sense of the word. Instead, the restrictions on touching create an imbalance.

Having a divided body leads to perceiving the self as an object rather than as an integrated whole. It perpetuates the mind-body dualism that had its origins in the thinking of Plato and Paul. Women, because the culture locks them into passive-dependent roles, generally experience this division more often and more vividly than men. Women are used as objects for the gratification of men's needs, often without receiving tenderness, support, openness, and pleasure in return. This leads them to test men over periods of time to see if they can be trusted. Essentially, what women are doing is waiting to see if they are really cared for for themselves, not just for their bodies—a reasonable precaution in a sexually repressed society but a tragic one in that it reveals how terribly dehumanizing oppressive societies are.

The repression of the body extends to the form of tension we consider pleasure: excitement. Limits are placed on children in the following ways: parents define sexual excitement in children as "hysterical" behavior (the appellation "seductive," as in "seductive woman," referring to a woman who arouses excitement or who acts excited, is used to stigmatize her); excitement is equated with a loss of self-control and hence, with powerlessness; and excitement is considered to be a sign of being tired. In these three ways, sexual excitement and pleasurable tension are associated with the three big sins of our society: being overtly sexual, being a person who lacks

power, and being a person who should be asleep (that is, narcotized, as with tranquilizers and mental patients)—in other words, sexual excitement is associated with a *person who is alive*. Children learn to inhibit themselves, suppress excitement, and, therefore, to frustrate their own capacity for joy and delight.

Excitement is associated with loss of control, in other words, with helplessness, and it is stigmatized in older people as "childlike," or worse, "childish." Excitement is unacceptable, and when people find themselves becoming excited, they begin to be anxious as well. Excitement becomes painful and frightening. Young people, therefore, avoid anything that might be pleasurable, at least to the degree where they become excited. This leads to chronic frustration, or "horniness," and to fears such as, "if boys don't get enough sex they go crazy." Avoiding excitement leads to attempts to limit oneself and others; again the emphasis is on power and struggle. Young people learn to seek out the controlled and the safe, and they become easy marks for the entertainment business, which markets ritualistic action, in which the ending is predictable, and enjoyable precisely because of its predictability. The repression of sexuality makes rituals and games necessary as well as desirable, and it leaves people terrified when there is a lack of structural and moral platitudes to guide their behavior.

The repression of the senses and the suppression of excitement is not only oppressive, frustrating the individual's ability to grow, but it is also alienating, and it deprives the person of satisfaction and of the full potential of his or her sexuality. The fragmentation of the senses leads to the division of the self.

The [ontologically insecure] individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than

substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body . . . the ordinary circumstances of living threaten his *low threshold* of security.⁸

The body is the basic way in which we experience the world, and the rejection of the body is therefore an attack on our senses. One is reminded of Perls's statement that people should lose their minds and come to their senses. A fragmented body not only leads to the division of self and to the ontologically insecure person—the person who cannot feel real—but also to a person who can be manipulated, exploited, and socially oppressed willingly.

Adult sexuality, in so far as it is restricted by rules designated to maintain the institution of the family and in so far as the desire for sexual satisfaction is diverted and exploited for the purpose of maintaining a socially useful institution, is a clear instance of that subordination of the pleasure-principle to the reality-principle which is repression.⁹

What happens if social institutions like marriage or the family have ceased to be viable for many and have become, instead, destructive and depersonalizing? Has the repression become, in Marcuse's sense, surplus repression—more than is necessary to have a civilization?

The Oppression of Sexual Consciousness

The oppression of sexual consciousness can be viewed by examining the typical treatment of sexuality in a recent book geared to young people (and their families). In it, we can see the transition of sexuality into a power struggle, the myth of the orgasm, the perpetuation of young people's ignorance about sexuality, and the commercialization and politicization of sexuality by society.

Sex and the Teenager is an example of a typical, "liberal" book that attempts to explain sexuality to young people. It represents a typical attitude toward sexuality and may be used

as a concrete example of the way much of society would prefer young people to deal with sexual issues.

Suddenly things are different! You don't know why, but nothing seems quite the same. The friends you've grown up with are a constant wonder to you; their voices sound different; their touch is strange and you begin to think a whole new world is surrounding you.¹⁰

This insipid beginning is based on the complete denial of sexuality in childhood and predicated on the fact that many young people are kept in total ignorance about their bodies, their sexuality, and the moral choices they will make and have made (unconsciously). Its patronizing, simplistic tone is directed only at the teen-agers who could possibly continue reading past this point; those who have been so completely oppressed that they have not even had an informal socialization to sex from their peers and are looking for answers. Unfortunately, this includes most of them. This book exploits that need and caters to parents who are searching for authoritative guidance that completely reflects middle-class values perpetuating sexual oppression and frustration.

The liberal credentials of the authors are only plausible compared to the reactionary beliefs of the seventeenth century.

Sometimes, because of our background and our country's social history, people believe there's something wrong with feeling the need for sexual relations. *There's nothing wrong with this desire.*¹¹

This is a nice semantic differentiation between desire and action. By not specifying the prejudices of those people who are against particular ways of expressing sexual desires, adults mystify the basic issues.

Unfortunately, whenever the topic of sex is mentioned, it's usually associated with words like bad, good, right, or wrong. These terms can't and should not ever be used in a general sense with a general subject like sexual adjustment.¹²

However, there are other ways of communicating negative attitudes besides the use of these words. These words only make the attitudes explicit. In the interest of promulgating specific values that might be offensive and alienating to young people—although comforting to parents—this particular book, as I will show, depends on the context, innuendo, implication, implicit values through examples, metaphors, and so forth to communicate to the reader (most advice on sex is for girls more than boys) the sense of wrongness and the attitude of “bad,” toward sexual activities that “go too far.”

The attitude the authors represent is very coy. While they refrain from using these words, they also refrain from being permissive. This is necessary because the implicit message in statements like “It is destructive to label sex acts as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ because in different people and situations they have different effects”¹³ could lead young people to assume that the judgment about sexual behavior should be left up to the individuals involved. Who else could know the people and the situations well enough to make judgments about “good” and “bad” if not the people involved? To counteract the permissiveness implicit in this point of view but still to maintain their liberal credentials, the authors point out:

In this book, we'll refrain from using such terms. Remember, however, that *you cannot ignore the moral codes* of the environment in which you live without suffering the often painful consequences. It's up to you to understand how to live with your sex drive and *yet stay within all the limits acceptable to society*. As you do this, you'll discover that words like “good” and “bad” won't need to become part of your association with sex.¹⁴(my italics)

What an incredible statement! The authors begin by saying that they're not going to use negative or positive words as if this omission will be significant. But what do they tell the young person? “You cannot ignore the moral codes,” and you must “stay within *all* the limits acceptable to society,” both of which dictums have the effect, presumably intentional, of creating a difficult, essentially contradictory bind. If people, as

a result of their background and social history, believe that there is something wrong with sexual feelings, doesn't it follow that many of the limits that are socially acceptable reflect this hatred and fear of sex? Furthermore, the authors don't *have* to make moral judgments about good and bad. All they have to do is continually refer to socially acceptable or unacceptable limits or to imply that some behavior is socially unacceptable to make it clear to the young person what he or she should or should not do. The individual is not expected to make decisions, except within the parameters determined by a sexually confused society. Of course, when the young person has stayed within the acceptable boundaries, the words "good" and "bad" are not meaningful. They only begin to be meaningful if the person feels he or she has trespassed a boundary.

The point of view represented by this book either lacks integrity or adults who share this perspective are very naive. Young people can and do ignore many, if not all, of the moral codes of their society, and they avoid the consequences. It is not true that breaking socially acceptable limits is the cause, necessary and sufficient, that determines the effect of "often painful consequences." The problem that young people need help solving is how to break limits that are oppressive and restrictive without being caught and punished or humiliated. Some need to have some support because they have "found out" and have developed a "bad reputation." They need support because often what they have done is not "good" or "bad", but only unacceptable. The authors avoid the fact that many young people do violate limits and do avoid the consequences. What we do need to know is how the few who suffer the consequences should cope with the punitive, moralistic, and rejecting dynamic around sexuality that the authors themselves are at pains to avoid being associated with. To lie to young people, or worse, to pass oneself off as an expert on sexuality in teen-agers and not know that many young people have established the precedent (taught to them by schooling) that if you don't get caught, you can do anything seems less than useful and helpful to adolescents concerned about the

problem of conflicts between their desires and social limits. It is not helpful—it is destructive to pass over the conflict by saying that it simply doesn't exist if you follow the rules. That is a truism, and that is not real.

Again and again, adults try to play both ends against the middle and not come out with a direct statement of the values that underlie this book. Again and again, the authors say something that is permissive in implication, leaving themselves perceived as liberal and supportive. Take, for example, this paragraph:

When you've heard and tried to understand all the varying degrees of opinion concerning sexual behavior in our society, you, in the last analysis, must make up your own mind. *However*, in considering all the various groups who form attitudes towards sex, it's obvious that all are in accord on one point: Sex between ■ husband and wife, securely related in a happy marriage, is the highest and most rewarding form of sexual behavior.¹⁵ (my italics)

One recalls Norman O. Brown's (and Freud's) observation that adult sexuality "is restricted by rules designated to maintain the institution of the family"; this is an excellent example of the process. Furthermore, what is "obvious" is not obvious. The criterion for sexual enjoyment is not a "happy" secure marriage, but openness, tenderness, responsibility, and an integrated personality. In addition, few marriages are sexually rewarding, and in some ways, much of the high divorce rate is due to this fact. It is misleading to encourage girls and boys to assume that if they wait until marriage, sex will be beautiful—an implication that the preceding quotation surely makes. The use of the word *obvious* indicates that any readers who think the opposite should doubt their beliefs, since the authorities have spoken.

The romantic ideal of marriage continues.

The Wedding Night. Today there no longer are certain things a couple are expected to do on their wedding night. True, it's natural that intercourse will be attempted, often several times.

Occasionally these experiences are a bit disappointing. Still, if the couple are happy, and their love for one another is true, these temporary disappointments will quickly pass on to be replaced by more satisfactory experiences with sexual intercourse.¹⁶

Sometimes this is true, although whether it is or not is by no means synonymous with true love. But usually, failure leads to failure, and the myth that a couple in love will also be, or eventually become, physically compatible leads to many discouraging marriages where both partners try to be the way they *should* be—"faking it." The experiences are a "bit" disappointing when young people are neither experienced nor psychologically prepared to become experienced sexually. Once a child or youth is conditioned to fear sex, to restrict and inhibit, and to postpone sexual gratification until "true love" comes along (and, many people hope, until marriage), his or her marriage is often founded on the fact that sexual intercourse, even pregnancy, has occurred. Again, physical desire and compatibility are basic to love, but they do not insure it. Later comes a feeling of estrangement and distance from the "loved one" that eventually leads to extramarital experiences, marital conflicts, and sexual withdrawal, in which the woman submits to the man who, in effect, masturbates in her, or divorce proceedings. The gloomy tidings are ever present, and we can see the logical outcome of this type of literature and social mythology in the pattern of the many conforming girls who follow the line all the way:

Though the number of youthful marriages appears to be declining, a fourth of all 18- and 19-year-old girls are married. More often than not, they had already had intercourse: more than half of them got married because they were pregnant. But on the whole, teenagers actually are not very active sexually, in spite of the large numbers of non-virgins.¹⁷

Once we understand the pressures exerted on young people by the society to refrain from sex until you find your true love and are, hopefully, married, this pattern is made more clear

than it seems to be to the reporter who expected a sexual revolution and found that there is none. Most young people are frightened. They do what they are told. They make sure (at least the women do, for reasons that will become evident) that they are "in love" before they have sex, and then they quickly translate the desire for sexual closeness into a need to get married. And one out of eight girls between eighteen and nineteen is already *pregnant*—if sexual intercourse isn't persuasive enough, pregnancy is. *Sex and the Teenager* explores the delicate line that society draws between doing a little and going too far. Sex becomes a continuum with the girl in control of the limits, and the extremes become terrifying. No girl wants to be considered "frigid"—a stigma that boys apply to anyone who won't be responsive and who acts stiff, rigid, and paralyzed. On the other end of the continuum is "going all the way," which is an interesting euphemism.

Necking is normal and satisfying to those who learn how to handle it. . . .

Already, we see the building up of worse fears—not being able to handle a situation, being out of control, chaos, and fear.

Many of today's teenagers are mature enough to understand this urge for physical contact. . . .

The lines are drawn. If you want to be considered "mature" by authorities, then follow their reasoning and act this way:

. . . and when confronted with the situation handle their desires carefully. *Others get carried away.* . . .

"Get carried away" is often used to refer to people who go crazy and get carried away to mental institutions; it implies a complete loss of control rather than the expression of passion in an integrated way, a response based on feelings and not on repression and frustration of both oneself and the other person. The moral connotations to statements like this become obvious enough so that one does not have to say girls who

“go all the way” are bad, wrong, and may suffer painful consequences. The old morality has become implicit, concealed under a liberal rhetoric. Perhaps an example will make clear, to anyone who isn’t sure, what society’s ideal is:

Jane dated often and was considered to be one of the school’s more popular girls. She liked to date and enjoyed being with boys. Her parents were quite open with Jane about sex, and she felt few negative feelings about physical relations with boys. In fact, she discovered that necking and petting were delightful to her in every way.

Sounds good? Would you like your daughter to be like Jane? Necking and petting are “delightful” to Jane in “every way”?

So much so that Jane, *being a sensible girl*, knew what this could lead to and designed a plan for herself. (italics mine)

What could this lead to? And why is Jane stopping this path up with a plan? What is a young person to think of this concept of “sensible girl”? Is he or she to act that way? Is Jane “good”?

This kind of manipulation of young people’s thinking is so evident that it is disgusting. His moralism in the guise of a liberal, rational, and factual presentation. Jane’s plan reflects the terror that she feels about sexuality, about losing control, about “what this could lead to.” It is interesting that Jane’s passions are considered to be so strong that they must be defended against. Jane would not be able to say no simply because she would not want to say no if she allowed herself full enjoyment. She must repress herself *before* sexual contact; she must erect limits that will protect her from herself; she must fear her own feelings.

She encouraged the boys she dated to double date. In this way necking wasn’t prohibitive, but also she was constantly assured of companions, and it wasn’t likely that things would go too far. She eagerly showed her affection on the dance floor by sometimes exchanging a kiss with her partner, but she was unenthusiastic about parking in a car for romantic purposes. When boys suggested they park, Jane usually said, “Fine, but let’s do it in such and such a place,” and she insisted that the place be the

family driveway where she always had the feeling supervision was not far away. . . . Lastly, Jane forced herself not to steadily date the same boy. . . . she often had severe crushes . . . and feared the consequences. . . .

The picture of Jane is a shockingly clear account of a girl who is not only sexually repressed, but is totally out of touch with her feelings. She is so petrified by the prospect of wanting to have sexual intercourse that she is willing to sacrifice passion, sexual excitement, intimacy, closeness, love (or infatuations, if you prefer), and the developmental consequences of this kind of relationship. Jane is dependent on her parents for control—why else feel comfortable with “supervision” just moments away? She distrusts her own feelings and probably has distorted them to a large extent. What is interesting is that the Benners never raise the two questions that seem most pertinent to Jane’s case. If she doesn’t want to have sexual intercourse, but her passions and desires are very intense, why doesn’t she pet to orgasm with her boyfriends? This is surely a viable alternative, and it relieves tension in a pleasurable, intimate way, while it allows a girl not to have sexual intercourse if she doesn’t want to. Or, if she *really wants to have intercourse* but is afraid that she shouldn’t because the consequences may be painful, why don’t the authors explore these negative consequences? If the consequences are really more undesirable than the sexual intercourse, probably Jane will simply stop before intercourse. She will *feel* like stopping. Only when a person is anxious about offending a strong moral code, as Jane probably is—and the authors are supportive of this anxiety, as we have pointed out—is there a conflict. Jane feels that she shouldn’t, but she wants to. The authors feel that she shouldn’t even if she wants to (although they are sympathetic). Therefore, they assume that the repressive limits Jane places on herself are justifiable and laudatory.

Jane, as you can see, was a most exceptional girl. She had quite a few things going for her: looks, intelligence, understanding parents, and terrific personality. She isn’t a typical teenager.

You're probably much more typical and can't imagine being able to act in such a mature way in similar situations. . . . But for girls, Jane's code for controlling her drive is an excellent example of what can be done. (italics mine)

Possibly, a careful reader may assume, Jane pets to orgasm in the car outside her parents' house. There is an ambiguity in the account. But from the context of the book, the implication seems to be in favor of her parking in front of her parents' house precisely because their presence such a short distance away acts as a restraint. They might come out, they might see. This anxiety would be restrictive and inhibiting. But the Benners like ambiguity, perhaps because it does confuse people. Let us see Jane's opposite, the girl who is more typical, one presumes, because she is not at all like Jane. She is a sexually repressed girl who does what Jane apparently would like to—gets intensely close to many boys and enjoys herself. Unlike Jane, she represses herself by avoiding intimate, enjoyable sexuality through the compulsive sexual relationships she establishes with *many* boys. Both girls are *compulsive*, a sign of oppression of the authentic feelings and desires.

Judy . . . was one girl who couldn't help flowing with the tide. . . . She knew how to keep from going too far with boys physically, but she couldn't help giving her emotions with no strings attached to the current boy in her life. . . . She wanted to be needed and wanted by a boy, and when he responded there was no good way for Judy to control herself. . . . Finally, after too many heartaches to count, Judy began reminding herself of the eventual outcome of too serious a relationship. . . . But she only learned through many unpleasant experiences.¹⁸

The constant use of euphemisms indicates that the words themselves must be avoided. Certainly they imply that making love is something to be feared. Yet society (and the Benners) does not explain why. And no one explains how many young people do or do not handle these issues. It is better not to have sex no matter what one becomes or does to avoid sexual intercourse. Judy and Jane are both compulsive girls; both are

obsessed with sexual intercourse. Judy is no longer giving herself to boys with "no strings attached"—this sounds like an oblique swipe at "free sex." Judy, by the authors' own account, expects—indeed has been hurt enough to demand—a steady, probably dependent, relationship. After "too many heartaches," she stops having sexual intercourse, or whatever it is she was doing. This is not a string? It is a need for closeness at any price that is disappointed. Judy is not satisfied through her sexual relationships—a key sign of compulsiveness—and Jane is not satisfied either. Judy wants love; Jane wants sexual intercourse. Perhaps they both want the same thing, unrepressed sexuality.

The Benners' contribution to the fear of young girls doesn't end with the implicit references to "going all the way." They reinforce the pressure *on the girl* at every opportunity.

What is Petting? Petting is the touching of each other's bodies with the hands. . . . Petting can range anywhere from the gentle caressing of each other's bodies outside the clothing . . .

One can sense a slight change in tone here,

. . . to vigorous manipulation of the sexual organs with naked bodies. . . .

From "gentle caressing" "outside the clothing" to "vigorous manipulation" of the "sexual organs"—you know, those objects that cause so much trouble in the world that we'd rather see a man shot in the head or his throat cut than his sexual organs in a state of arousal or, in fact, at all.

Petting is a natural outgrowth of necking. . . . The decision to practice it or not is up to the girl involved. . . . Few boys will date a girl over a period of time and not attempt to engage in petting, so it is up to the girl to set her own . . . standards and stick to them. . . .

This sample of the double standard reflects the pressures on both girls, who must be responsible for what happens, and boys, who feel that they must always be initiating lest they be

thought less manly. Many times, neither the boy nor the girl really desires to keep going further, but both continue the ritual out of fear of seeming "queer," from the boys' point of view, and either "frigid" or "loose," from the girl's. Girls cannot win.

Furthermore, it is possible for limits to be set mutually, between boys and girls. If a boy really respects a girl's anxiety and she respects his frustration (and her own) and they are realistic about their desires and needs for satisfaction, they can deal with each other in an open way that is mutually satisfying. Boys, like girls, like to know where they stand, since ambiguity is difficult to tolerate. For myself, it is annoying to have limits placed on me after a period of stimulation, out of the blue, that reflect the woman's anxiety rather than her desires (which are also evident). If I am told ahead of time in a nonanxious atmosphere what her limits are, I feel I can make a realistic decision either to become involved up to the limit or simply to avoid physical excitement. Mutually acceptable, mutually agreed upon decisions are the essence of any significant relationship, and it seems to be destructive to future intimate relationships to be encouraging girls to view boys (and boys to view boys) as always aggressive and themselves as always passive. On top of this, to suggest that unilateral limits should be set by the girl on herself—and also on the boy—as a necessary defense, well, this hardly seems constructive and just leads, I think, to justifiable "testing" and anxiety—it becomes a relationship based on power, will power, and seductive powers, not on trust, openness, and responsibility.

What consequences evolve from petting depend upon the individuals involved. There is less likelihood of "going all the way" when teenagers restrict themselves from heavy petting. . . . the girl who pets is allowing herself the risk of being talked about. . . . then, too, there's the possibility of becoming so physically excited that you can't control yourself or your petting partner . . . The next step is sexual intercourse.¹⁹

Several statements strike our interest here. Again we find the attempt to create fear of intercourse and the association of

sexual intercourse with a loss of control: Can young people ever be considered "mature enough" to *decide* to have intercourse? Must intercourse always be presented as a *loss of power*, as if sexuality is always a matter of struggle? The association of a natural passion, an increase in desire from stimulation, with danger leads to excitement and anxiety becoming synonymous. There is an absence of any perspective. I have counseled many young girls who had bad reputations. Some were caused by the girl turning down a boy, some by the way a girl dressed, one by a girl who was very promiscuous and wanted everyone to know it, and one by a girl who went "too far" with a boy who felt the need to brag. The antidote to bad reputations is not fear and repression; it is the ability to confront people who contribute to the rumor process. It is the ability to form open peer groups supportive of each other rather than competitive—the way the schools would prefer to keep young people. The Benners suggest passivity and sexual repression, withdrawal, withholding, restrictions on the other, and a struggle to stick within limits that can be and often are against one's authentic feelings. Is this helpful?

The kind of morality that society in general passes off as rational and authoritative is of an ilk that includes comic books on love and romance, gossip and lovelorn columnists, some sex educators, and countless professional authorities on the subject of sexuality. It is an unrecognized morality, and it is based firmly on the belief that the individual should adjust to society, not that society should adjust itself to benefit the individuals in it. The worst sin of any apologist for the status quo is withdrawal and social regression.

Masturbation (the ultimate expression of independence and withdrawal) becomes dangerous, something to be feared.

Masturbation should be considered ■ release from tension. If you feel yourself constantly thinking about it and always looking for a private place to practice it, you should try to become more understanding toward your masturbation practice. Sex, after all, *should be* a shared experience . . . something we do with others.²⁰

The first sentence is ambiguous. Compare their definition of masturbation with their definition of orgasm:

An orgasm is the release of all the tension and excitement of sexual contact.²¹

The attitude the Benners reflect is the seventeenth century's point of view that masturbation is bad. Most liberals assume that only a "preoccupation" with masturbation is bad because sex should be a "shared experience." This reflects the assumption that anything too extreme is negative—if it's fun. Do they suggest "understanding" to be an awareness that something is "wrong"—only they don't want to use the word? The quotation is ambiguous, the overall connotation being that masturbation is in some way abnormal and wrong. It is left up to young people to decide how wrong.

The social values expressed in the book, at the expense of young people's potential for unrepressed sexuality, are conveyed in their writing on homosexuality. The section is entitled "Homosexuality and *other problems*" (italics mine).

Sex is beautiful, natural, and wonderful to all who experience it with understanding and without fear. Yet, *like a crooked branch on a tree*, the sex drive of some does not develop as *it should*.²² (my italics)

The fact that homosexuality, although a minority experience, is found in many animals and birds suggests that nature doesn't have a sense of "crooked" branches, but rather that this idea is a cultural invention. The word *should* invariably means that someone has an idea of how things must be for everyone, or else. . . . The punishment, besides stigmatization, is the implication that the individual is somehow *wrong*—that something is wrong with the person. The Benners, committed to not using the words "bad" and "wrong," euphemistically phrase it this way:

When detected, it should be treated as *if* it were an illness by seeking professional help and guidance. Your doctor . . . a teacher at school whom you respect . . . your minister . . . your

parents. We list these last because too often, through no fault of their own, they have failed to see you as *you really are*, and, therefore, may have difficulty accepting your problem and guiding you in the correct steps to counteract it.²³ (my italics)

"As if" is a defense used to deny reality. Homosexuality is not an illness. Doctors are not able to treat homosexuality, and it is common to find psychiatrists willing to admit that homosexuality is only a problem because of the way we treat homosexuals. This book is part of that "treatment." It attempts to scare young people, to get them to act sick, and to present themselves as sick because they are morally offensive to people like the Benners, who can tolerate some homosexual experimentation among adolescents—as the educated liberals they are—but believe that anyone who finds homosexual relationships preferable to heterosexual ones is to act as *if* he or she were sick.

I have spent considerable space demonstrating the new techniques that society is using, which are adjusted to appear to include new psychological information. Any direct understanding of it upsets their ability simply to rely on absolutes, pieties, and rules. Young people resist overt indoctrination, so more subtle means must be used. But the ends are the same. Stimulate fear. Reinforce socially acceptable limits as the primary, safest, and most acceptable way to channel sexual desires. Mention punishments and pain—even illness—as the penalty for deviations from socially acceptable limits. Keep the real issues undercover, concealed beneath a mystification process that treats sex as a cross between biological facts and learning to adjust to social norms; adjusting is, after all, *obviously* the best thing to do for everyone concerned.

These tactics are part of an insidious, constant effort by almost all authorities to mystify young people's minds. Once they are intimidated and confused about sexuality, they will spontaneously act in contradictory and unconscious ways, eventually experiencing great difficulty in their relationships with others. This will fulfill the prophesy of adults: if you don't

stay within socially acceptable limits, you will get into trouble. Since "trouble" is never specified, *any* difficulties fulfill the promise. Clear thinking about relationships—the ability to sort out the contradictions and socially conditioned patterns that do not reflect the authentic desires of the individual and to make decisions that do—is a skill most young people will never achieve. The ones who do usually throw themselves outside of the taboo boundaries, experience incredible turmoil and disintegration (of their "programmed" self), and then begin a slow reintegration process, including in their attitudes, relationships, and lifestyle elements that they know do feel right to them. To become healthy in our society means first to go mad and then to find your own way back to center.

Sexuality: The Struggle for Power

The rejection of the body creates limits, or taboos, that not only fragment the consciousness of the individual, but also continually come into conflict with authentic desires and needs—conflict that is experienced intrapsychically and interpersonally. As one struggles to maintain limits, the needs and desires repressed by the limits intensify. The fear of sexuality transforms sexual relationships into a struggle for power. The individual seeks to avoid intimacy, openness, and pleasure while simultaneously manipulating others into being love objects. Genuine intimacy involves responsibility and the willingness to surrender complete control over oneself. Yet complete control over one's body and thoughts, through repression and other limits, has been a lifelong means of defending the individual against anxiety and punishment. Instead, the individual seeks to bind the other to him, and to extend controls over him, rather than to cease to need to be controlling. The struggle for control has three aspects that I will briefly discuss: (1) dependency, (2) sex roles and ritual behavior, and (3) manipulation.

First, let's consider dependency—the promise that all needs will be met by the other if one will only do what is expected of her or him. All of us live interdependently with each other. By negotiating exchanges, sharing, and mutually defining relationships, the independent person meets his or her own needs, but through the cooperation of others. Dependency is a false form of interdependency. The authority figure promises, in ambiguous and future terms, to meet the needs of the dependent person, who, implicitly, cannot meet these needs *in any other way*. The dependent person (who is all of us at one time or another) experiences emptiness, need, loneliness. Consequently, the dependent person is desperate, tantalized by the promise of satisfaction (and perhaps by a few crumbs), yields autonomy, and allows the other to control the relationship. The oppressive family develops dependency as a means of controlling the children.

The critical institution in the transition from ape to man, the link between man's sexual and social organization, is parenthood, with the prolonged maintenance of children in a condition of helpless dependence. . . . Parenthood implies family organization of some sort or another, and that family organization is the nucleus of all social organization. . . .

The infant's objective dependence on parental, especially maternal, care promotes a dependent attitude toward reality and inculcates a passive (dependent) need to be loved, which colors all subsequent interpersonal relationships. This psychological vulnerability is subsequently exploited to extract submission to social authority and to the reality-principle in general.²⁴

The passive need to be loved, as opposed to the active *loving*, is basic to any understanding of the power struggle in any relationship, particularly of the struggle of young people to learn to survive sexually in an oppressive society. The need to avoid loneliness propels young people toward each other in a clinging way, just as anxiety prevents them from being open and tender. Sexual relationships become a desperate attempt to be close to someone who can meet the individual's need to belong to someone and be loved, taken care of, and gratified;

they also become attempts to deal with the converse—the fear of being weak, vulnerable, exploited, and rejected. Young people have a disturbing tendency to become too close, in the possessive and clinging fashion they call love, or to be too distant and remote. Either way, dependency vitiates the sexuality of both individuals and becomes the context for the power struggle for dominance that occupies so much of people's romances.

The paradox of the dependency relationship is that although each individual seeks to meet his or her needs through loving a more complete other, cultural conditioning attempts to make the orthodox love affair a matter of domination and submission. We tend to think of the dominator as powerful and complete, while the submissive individual is weak and inadequate, a false conception. The dependency relationship is the ground upon which the passive and dominant roles are acted out. Both *need* the other to feel complete.

The fragmentation of the body leaves the individual experiencing himself or herself as *incomplete*. He or she seeks completion through others, since his or her own fragments are part of the not me or the bad me and reaching for them occasions anxiety or guilt. The other may be seen as complete and whole because the anxiety and guilt is not associated with his or her body, but with one's own. Yet one cannot regain a sense of completeness through another. The idolization is a projection, a mapping of internal needs onto external objects. The ideal—the idol—is always beyond the grasp of the person. Many people pursue an imaginary ideal being, although they secretly believe that if they met their ideal, he or she would reject *them*, they fail to realize it is they who reject themselves. They cannot be satisfied with any real person, and so they end relationships vaguely dissatisfied and yearning for "freedom." They are trapped in themselves, and the strain of being torn between the other and the idol becomes too stressful. They have to leave in order to be "free" to seek the idol. If they are with someone whom they may have greatly desired in the

beginning, they feel trapped because they *may* see in someone else the ideal person and be unable to seek him or her out because they are already in a relationship—therefore fearing they will be permanently incomplete.

Many intense feelings are connected to the ideal image of the other. Whenever the person meets someone who appears to be the ideal, he falls madly in love. The intensity of his feelings is real, and given time his feelings may become integrated with the real other, but at first he is merely projecting need onto his ideal. After a period of time, he becomes *disillusioned*. He sees the discrepancy between his ideal and the real person. He may resent the real person, feeling tricked or used or let down. He may seek to appreciate the other as real, or he may leave to seek elsewhere a sense of completeness.

Mike and Patti have a dependent relationship. It was "love at first sight." Neither can "live" without the other. They are "mad" about each other. Each feels that the other is "too good to be true." Their worst fear is that they will "lose each other." They are together all the time, usually having intimate physical relations. Sex is "the greatest ever" and "cosmic." Patti considers Mike a part of herself. "Without him," she says, "I just wouldn't be myself." She believes that Mike makes her complete. Mike says that Patti is his "better half" and refers to her occasionally as "someone I couldn't do without." "He says whatever I need to hear whenever I'm down," Patti proclaims proudly. Mike is extremely jealous of Patti, and Patti is envious of any girl to whom Mike talks. Mike says he is afraid that someone will "take her away from me." This expression indicates that he is not concerned with her choosing to leave, but with her being taken away, as if she were an object that someone was stealing from him—a valued possession. Patti is afraid that Mike will leave her "when he finds out how worthless I am." Mike is always telling Patti that he loves her. Patti feels valued as an object, not for what she is inside, but outside. She feels physically desired, but fears Mike's really getting to know her. Her real self she believes to be cruel,

hostile, rejecting, and ugly. Patti often does not want to make love with Mike, but feels that she has to. She would rather be "liked for myself." Mike feels that he has to make love to Patti or "she'd be crushed. She needs it." This relationship is a year old. Both say, "we're closer than ever to what we've always wanted." The other day Patti expressed a desire to become involved with another man, but she was afraid of "what it would do to Mike." Asked what she was most afraid of, she said: "He'd break down . . . fall apart." Each of their statements reflects the aspects of their relationship about which both are anxious: their dependency on each other as ideal objects to complete their incomplete selves.

Sexism: A False Duality

Young people are continually confounded in their relationships by the contradiction between their sex roles and their feelings. Sex roles, by prescribing certain characteristics, make young men and women feel compelled to act in certain ways and to feel guilty if they don't. Boys are to be active, aggressive, dominant, controlling, and competitive, and they are to inhibit their feelings. They are *a/ways* to appear strong and self-controlled, even when inside they are sad or frightened. Girls are to be passive, indirect, dependent, weak, incompetent, irrational, and emotional. Certainly, boys should always want sex, while girls must deny sexual urges. Boys can "look for a piece of ass"; girls are to be innocent and virginal.

The incredible contradictions created by the conflict between sex roles and authentic feelings are a major source of crises for young people. Linda, a fifteen-year-old girl, ran away from home. She met a boy whom she felt very sexually aroused by, although she didn't want to make love. Actually, making love was rarely pleasurable for her; she felt used. But she enjoyed foreplay very much; during forplay, it was much more likely that the boy would be trying to stimulate her rather than satisfying himself. Because of her concept of what she ought

to do—since she is a girl—Linda could not come right out and ask the boy to have a sexual relationship with her. Indeed, she had been taught that nice girls don't have any sex until they are married. This was a strong taboo with her.

She resolved the contradiction in three steps. First, she told the boy how frightened she was that he might try something, and she described some things that she feared he might try. Although appearing frightened, Linda was also putting ideas in the boy's head, if they weren't already there. Then she added that she had had boys force themselves on her before. She had been "raped," as she put it, but when she said this, she smiled. The boy became interested in her smiling while describing being raped—raped in several different cases. "You're not going to rape me, are you?" she suddenly said in angry, apprehensive tones. "No," he responded appropriately. "I wouldn't want to have intercourse with you," she added, with a slight pause, "because I'm not supposed to do things like that." This implied that the only reason she wouldn't was the rule. Then she talked about being raped, and how different boys would do this and that, *even though she didn't want them to*. Finally, the boy asked the right question: "Why didn't you stop them?"

Linda smiled, as if fondly remembering the incidents, "Oh, I tried to, but they were too pushy. They wouldn't take no for an answer. They kept on touching me. Finally, I just had to give in." The boy caught on and began to touch Linda. The second step was to act as if he wasn't touching her at all, while physically responding to the touches in positive ways. She looked out the window, read a magazine, and, in general, acted as if he wasn't in the room. The boy, in order to get a response, touched her more aggressively and began moving under her clothing. After a few minutes she said "Stop" and began to move away very slightly. He laughed nervously but continued to feel her body. "Stop, I said!" While she said this she smiled, but her tone of voice was emphatic. "Don't you hear me, I want you to stop. What do you think you are doing,

raping me?" "Yes," the boy answered, playfully. After a few more half-hearted attempts to "stop" the boy, Linda finally said (step number three), "Well, I guess there is nothing I can do to stop you," undid her clothes, and "allowed" the boy to continue to excite her.

If Linda were able to break out of sex roles, the necessity for creating the illusion that she was not responsible for sexual relationships, that she didn't desire sex, and that she was continually forced upon by boys would not be there. She could accept, without shame and guilt, the fact that she had sexual desires and needs, and she could act upon them in any relationship the way she wanted to.

Orin, a young boy about fourteen, was intensely in love with a boy who had left town. There were a few exchanges of letters, then nothing. Orin wanted to know if he should try to see the boy or forget the entire thing. In exploring his hesitancy about pursuing the friendship and love affair, Orin mentioned that the boy was not a homosexual. *He* was, he thought, but he didn't want to make the other embarrassed or ashamed. Here a boy was trapped by a stigma attached to his homosexuality. He was afraid that it would frighten other boys, and even though this had nothing whatsoever to do with his needs or desires, it created a fear within him that prevented him from having satisfactory relationships with others who were not part of his circle. He was encouraged to go to see the friend. If his friend couldn't handle it, then that was the friend's problem. There was nothing dangerous or harmful about liking or loving someone, even of the same sex, and he needn't have acted as if there was.

Sex roles create a compulsive quality in many relationships that supersedes real feelings. Boys, anxious to be men, obsess themselves about what moves to make when, when they are with girls. At the same time the girls are likely to be wondering how far they should let a boy go and whether they'll get into trouble or not. The high level of anxiety, created by the need for maneuvering within the relationship, prevents learning and

openness. Neither boys nor girls are finding most adolescent relationships very positive—only hurtful, confusing, and trivial. There is nothing in their ages or in their level of maturity that creates such decrepit products of relating. They are struggling with each other largely because of binds placed upon them by dependency patterns and sex role contradictions.

Since they struggle so hard to achieve a coupling few are willing to let a coupling dissolve. Instead, fearing the hurt they will have to experience in getting to know others, boys and girls tend to cling together for security. Despite the often hostile and destructive experience of the relationship, few are willing to risk being lonely (in terms of sex role assumptions, an interpersonal failure) or finding someone else (and risk being used, rejected, or overpowered). The preference that people show for coupling is often not due to the intrinsic satisfactions of the couple relationship—there appear to be few—but to what they avoid by being part of a couple. Girls and boys both talk about how they always have someone to be with, to go places with, to hang out with, to talk to over the phone after returning home, to look forward to and *who knows them*. To be outside of a couple is to be alone and a stranger.

Small groups have been an alternative to sexual coupling, or, with girls, coupling with another girl. The alternatives are no less damaging. While she is a member of a close group, the person avoids sexual relationships and, therefore, does not learn (or at least have the potential for learning) from the experiences. Yet if they do couple they leave the peer group or friend, unless it is convenient to remain. Both groups and close friends are primarily ways of passing the time between coupling, a pattern that continues through adulthood unless deliberately broken. It is one or the other, with the priority always to the couple. Too much of our sexual and personal identity is synonymous with being part of a couple. The other person, or members of the group to a lesser extent, is invariably hurt by the sudden and often complete loss of what was

previously a close and constant friendship when the other leaves to couple. Yet the binds we place on each other in relationships prevent most couples from relating equally and fairly with outsiders. Couples, therefore, seek other couples—a disaster for the lonely individual who breaks with his other, since they no longer have the old circle of friends.

Sex roles, even when the individual can work through the tendency to dominate or comply with others and to be oppressive in other ways, still provide the basic assumption that one is complete only with another, that is, in a couple. The compulsive need to couple destroys the individual's sense of center and autonomy. In a relationship he or she is fulfilled, yet outside the relationship he or she has more friends, does more varied activities, and generally has more energy for creativity. Yet he or she is also wracked by loneliness, feelings of incompleteness, and needs that obsess his or her mind. The contradiction often produces depression and lethargy alternating with bursts of enthusiasm and energy.

Young people establish two general patterns because of sex role assumptions. First, they establish a primary coupling. Whatever else and whoever else they are involved with depends on the primary coupling's parameters. Or, second, the individual begins alternating between being alone and being in a couple. Such an individual is often, when alone, compulsively and obsessively seeking an other to complete himself. They enter couplings during periods of energy and exuberance, and they withdraw when they become depressed by the routine of coupling styles. They assume that the other person "wasn't enough" and look elsewhere. Even when they marry, these people continue to look elsewhere, often becoming divorced in order to be free really to look. The ideal is always to find completion in a couple. An illusion! One can only escape oppression by being whole and unfragmented, not by finding another to complete the picture. Unfortunately, ritual behavior is far less obvious to discover than the particular

characteristics of a sex role, which can be identified, listed, and changed if one takes the trouble to do so.

Manipulation

Young people grow up in oppressive environments. They learn many strategies to satisfy their needs indirectly, while still appearing, at least, to be behaving according to the expectations of the other. It should come as no surprise that when they attempt to relate to each other, the strategies and tactics that they have been depending on to keep themselves safe and secure are relied upon. Adolescents have difficult relationships with each other because they use oppressive maneuvers that each recognizes and fears, while they fall back on defensive reactions that each has contempt for, since that is the way they behave with authority figures.

Since neither the boy nor the girl really has economic or social advantages beyond those that each gives to the other based on their respective sex roles, and these don't last long, the relationship usually becomes either a stalemate or a struggle to manipulate each other. The difficulties in the relationship are often overshadowed by the much more strenuous task of having the relationship at all, given the pressures from society to prevent coupling. With no place to go, no privacy at home, and public private areas patrolled by police, young people often have difficulty being physically close. If they are so in public, often it is with some embarrassment (although adults probably don't think so anymore since they are used to seeing so much public contact).

The pressures against the couple simultaneously keep them together, and create turmoil inside the relationship. These pressures keep the couple on guard. The fact that they are against the world, in some sense, and alone together gives the relationship an almost heroic cast. The fact that a couple exists per se is a sign that both are attractive, lovable, and masculine and feminine people (respectively), and it is another reason

that difficulties are rarely evidenced. The couple has too much to lose by showing stress between them.

Yet oppressive sexuality often creates a relationship that is based on horrendous interpersonal behavior. Gerri, a very attractive fifteen year old, feared losing boyfriends. She would immediately become actively, sensuously, and aggressively sexual as soon as a boy indicated that he was losing interest. This form of bribery contrasted with the other form she used to attract boys—offering, but not giving, sexual pleasures. The cost to Gerri was the belief that she was a slut, the defeat of losing the boy anyway but his bragging about his conquest, the loss of respect of her friends, and the need to conceal her fearful, unhappy, and tortuous affairs from her parents.

Carlos, a counterpart to Gerri, would threaten girls with whom he managed to develop a close relationship. Using various blackmail strategies like, "I'll leave if you don't come across," and outright threats of violence ("I'll make you sorry if you don't"), Carlos demonstrated his manhood and secured satisfactions that ranged from a deep-seated conviction that no woman wanted a sexual relationship with him, that he was incredibly inadequate and unattractive, and that women were really no good and couldn't be trusted to empty boasting about his conquests.

On a more subtle level, we find people like Henry, who was fearful of being hurt and constantly talking to girls but never listening. He would eventually end up boring girls or making them feel rejected, they would leave him, and he would be convinced that girls only pretended to like him. After giving of himself, he believed, they would say good-bye. There was nothing in him that people wanted. This tactic of acting as if there is no one else there is an indirect expression of contempt. Unfortunately, Henry met Angel, who liked to listen. She would listen and listen. Finally, after Henry eventually grew to trust her, *he* wanted to listen. Angel and Henry would sit together for hours saying nothing, except for the half-hearted attempts by Henry to break the silence. Then she left

him, convinced that he didn't want to relate to her anymore. This is an extreme form of withholding, yet it is one that distorts the beginnings of many relationships in less disastrous forms.

Jim and Barbara argued about different things. Jim would say to Barbara, "You don't know what you are talking about. You don't even believe what you are saying." By casting doubts on Barbara's sanity, Jim invalidates her positions and makes her believe that something is wrong with her. She retaliates by invalidating herself: "I must be stupid. I don't know enough." This makes Jim feel guilty. Making another feel guilty through the deprecation of self is a fine rebuttal. Jim, never to be outmaneuvered, will offer a form of mystification. He will discuss the issue until Barbara is practically in tears from his castigation. Then he will triumphantly assume that he is correct because of how emotional she has become. Barbara now has to contend with a sense of loss and a feeling of inadequacy, all attributable to her "overemotional" state of mind. This tautology leaves Jim's behavior above reproach.

Barbara, convinced she needs an ally, goes into therapy. She is, she explains, unable to control her emotions, stupid, and irrational. She gradually introduces the topic of her lover, Jim. As he becomes more and more the topic of conversation, the therapist reveals to her how much rage and frustration he causes her. She says, "He's really a bastard, isn't he?" The therapist says nothing, not wanting to be partial. She goes home and says to Jim, "My therapist (ally) agrees with me. You are a bastard." Jim, becoming infuriated with the therapist, tells her not to see him anymore. "He's taking sides, and he's supposed to be objective." Barbara has hurt Jim, but she has managed to focus his attention elsewhere.

In other words, there are literally hundreds of oppressive issue-avoiding tactics that one can use in a relationship. Young people, particularly, are inclined to use rather infantile ones: they whine, complain, beg, seduce, punish, isolate, confine, threaten, intimidate, and more. These tactics are infantile in

the sense that the young person calls upon the repertoire he has learned in the family (like throwing temper tantrums of one degree or another) to cope with his needs from the other person. The fact that such painful relationships go unnoticed (young people avoid psychotherapy, for the most part, because they distrust adult authorities or, at least, their own capacity to protect themselves from an adult's pressure), except through specific letters to columnists like Ann Landers or occasional indirect comments by young people when they are in some sort of problem-solving relationship with adults, is a tragedy. Young people fail to learn how to establish mutually satisfying, nonoppressive relationships without preoccupying struggles and maneuvers.

The superficiality of adult conceptions about youth's relationships and their dilemmas surrounding sexuality is astounding. Of course, their problems are really just like adults'. Of course, the problems cannot be dealt with by the few social bromides many advisors give them, nor by facts instead of methods of thinking through issues, nor by the pretenses of adults that everything is all right if we don't see Judy pregnant—and Peter? But is there any sign that boys have difficulty in sexual relationships at all? No symptoms, no problems, right? Of course, sexuality is extremely complex and difficult in its own right. But look at the repression of the body, the inculcation of sex roles, the establishment of patterns of interpersonal behavior characterized by manipulation, the mystification of young people's consciousness rendering many of them incapable of problem solving, the inculcation of dependency needs and behavior, the hostility toward young people evidenced by the lack of privacy granted them, the lack of place in society, and the absence of viable, meaningful activities for most youth. Aren't we really doing everything possible to ensure, however unintentionally, that young people enter adulthood as helpless, confused, threatened, and frustrated as possible? And worse, as alone as possible.

5

THE DIALECTIC of OPPRESSION

The meaning of *oppression* can be suggested in a variety of ways. Oppression is a psychic process in which a person attempts to cope with his fear and anxiety through the sacrifice of another's freedom. It is a process that struggles toward a homeostatic solution and an entirely controlled situation where all choices are predetermined, orderly, and, therefore, completely expected. Oppression seeks the cessation of feeling, or passion, through the imposition of limits on thinking, feeling, self-expression, and behavior in the vain hope that these limits will defend the individual against the terror and anxiety he experiences in changing, unpredictable, and, therefore, potentially or actually threatening situations. The extreme consequences of oppression are the psychic equivalent of death. Oppression is an interpersonal dynamic, yet the product of oppressive relationships is self-oppression, an intrapsychic process.

Another way of seeing oppression is as a turning away from change, from personal growth, and from risks to a means of

interacting and being-in-the-world that is static. The individual stops *learning* and begins to act as *if* the result of a situation were already determined—as if there were a pattern or map to follow that would avoid the element of risk and threat and that would lead the person to his goals: fulfillment, pleasure, peace, whatever. The individual who stops learning in any situation sacrifices his ability to *choose* what he will be (act, think, feel, express, understand, respond to) and creates the delusion that, in fact, he cannot choose—that he is not responsible for what he does or for what happens. He assumes the stance of a person who is little more than an object, simply doing whatever he must—a victim of circumstance, doing the “best” that he is able in trying times.

Oppression is a process and may be inferred in people from the way they act, express themselves, or react to different circumstances. But it is also *praxis*—that is, what is occurring in the group can be traced to the behavior of the participants.

The behavior of people in any oppressive situation can be discussed in terms of the roles the various individuals assume. For our purposes there are two: the *oppressor*, who imposes limits on others and punishes and hurts them in the process, and the *oppressed*, who seeks and accepts limits imposed on him and is willing to suffer these limits rather than the much greater risks he perceives in freedom. Each role can be broken down into strategies, but in any situation where there are no clear polarities, there ensues a power struggle. People attempt to seek power over others and, thereby, assume the role of an oppressor, or they attempt to *act as if* someone or something has power, and therefore they are not responsible for their own actions. They are controlled.

The outcome of fear and anxiety need not be the attempt to impose, or have imposed upon one's self, limits as a means of defense. Once people realize that the choice between oppression and autonomy does exist, the fact that many people *want* and even believe they *need* oppression will become a major social tragedy. However, it is important for those who do want

freedom and growth to learn how *not* to be seduced into oppression as a defense against fear, since our society is predicated on power, on profit, and most of all, on instilling and reinforcing fear and psychic impoverishment in everyone, including, and most particularly, the young.

Freedom

There is freedom only in a *situation*.¹

The philosopher who speaks most directly to the concept of freedom violated in the oppressive situation is Jean-Paul Sartre.

Man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. We are taking the word "responsibility" in its ordinary sense as "consciousness [of] being the incontestable author of an event or of an object." In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it, for the very worst disadvantages or the worse threats which can endanger my person have meaning only in and through my project; and it is on the ground of the engagement which I am that they appear. It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are.²

This is a radical assertion. On the personal level, as in Gestalt therapy, phrases like "I *can't* understand this" may be transformed into "I *won't* understand this," and "I don't know," or may become "I don't want to know." The oppressed is transformed from a passive object subjected to external forces that determine his or her behavior and feelings to an active being who may choose to remain unaware of some aspect of experience or who may choose to not do something rather than to plead, "I can't." The limitations that we put on our awareness,

our experiences, our emotions, and our actions are, in the sense of man's freedom Sartre suggests, our own.

Someone will say "I did not ask to be born." This is a naïve way of throwing greater emphasis on our facticity. I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore everything takes place as if I were compelled to be responsible. I am *abandoned* in the world, not in the sense that I might remain abandoned and passive in a hostile universe like a board floating on the water, but rather in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help. . . . To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon Others is still to choose myself.³

In a sense, man is alone, but he is capable of acting or choosing, even to choose not to act, not to feel, not to be. Oppression results from man's fear and anxiety regarding his freedom to choose and his freedom to be or not to be.

A strong statement can be made: the primary malfunction of the growth process, the creation of dysfunctional behavior patterns, comes from the family, school, and community influences on the child that reflect the widely held assumption that development must be frustrated and channeled into preformed molds and that deviation from socially acceptable limits must be punished. The product of limiting, oppressive interactions is a child who becomes increasingly involved with oppressive modes as a defense against anxiety and fear. The child's choice, then, is restricted to being either the oppressed or the oppressor.

As the child develops and the parents begin to assume the role of "Parents"—that is, they begin to socialize the child—they often simultaneously *withdraw* from the child in terms of tenderness, intimacy, openness, and the sharing of pleasure. Instead, parents become largely punitive, rejecting, judgmental and distant, in order to fulfill their role and make sure that the child grows up properly. Anxiety first arises in the normal course of development as an empathetic response to mother. "Anxiety about *anything* in the mother induces anxiety in the

infant."⁴ Maturation creates a growing aloneness, a sense of enforced distance, and the more the parents withdraw affection and validation of the child, the more this aloneness will be synonymous with anxiety and powerlessness. The child will develop defenses against rejection or threats of other kinds. The primary defense is an artificially created crisis or emergency.

We believe that in the interests of socialization—an attempt on the part of the parents to do what is best for their child so that he will grow up properly—autonomy is often sacrificed. Children, in defending themselves against the withdrawal of tenderness and various pressures conform to attitudes, feelings, limits, and means of self-expression acceptable to the parents. It is not the *fear of freedom* that makes him conform, or at least not only the fear of freedom, *but the anxiety* related to any rejection, invalidation, threat, or punishment to the child that may be tied into the idea of being free—i.e., resisting parents' efforts to mold personality, or the pressures from school and the community. The various attempts to defend oneself by avoiding personal responsibility lead to a disorganized and often malfunctioning personality.

The child is a being who requires support—that is, the affirmation and confirmation of his or her being—in order to grow. The child needs affirmation in the sense of validation, a consensus that he is of worth, and confirmation in the sense that he is an independent viable organism, that he is real, and that he is separate. Parents try to control their children as if they were extensions of themselves: "my child," and the like. The child learns to suffuse his identity into that of the parents' in order to avoid the pain of rejection, invalidation, and punishment. Pain threatens both the physical and psychic existence of an individual, and it does so in a perverse way; for some people, pain becomes *the only way* they can feel at all. The dialectical relationship between dependency and freedom, and between the role of child and the role of parent eventually

becomes the model for the relationship between the individual and society.

A child does not give up the idea of freedom when she is oppressed. She has no idea or experience of autonomy; she has only, perhaps, a need to escape the particular pressures of home. I am not talking here of the freedom in the crude sense, which may more properly be called license or chaos. Both are usually confused with real freedom. According to Sartre, freedom

means only the autonomy of choice. It is necessary, however, to note that the choice, being identical with acting, supposes a commencement of realization in order that the choice may be distinguished from the dream and the wish. Thus we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of a prison, which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape.⁵

The distinction must be made between limits that facilitate growth and move the person toward the goals he or she seeks and limits that are oppressive. The distinction is simple but controversial. Limits that a person sets for him or herself, in a particular situation or for a particular kind of situation, are nonoppressive when he or she can set them without the fear or anxiety that attends the failure to do so or the failure to accept limits set by others in the situation. Every act chooses, every movement defines, every action is a limit, since it removes alternatives from that space and time. Limit setting is facilitative, or it is oppressive—in other words, it leads either to growth or to disintegration. The problem is not to discover whether something is or is not oppressive (or free), since both freedom and oppression are situationally defined: They are a continuum. Moreover, in some situations anxiety becomes confused with authentic desire to the point where the choice to set a limit or to persuade another (a child, for instance) that the limit is valid is neither clearly free or clearly oppressive.

The question of whether or not a limit is oppressive must be answered by examining *motivation* (desire or defense), the *context* in which a decision is made (safe and supportive, ambiguous or potentially threatening, or explicitly or implicitly unsafe and anxiety provoking at the moment), and the choice of *method or process* for setting the limit for oneself or another. It is only by an understanding of these aspects of any situation that we can say yes, it is oppressive or no, it is not. Any situation can, because of constant change, sometimes facilitate growth and at other times impose oppressive limits.

Learning

Learning is discovery.⁶

There seem to be two kinds of learning. First, there is the learning that occurs in a safe, supportive, affirmative environment; in it, the child or person can be what he feels in the interactions he has with others, a state that encourages experimentation. Second, there is the learning that occurs in a fearful and anxiety-creating situation, where there is pressure from someone in authority or from someone who has power. It is clear to almost everyone that learning in an atmosphere of anxiety is counterproductive. The anxious person panics and becomes erratic and indiscriminate. His sense of integrity, his ability to be reflective, and his capacity to choose between alternatives on the basis of his own feelings rather than the need to protect himself against rejection, invalidation, or punishment are all prevented. But learning does occur in oppressive situations—the point is, what kind of learning?

It can be suggested that children learn a broad range of responses to their environment that can be classified as *imitative*. However, this imitation, under anxiety-provoking circumstances, is not selective and reflective of the individual's personality; rather, it is compulsive and all-encompassing—it is internalization, a defensive process, as opposed to identifica-

tion. Perhaps learning occurs in two modalities: (1) *identification*, in which the child associates positive feelings with a particular aspect of a person or a person's image, and (2) *internalization*, in which there is fear or anxiety, and more unselective and indiscriminate learning takes place. The mother, or the Other, creates anxiety by moving away and by being rejecting, invalidating, or punitive. Therefore, the child is driven to find a way of minimizing alienation in order to reduce the tension of the anxiety, satisfy his primary and secondary needs, and create an intimate, open relationship (again). Internalization is stumbled onto; it is an "as if" performance, in which the child learns to conceal his true feelings by acting *as if* he either does not have them or, having to admit them, *as if* the feelings and actions were caused by a superior force.

The importance of internalization is simply that under conditions of fear and anxiety, the individual learns the entire situation he is in, and as a means of defense, he imposes this "map" onto similar, and presumably threatening, situations. Learning is limited to defensive, ritualistic superimpositions of past events onto present events, feelings, or perceptions. It is oppressive, since it prevents the individual from responding to the here and now; instead, he responds to anxiety resulting from "anticipatory catastrophes" based on his experiences. For the anxiety is "learned," or internalized, along with the defense against anxiety that was found effective, the action of the individual who created the anxiety, and, possibly, the *other* reactions that the individual had had previously but had found less effective or was less willing to use. Regression is simply the retreat back into one's past to find the most effective defense against something that is too threatening to the most immediate (closest in time) and desirable defenses (socially acceptable) that the individual has in his repertoire.

A direct result of comprehensive defensive systems is the restriction of the individual to primarily defensive behavior

patterns. If a person is unable to resolve the initial experience that led to the anxiety and the internalized pattern, he will tend to repeat his defensive maneuvers in any situation remotely resembling the first. These unfinished situations, Fritz Perls suggests, must "always emerge and can be dealt with"; otherwise, "we function badly and we carry hundreds and thousands of unfinished situations with us."⁷ This situation creates frustration, helplessness, and apathy as a matter of course.

I would suggest that oppressing someone is an act of aggression; it is done because there is no acceptable alternative for the release of aggression available, and no process is being created to find an acceptable alternative. Aggression as oppression creates frustration and, therefore, leads to further aggression. Frustration is a response to the blocking of one's feelings and of one's alternatives—to the sense of being trapped without even understanding exactly how one is trapped or at whom one should be angry. This aggression is a diffused and indiscriminate striking out against everything, including one's self. The individual feels constrained to act in a particular way—"I *have* to do this" or "I *should* do this"—regardless of what he or she wants to do. Anxiety and fear predominate the situation, and no matter how benevolent the authority may appear, the situation is only *relatively* free compared to a situation where no expression or aggression is permitted, for example, a classroom.

In any situation where the young person (or anyone) cannot "ask questions" or where he is taught to ask, from the point of view of his own needs, the *wrong* questions so that no meaningful or useful answers can be discovered, in that situation the person is oppressed. The attempt to warp consciousness in such a way that the individual only "discovers" answers that are provided by authority is a form of indoctrination and a manipulation of consciousness and the need for belonging toward behavior and thinking processes consistent with the needs and desires of those in power.

Characteristics of Defenses

Any limit can be used as a way of ordering reality so that the person is able to move directly toward his goals. Limits provide a sense of stability and give a person a way of measuring progress, as well as a way of functioning more effectively. All of us can use limits in a healthy way. But we can also use them defensively. Even this may be useful; for example, a person may limit the amount of liquor he drinks so that he will be less likely to have an accident or do something he will regret later. Defenses are not, in themselves, negative uses of limits. We suggest that defensive uses of limits have certain "built in" characteristics, however, that severely lessen their usefulness to a person, particularly over time. Our rough assumption is that the more a limit is imposed on a person from any source including his "self" in a way that negates his authentic needs and desires, the less it is helpful, regardless of whether the intention behind the limit is to make the person do the "right" thing or to protect him from possible dangers. Furthermore, we believe that the more inflexible the defensive limit, the more it inhibits the person's growth. Any limit may be perceived as defensive in the sense that it diminishes anxiety, and limits choices (both critical decisions and attendant anxiety), and creates a static, unchanging sense of reality that induces the illusion of predictability of events and, therefore, control against threats and danger. Finally, the more a limit necessitates itself, independently of the actual situation that created the need or desire for the limit, the more the defensive system oppresses the individual, divorcing him from experience.

Let us take an example. A young girl, thirteen years old and just developing breasts, is told by her mother not to let anyone touch her breasts; indeed the implication is often that the girl should not pay undue attention to them, either. This creates a limit, with attendant anxiety. First, there is the fear of being touched that is based on the expectation that something bad will happen. Second, there is the anxiety concerned with the

mother's disapproval of the event, particularly if it appears that the girl *has let* it happen and, in effect, has rejected the mother's limits and feelings. The act of letting a boy touch her, therefore, is a rejection of the mother—in this specific sense. Now, to the extent that the mother is anxious, the daughter will also be anxious. If the mother implies threats and a negative attitude without specifying the consequences, the girl's fear or anxiety will be even greater, since she knows that something bad is going to happen but doesn't know what. If she knew, she could evaluate the prospective danger, weigh its consequences against what she might get out of it, determine the probability of the danger actually happening, and act according to her judgment.

Now, given that there is a certain amount of anxiety connected with letting a boy touch her breasts, this girl must set a limit. The problem becomes where and under what conditions. Logically, the limit must be placed before a person actually touches her breasts; therefore, she must become attentive to the possibility that someone is about to act in a particular way. She becomes suspicious and, if the anxiety is high, paranoid. She begins to withdraw her breasts from sight and contact by crossing her arms on her chest. She begins to act defensively and to set limits in any situation, such as a date, where the possibility is present. She must also limit any feelings of desire for caresses. Having her breasts touched becomes the one thing she must want not to have happen or allow to happen. She must repress her feelings and preoccupy her thoughts with avoiding contact. She carries her books across her chest in hallways in school and keeps her coat on when she is alone with a boy. She becomes preoccupied with the thoughts of boys—do they want to touch her? Is that why they are being nice? She acts cold and sets up elaborate tests to see if she can really trust them. If her breasts are touched, she freezes, unwilling to move, since she must not allow herself to appear desirous of this forbidden event; even if she actually does not want to be touched, she cannot afford herself

the luxury of just appearing stimulated or moved through the action.

In order to function, the girl must create a ritual, an unconscious pattern of habit that defends against the possibility of being touched so that she can go along and live from day to day without being so anxious that she is afraid to move. This ritualized life style has built in cues; she foresees certain relatively dangerous situations, and whenever there is the possibility of danger, her anxiety level goes up and she responds defensively and automatically. Her personality has become centered around her primary anxiety, which is associated not with any real event and not with the situation, but with the limit in her mind. She is perpetually defensive, only more so in particularly threatening situations.

The limit ceases to be helpful and, in fact, becomes oppressive. She must either seek the lowest level of excitement or activity possible—the ritual of conformity—or she must break out of the limit by rebelling against her mother and letting, even encouraging, boys to touch her. She must conceal the activity so that she will not be discovered by fragmenting herself into a good me (visible) and a bad me (concealed). This may lead to guilt, which pushes her back toward conformity, which, in turn, pushes her back to letting it happen. She is in conflict. She may become fragmented in other ways; for example, she may let boys touch her but act as if she wasn't being touched. She may experience extreme anxiety but still be unable to choose between fears of loneliness (being rejected by boys as "frigid") and being "bad." Thus, she is paralyzed and "taken advantage of"; in other words, she allows the boys themselves to decide. Their decisions depend on their aggressiveness and their disregard of her fear. This in turn frightens her and increases her self-contempt and her fear and hatred toward boys, whom she considers as being exploitive and treating her like an object.

Finally, the creation of a limit that conflicts either with someone else's desires or with hers leads to a need for control

and power. Conversely, threats to her limit create a feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability. It is inevitable that the girl must become interested in the questions of power and control. She begins to concern herself with prediction (trust) and she analyzes the situation, breaking it down so that she will be able to perceive threats ahead of time. At the cost of spontaneity and responsiveness, she distances herself.

Over a period of time, the use of defensive limits leads to the gradual preoccupation of the self with defense, control, ritual, conformity, and establishing a pattern of living that minimizes anxiety. We can see the tendency of defensive patterns to generalize, and when the limit itself is associated in the person's mind with anxiety, it tends to perpetuate itself. To be effective a limit must become an element in an entire system of internal defenses against desires that include perceptual awareness of threats, conscious attention to cues that indicate a potentially threatening situation, limits correlated with the original or primary limit, and the conditions and context in which the limit applies. Limits create and tend to intensify alienation. The anxious and defensive individual becomes preoccupied with order, effective functioning (smoothness), and so on; change creates unbearable anxiety. The fearfulness is directly related to the internalized limits that create conflicts the individual is unwilling to confront directly and resolve.

The Dialectic of Oppression

We can use the word *dialectic* in two senses—first, as a method of argument that systematically analyzes contradictory patterns of behavior or ideas, with the purpose of realizing or resolving their real or apparent contradictions, through the creation of a larger frame of reference in which the contradictions are seen to be parts of a whole and second, as any contradiction between two apparently opposite forces that are in fact aspects of a larger whole and are therefore interdepen-

dent. Specifically, oppression is a whole pattern that appears as the interaction between an oppressor and an oppressed person (two "opposites"); in fact, the function of the oppressive relationship—defense against fear and anxiety—is only realized through the interaction of these two roles, roles that are interchangeable and reciprocal.

The oppression of youth is one form of the oppression dialectic; its aim is to maintain power, to perpetuate the social system, and, most important, to defend against the fear and anxiety associated with the possibility of radical or extreme changes. Any change in values necessitates the adaptation of consciousness to a new perspective of reality and to the alteration of relationships between people, lifestyles, and the social structure itself. Society and people are only stable (and secure) when the basic values remain the same; even changes in style are tolerable only because the basic form and content remain the same. No *real* change is safe; the illusion of change is preferable.

Rather than being a response to authentic needs, oppression appears out of fear. The individual reacts to fears and anxiety with limits against the source of anxiety and then attempts to impose the limits on all others who might (even inadvertently) create an analogous threat in other situations. There is a genuine need to defend against the fear, but there is also another way to do so: confront the source of the fear directly and resolve the situation in its own terms. Furthermore, one may choose to establish limits for his own defense and yet not attempt to extend his limits over others. But once people decide to satisfy their desire for a cessation or minimization of anxiety and fear by the defense of oppression, then their relationship between self and others becomes *symbiotic*.

This symbiosis depends on the establishment of an oppressor-oppressed relationship, not necessarily on having any given person or thing in either role. Consequently, oppressors may kill off many oppressed people as long as they appear to have, or really do have, alternatives. The oppressor is depen-

dent on having someone or something to oppress, but not on a particular group or person.

The drive to mastery is complemented, necessarily, by the submission of the oppressed. Submission is just one form of flight. To be an oppressor one must have some kind of power, for example, the control and ownership of resources, funds, and possessions. If we consider the role of oppressor in a nonstatic or monopolized sense, then the question which comes first, oppressor or oppressed? makes no sense. Either one comes as a response to fear, and if someone wants control or to be submissive, he may "project" his strength or weaknesses onto other people or onto a symbol. Fear occurs as a consequence of the disruption of a system; the disruption is automatically a malfunctioning in a process designed to meet critical or desired needs. This malfunctioning anticipates a frustration of those needs or, interpersonally, a possible loss of a loved one or of his or her love.

Once the self-preservation anxiety (which we assume to be a combination of fear and anxiety) is stimulated, it leads to a continual effort to maintain the status quo. Much of any social system, therefore, is oppressive and defensive.

The anxiety of self-preservation with all its refinements and accessories comes from the pattern of intrasocial balance. This is the source of the so-called perversions of the instinct of self-preservation. These perversions take the form of privilege, power, and dominance. Their true nature is frequently hidden under the anonymous devices of economic practice . . . so that no one is held personally responsible for anything. They are perversions in the sense that they do not subserve survival because they disturb cooperative endeavors, on which the success of social life depends. They can become pleasurable ends over and above their use for survival . . . killing for sport, etc. In their perverted form, these tendencies are difficult to tame, and are accompanied by powerful emotions. They are capable of diverse and subtle rationalizations. We have civilized only the means, but not the end itself.⁹

The dialectic of oppression is thus expressed in society.

Eventually, the social system becomes so complex, the interdependence so complete, that no one *feels* powerful, although some people *are* powerful in the most extreme sense of the word. Paradoxically, the dialectic exists not just *between* people, but *within* them, since their selves become fragmented by the defensive system and limits. These fragments *mirror* external relationships between oppressor and oppressed. The person internalizes a composite oppressor (whether one calls this oppressor parent, top dog, or some other term) *and* an internal composite of the oppressed (child, cry baby, underdog, or victim). In social relationships a person is usually in a role that allows him to express one side of this dialectic, leaving the other side internal.

As a society becomes more and more oppressive, the dialectic becomes clearer, but the investments of both sides of the dialectic in the defensive process lead to a distortion or avoidance of the polarization. As the society becomes more estranged from an awareness of its processes, individuals become more alienated from each other. Only in a free society, where the relations of production are centered on supporting the emergence of a *social* consciousness, a communal consciousness, can a fully realized person emerge. Continuous social changes are necessary for the development of authentic consciousness.

6

BEYOND OPPRESSION

My argument has tried to demonstrate that there is a pervasive, insidious pattern in the way our society, on all levels, relates to youth. The pattern is evident when we trace the history of "adolescence," when we analyze the position of youth in the family and in school, or when we study the development of one area of social relationships—sexuality. The pattern could be studied by examining the ways in which psychiatrists and psychologists often use their authority and power to confine young people to institutions and to justify drugged (tranquilized) states of mind and ways of thinking that cripple youths' attempts to rebel against oppressive limits, all made legitimate by reference to the words *appropriate*, *normal*, and to socially acceptable norms. Of course, these norms are reflective of the self-interest of authority figures and often have been used against young people in ways that make them suspicious of authority, limits, and power per se. The pattern could be studied through an analysis of the basic assumption behind most social science research—the need for social control, particularly of defiant youth. But instead, this chapter will be used to discuss the moral aspects of the oppression pattern,

to suggest how these patterns affect the personality of the individual and what, if anything, we can do to end or at least alleviate the oppression of youth.

Moral Issues of Oppression

The concept of oppression has been used to describe the ways that adults in positions of authority often use their power over young people. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to isolate descriptive functions of language from evaluative ones. Instead, it must be clearly stated that while my sympathies are with young people (since they suffer the most from oppression), I do not make the mistake of assuming that young people are innocent victims of evil intentions on the part of adults. This is far from what actually happens.

Generally, young people collude with oppressive adults. They are able to escape responsibility for much of what they do, they exploit the easily obtained support (economic, emotional, and so on) from adults genuinely concerned for them, they prefer indolence to activity, and they are able to manipulate oppressors sufficiently enough to manage to live comfortably, all while avoiding the responsibility for self-initiated activity. Consequently, young people in general, often exercise far less judgment, initiative, responsibility, and activity than they are prohibited from doing by the oppressive limits.

Being oppressed seems to have three consequences that should have bearing on the moral judgments of the people or actions involved. First, as oppressed people youngsters learn how to be controlling, manipulative, seductive, and threatening as a way of serving their own self-interests and of being relatively secure. Consequently, when given the opportunity, they seek to be oppressors (power struggles arise when the balance of power is approximately even, and the people involved battle to define themselves as oppressor or oppressed) or to assume the role-related behavior of the oppressor. When young people terrorize other young people, manipulate and coerce each other in sexual relationships, or act as if an adult

was oppressive in order to justify their behaving in indirect, irresponsible, and controlling ways, they are mirroring the way oppressors have treated them. But they have the choice not to do so and must share, if not accept, the burden of responsibility.

Second, oppressed youth are severely limited in their growth and are often not able, even when willing, to go outside of the rituals of the oppressed relationship. They continue to *perseverate*, or act out the oppressed role, regardless of the context or of how power is distributed. Although oppression can be dynamically expressed as behavioral patterns—for example, the technique of mystification or emotional and psychic blackmail—the reliance on these patterns does not automatically indicate that the individual is morally or spiritually convinced of the justification of oppression as a way of relating to others. Merely being able to say that someone is being oppressive, therefore, cannot be considered equivalent to saying that the person intends to be oppressive or considers oppressive behavior justifiable. This creates a paradoxical situation in which when a person is called on to be an oppressor, his response is invariably an attempt to justify or excuse such behavior. But this is a conditioned reflex, another reactive defense to protect the person from anxiety over being rejected or being found to be objectionable. Given a sense of security and an ability to reflect upon the way he or she has behaved, the person will usually agree that oppressive behavior is unwarranted and undesirable. Not giving a person this space in an attempt to condemn and punish the individual is as oppressive as whatever he or she has done.

Finally, young people usually do not have the conscious awareness of what constitutes oppressive behavior in authority figures. They intuit oppressive behavior by the fact that they feel oppressed or frustrated by another's actions and unable to act. Consequently, much of what young people do as a response to being oppressed severely in one situation is to rebel against any and all adults and authority figures in order to survive. Authority figures—for example psychotherapists—of-

ten assume that because their intentions are helpful and well meaning, rebellion against them is inappropriate and evidence of a psychologically disturbed individual. Much behavior in young people that is considered delinquent or disturbed is simply a form of rebellion, lacking a coherent ideology, and often ineffective and misdirected, but essentially a protest against a feeling of being smothered. An analysis of even benevolent therapists, or other figures, demonstrates that in many cases the rebellion is warranted from the point of view of the young person. When one is extremely sensitive to being oppressed, one is likely to react more strongly to oppression than someone who is dulled by, or reduced to accepting the necessity for, oppression. Young people designated as disturbed or delinquent usually are the ones who frighten some authority figure and make that authority figure feel out of control. Help, when it is given to youth, is often assumed to be equivalent to making the youth behave according to socially acceptable standards.

In this kind of situation, it is important to keep in mind that only an analysis of the context of the youth's behavior can allow us to judge accurately whether (1) the youth is behaving in response to oppressive reactions to him, (2) the youth is behaving in a habitual way and cannot distinguish a helpful, supportive environment from an oppressive one, or (3) the youth is using oppressed behavior to manipulate the situation and has a deep distrust and fear of others. Depending on these judgments, one would, as a therapist, social worker, teacher, concerned adult, parent, or whatever, take different steps to relate to the youth.

In trying to reach some kind of moral judgment about oppressive or oppressed people's responsibility for their condition, it is imperative that the concept of collusion, or mutuality of interests, be kept in mind. Paradoxes abound in human relationships, and certainly one of the most tragic is the fact that many people prefer and seek the role of the oppressed because they are confused about what is in their self-interest and what their own abilities may be. They seek the security of

being told what to do, and what not to do, and they enjoy the irresponsible manipulation of others that they can carry off by claiming victim status. Young people are rarely innocent victims; however unprepared they may be to be self-reliant, independent, and to rebel against oppressive limits, precisely because they have been oppressed as children, the fact remains that the choice is there. On the balance, however, in my work with families and adolescents in therapy, I would say that young people have the largest share of the suffering and limitations, despite the fact that many collude with adults' oppression of them or even turn the tables and become the oppressors themselves.

The Effects of Oppression on Personality

The description of the social, or interpersonal, aspects of oppression has one limitation: people can identify through personal experience with the issues of oppression, but the visible effects of oppression are not nearly convincing enough to ensure that our society will take steps to cope with the problem. Up to now our society has dealt with problems only because a great deal of distress was caused by the problem or because people agitated for change. Drug use, for example, caused a certain amount of attention to be paid to the need for programs directed to youth, but after the fear associated with drugs dissipated, so did the funds, programs, and attention. No impact could have been expected on the fundamental issues that youth experience as problematic, and, consequently, alcoholism has replaced drug use as a symptom of discontent and unhappiness. Because alcohol causes little social distress, and people are used to it, the increased dependence on alcohol among youth goes largely unnoticed.

Oppression surfaces among a small minority of youth through painful, desperate attempts at rebellion. This rebellion does attract some attention, since the youths involved deviate from socially accepted limits and create distress to authority figures. The reaction to deviance is substantially the same as the

problem that led to the rebellion, an attempt to overcontrol the deviant. Police, courts, and mental health professionals combine together as society's first line of defense against rebellion and dissent. Little attention is paid to whether or not the deviance is reflective of the oppression of the youth by others. The emphasis is on social control in theory and practice. Only when the youth is brought under control, and kept under control, do authorities speculate on the possible "contributing factors" to the problem. The problem, of course, is not that the youth has been badly treated by family, school, and community. The problem is that we know, because the youth is deviant, that something is wrong within the individual. What may have contributed to this remains an abstraction of concern only to professionals; it is not part of the operational definition that leads to intervention. The present operational definitions blame the victim for his own plight. Even when professionals acknowledge that the causes of the problem exist outside of the individual, the patient is still treated as if the problem were herself.

Once we understand the simmering hatred among youth toward oppressive schooling, vandalism becomes an *anticipated* reaction. Why not attempt to destroy a dehumanizing institution? Once we accept the realization that families have become psychological prisons forcing the young into channels that cut off their activity, running away from home becomes an evident possibility. Once we acknowledge the fact that society deliberately leaves young people mystified about sexuality, trapped in sex roles that end only in humiliation and a sense of inadequacy, and unable to find pleasure amid the fears and terror, then rape, sexual promiscuity (indiscriminate intercourse and sexual acts by both men and women), unwanted pregnancies, impotence, and indifferent responses have to result. Oppression forces young people to rebel—to attempt to fight back. Or it gives them two options that are less dramatic and, therefore, likely to escape the notice that too often brings punitive, restrictive, and humiliating reactions from authorities: conformity and escapism.

Youth cling to the invisibility conformity allows them. Terrified of being exposed as different, as outsiders to be ridiculed or condemned, young people often stop thinking and stop feeling. They simply go along. With blank faces, imitation life styles, a nice, pleasant personality, few complaints and always of a vague nature, young people by and large trade individuality, their own needs and desires, creativity, and insightfulness for safety in numbers. The repression of the late sixties and early seventies taught young people one thing: The system was not going to change, and conformity and escapism were the only viable choices allowed by authorities. The alternative was physical assault and possible death. Young people learned.

If the pressures on individuals prevent conformity in substance as well as in form, youth camouflage the discrepancy between their actual behavior (and values) and the image they project to authority. The young person knows that what people don't know won't get him into trouble. The fear of rejection is so strong that it does not seem hyperbolic to children to say, "If my mother finds out, she'll kill me." In a sense the individual fears psychic death—the rejection of self by loved ones—and, therefore, conceals excessive drinking, petty theft, minor vandalism, sexual experimentation with the other as object, and so on. The minimal severity of these behavioral patterns need not distract us from the fact that in principle the youth has opted for the same form of resistance as the rebel, if not for the same extreme. Whether boys paint a rock with initials or destroy desks in a school, their indifference to the value these things have is an indication of how little these young people can identify with anyone who has the feelings they have lost touch with.

Regardless of the strategies they depend on for survival in a society directing hostility toward them from all directions, young people are in terrible shape psychically. Here the damage can only be assessed from two points of view. First, is the individual suffering more than what is normal? This point of view assumes that what is normal is necessary, unavoidable, and even virtuous. Second, what is the best that can be hoped

for—the highest state of consciousness possible among young people? Here one looks for young people who do not have exceptional potential, but who seem to have realized themselves in many ways that other young people have not. In other words, by examining young people who have been relatively unoppressed, we find noticeable differences from those who have been subjected to limits on growth, however subtle and indirect.

The differences I have noticed, although I know of no formal studies, between young people from relatively liberated backgrounds and those from oppressive backgrounds are twofold. First, liberated youth have a much greater capacity to act, to take initiative, to overcome situations, and to learn from them. They do not tend to be lost in repetitive compulsions. The vast majority of young people from oppressive environments (relatively speaking) do not seem, on the balance, more disturbed inwardly, but they do seem less able to cope. They do not transcend adversity, they are swamped by it. Second, liberated youth have a joy, particularly about learning. New experiences are anticipated as ways for revealing the self. Limits are to be tested, examined, and challenged. Oppressed youth tend to become extremely anxious about limits and rather sheepish. Authority intimidates them, and they are obsessed about limits. These two differences are consistent enough to suggest that personal growth is adversely affected by limits imposed out of fear.

The psychic burden of being oppressed is considerable: guilt, anxiety, resentment, hatred, helplessness, dependency on others, compulsive behavior, sadness, boredom, and so on. Of course, these feelings may come from situations other than oppression, but they seem particularly vitiating when the individual has not developed self-reliance. Young people enter adulthood with these burdens and suddenly, after many years have passed, realize that these burdens are unnecessary and have lost them precious time. Even though it is never too late, learning to be oneself and discovering what one wants, not what one is supposed to want, becomes difficult and expen-

sive. Psychotherapy, divorce, a return to schooling, single parenthood, depression, and regret are ways we pay for what we have missed. It is granted that much enjoyment and satisfaction can be found in the ways we have developed to renew ourselves and free ourselves of the past and the oppression we have experienced, yet there is sadness over so much wasted time and energy. The loss of these years, as people act out the rituals they have been programmed into, is another hidden cost of oppression.

The full scope of the deleterious effect of oppression can be minimized and passed over by assuming that what is normal is healthy and good. Being oppressed is the normal state of affairs! To evaluate the negative effects of this oppression by reference to deviances from the norm only allows one to conclude that since you seem severely distressed everything is basically okay. Or, if we are all oppressed anyway, what difference does it make? The difference is settling for what we are or have become; we react to fear by closing off life-enhancing possibilities when we could be life embracing. The normal adolescent is chronically bored and reduced to rituals that have no social meaning. Is this really what we want?

The normal adolescent has little to do. No place is provided in our society for youth. When not at home or in school, young people tend to "hang out." Preoccupied with the opposite sex or desensitizing themselves with beer, wine, marijuana, loud music, and so forth, young people frequent town greens, discount stores, local pizza parlors (when they can afford it), or they drive aimlessly around town. There is no meaning in their life now—only hopes about what will happen when they get out of school. As with convicts, they do one day at a time. No meaningful involvement is allowed or desired by society, so young people generally stay by themselves, entertaining each other. Impoverished lives like these depend on artificial stimulation: smoking cigarettes, drinking cokes and coffee, and doing forbidden (but not absolutely) things if possible.

Rarely are youth welcomed anywhere. Sure, there are small recreation programs, offering pool, Ping-Pong, and listening to

records—as if the needs of youth for activity can be simplified to the pursuit of minor sports. Unless young people have money to spend, they must keep out of most stores. In New Haven they have to keep walking if they frequent a downtown shopping center. This rejection is accepted by most, graciously. Young people have learned to accept their lack of place and expect or demand no more. Indeed, most prefer being left alone, since it gives them the illusion, at least, of autonomy. Ultimately, to be sure, the illusion is lost.

Reference to the normal adolescent should give no one any hope. The normal adolescent is pathetically boring and predictable. Lacking sensitivity, self-confidence, and openness, most young people are simply watchers. Their fear of involvement in any activity and their profound inhibition except when they are intoxicated and thus given the excuse for freedom leave them still. It is the placid surface, the lack of activity, that is the final result of the oppression, and during the sixties, the repression of youth. Young people become a mirror. Look into their faces and you see nothing except the reflection of society—that is, a self-centered urge for immediate gratification and a lack of concern for the pain around them. There is nothing to do; just take care of yourself. Look out for Number One. Morality requires conviction based on hope. Young people are aware, painfully aware, of the problems in our society. They are also aware of the resistance toward change, and they have largely concluded, for a while at least, that the necessary changes will not be forthcoming. Therefore, there is no hope, and morality is a useless expenditure of energy. Better to look for answers elsewhere. Perhaps in religion. Perhaps in intimacy. It seems that if anything can be done, we had better do it.

Beyond Oppression

The extent to which oppression is rooted in the entire social fabric cannot be overstated. Complex social changes in the political and economic structure of the society must occur to better the condition of all disenfranchised and poor peoples,

including youth. The priorities of the society must be completely altered so that the overall emphasis is on improving the quality of life in America for all groups, rather than on our present priorities, the preservation of unimaginably destructive defense systems and the protection of profit for corporations. To many this magnitude of change seems out of the question given the inertia of the bureaucracies and the unwillingness of those who will be obliged to relinquish control over what they have. To others changes must come gradually, from within; however, it would seem that changes from within are co-opted versions of the original idea, converted in form and substance by the process of implementation to reflect what is already, rather than to allow changes toward what could be. For a few the changes must come through violence, and any social agitation short of violence is ineffective. Certainly, the changes that have come from violent riots are more immediate and visible than changes from nonviolent dissent. I am only sure that fundamental changes are necessary if the quality of life—and I include the relinquishing of our dependency on oppressive relationships here—is to improve significantly.

If the total elimination of the problem seems out of the question, one role that adults may take in dealing with the problems of oppression is advocacy of the rights, needs, and desires of youth. One primary focus of this advocacy must be in the area of funding. The federal, state, community, and private-sector sources of funding must make youth (and children) a consistent priority; they should not just respond to youth from crisis to crisis (drug abuse one year, child abuse another). This funding might be split between programs *for* youth and programs *by* youth.

Programs for youth can occupy their first few years pursuing five goals:

1. The reeducation of the community regarding the myths of adolescence, and the elimination of the widespread fear of youth and the consequent hostility and rejection, or manipulation and control, of young people.

2. The development of counseling and simple service programs based on the values and needs of the clients (youth) rather than on the values and standards of the community (adults), as interpreted by the therapists. Young people need to be dealt with in the context of their peer group and according to their needs and desires as individuals, not because they are brought in by parents, teachers, or police when they cause trouble or become difficult to manage. Programs for youth would have advisory boards of young people with power to make suggestions in a meaningful way; they would take only volunteer clients and offer services relevant to the needs of these clients as the clients themselves define them, not imposed solutions to problems defined according to the values of authority figures. The services would be available to youth without making them visible to potentially punitive authorities, such as their parents.
3. Extensive family counseling, stressing the breaking up of oppressive interactions as well as the development of insight and the expression of feelings. Many times therapists neglect interactions or deal with them on a superficial level. Family therapy must not only block oppressive patterns; it must develop alternative patterns that do not become confining.
4. A redesign of the schooling process, making education or training relevant to the needs of youth, not of society, and stressing the development of communal relationships rather than competition, the development of choice situations rather than coercive forms of learning, the creation of movement instead of the suppression of activity, and, finally, involvement in the community, not withdrawal.
5. The development of educational programs geared to helping young people clarify their values, explore the decision-making process, develop information relevant to the decisions involved, identify resources available in the community to realize their decisions, discuss their

feelings, perceptions, judgments, goals, needs, and experiences with each other in open, nonevaluative, and in-depth discussions, and finally, come to a judgment based on personal experience with the outcome of their decisions, rather than by relying on "shoulds" inculcated in them in childhood. Information on sexuality, particularly, must be available without censorship on an as-desired basis as early as six or eight years of age. This is when the fear of sexuality seems to be created in youth.

Programs by youth must begin with the location and development, under the direction of youth, of centers where young people can gather free from restrictions imposed on them by adults. The need for limits that guide behavior and protect the interest of the group will develop (adults fear that young people enjoy chaos), but the process is a long one. Young people are not used to self-reliance, independence, and the fact that limits can be facilitative rather than oppressive. The programs by youth may stumble along for several months on the verge of collapse until the young people realize that they really are able to have whatever kind of program they want. It would be helpful if the community could reinforce this possibility at all times and interpret to youth the reasons for their unwillingness to use limits in relating to each other. Experience shows that young people manage space they identify with very well, and they do not allow other young people to act out aggressions against that space. They can provide these limits without hurting or rejecting the young people who are hostile to the space. Indeed, the only protection young people need is not from each other, but from many adults in the community who will act out against them.

Adults are impatient. In the rare instances when they turn programs over to young people, they usually take the controls back very quickly. Then, terrified or resentful of the way groups of young people use the program, or abuse it, they close it down. This ambivalence is a consequence of the realiza-

tion, on an intellectual level, of the need for self-reliance among youth but of the wish on a gut level to deny youth a learning period. It takes time for young people to unlearn oppressed role behavior and evolve nonoppressive alternatives.

It is important that programs by young people are truly by them. This cannot be faked, or the program will fail its essential purpose: to provide young people with the resources and learning ground to give them the option of developing initiative, self-reliance, and responsibility. Young people must define priorities and make all major decisions, including the allocation of resources. Turning funds over to kids will seem the height of folly to many adults, whose contempt for youth is evident. Others will object that the funds will be wasted, and in part this is true. Fortunately, adults have perfect records when it comes to avoiding waste of funds, and they may serve as consultants to the youth if they request this help. Throughout the process of setting up the basic structure necessary before the opportunity of developing and maintaining their own programming is turned over to youth, the old habits will manifest themselves. Change is difficult for everyone, not just for young people. Yet as skills develop, young people will extend their capacity to help into the community, beyond simply helping themselves. Opportunities for adults to share skills will develop in an atmosphere of mutual respect based on the shared experiences of program development and implementation.

Programs are not, obviously, the whole answer. Individually, there is much that adults can do to ameliorate the situation youth are in. Specific suggestions would take up too much space to be practical and would probably co-opt the reader's own imagination. Once a person begins to be free, and to not bind others, the process seems to be self-perpetuating. The issue must be joined on three levels simultaneously; however, the initial step is a change in attitude. One must want to be free, and this means giving up whatever rewards oppressive

relationships provide, particularly an illusionary but still comforting feeling of security.

What a person owes himself or herself is a commitment to personal and social development as the fundamental process of living. Change, however threatening, is finally the only reality. Whether one enters therapy, participates in the numerous personal-growth workshops around the country, reads avidly, joins consciousness-raising groups, takes courses in college or universities, changes jobs, learns new skills, develops and completes projects of any kind, travels, or relates intensively to others, the emphasis can be on enjoyment, fulfillment, and the extension of oneself into the community (meeting others). The focus of learning could be on the kind of thinking, feeling, and acting that furthers these highly subjective goals. What is important, on reflection, is the emphasis on extending oneself into the community and on becoming involved with others, not because it is profitable or even satisfying, but because it is necessary for people to develop communal bonds to survive and to ensure a quality of life that makes surviving meaningful and desirable to everyone.

The clarification of one's values, the examination of alternatives to oppressive relationships and situations, the daring to take the risks involved in change, the maximization of the personal gains from making changes, and the transcendence of loneliness and egocentricity are aspects, important ones, of the growth process. Reflection, insight, experiential learning, and so on are also important. What is critical is that as one becomes free within oneself and gains the feeling of fullness out of which giving and love come, relationships with people close to him or her change from primarily self-serving and protective ones to challenging and supportive learning processes. Hanging onto someone else because you are fearful, lonely, or dependent is a tempting, but unjustifiable, alternative to becoming independent and self-reliant, whatever the fears of pain and terror that are holding you in, down, under, or up.

I believe very strongly that personal growth must result in changes in oppressive behavior patterns, not just in improvement in subjective states of consciousness, to be socially significant. Only when one is involved in the community, where one goes beyond self to others, does real growth begin. Withdrawal into drugged states, religious experiences, meditation, higher consciousness, more profitable and satisfying positions in business, or whatever have no meaning beyond the self if they do not allow the individual to contribute meaningfully to the condition we are all living within.

Education, increased awareness, and responsibility in relationships lead to a desire to share with others in a warm, loving way. Tenderness wants reciprocity, and only tender relations with others minimize the anxiety and fear propelling people into compulsive attempts to control others, impose limits on their movements, and prevent their development and change toward a more complete self.

Young people need tender, compassionate *environments*, not just, if they are lucky, some "therapy" that attempts to make up for a hostile and rejecting community, family, or relationship. Without the space, respect, tenderness, openness, and freedom to experiment, young people may change physically, but they will perpetuate immature, selfish, and self-destructive forms in all they do, feel, and want. The responsibility for environments conducive to growth and experimentation (changes) is everyone's, though the resources, power, and awareness necessary to begin creating such spaces within the community are in the hands of adults—some adults. Unfortunately, it is the qualification *some* that creates the obstacle that returns our consideration to the need for social, political, and economic changes. A vicious life-denying cycle, complete with myths to encourage self-deception, perpetuates—indeed, demands—the oppression of youth. It is time to break this cycle, even at the risk that the momentum will create a moment of chaos or the reinstatement of more repressive relationships.

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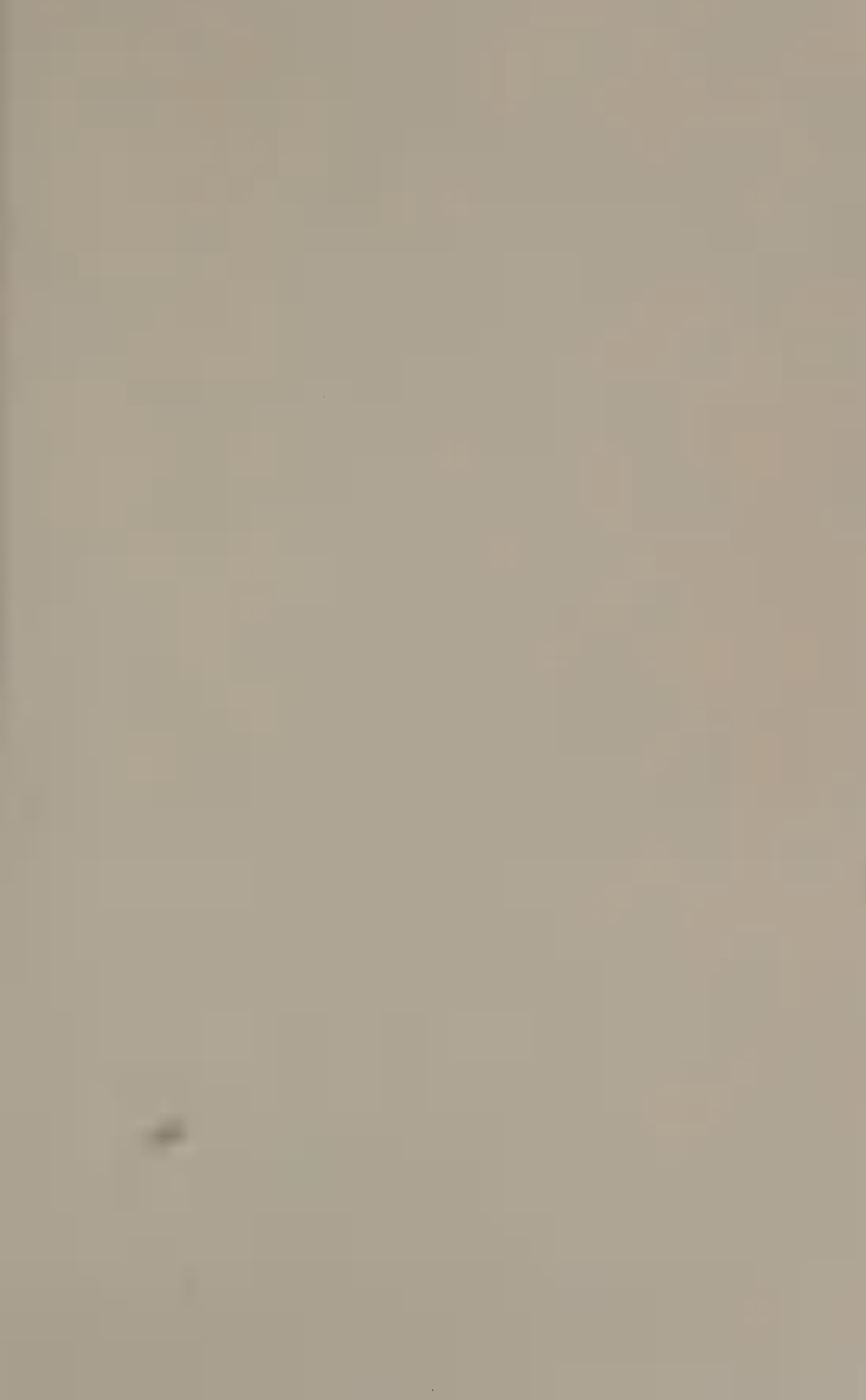
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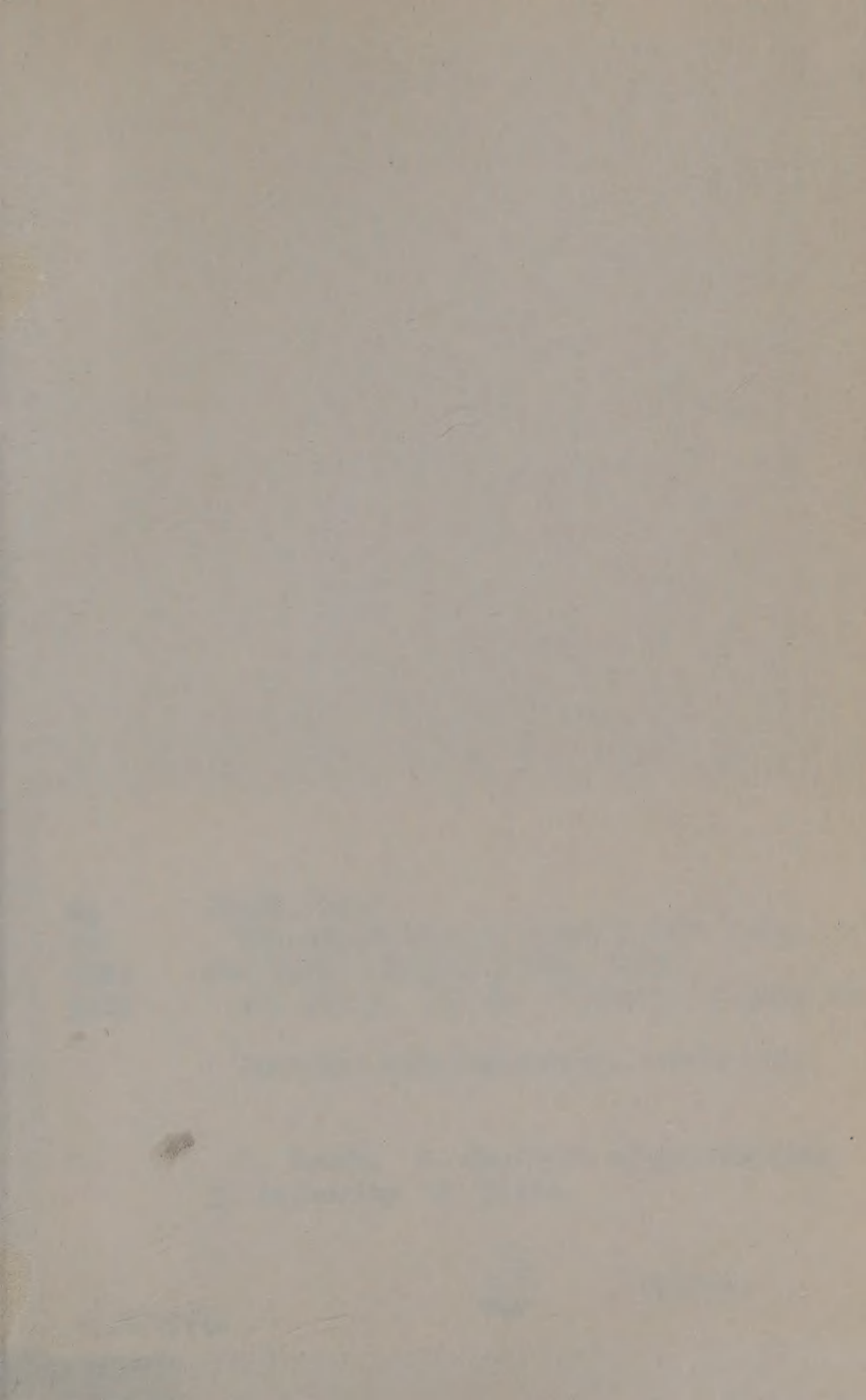
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"Ted Clark's book is a fine one. It speaks to many valuable issues and it speaks with a wise tone and knowledge. I am very much impressed by it. There are many places where I am dazzled by some of the ideas and rarely find passages where the writing puts me off. There is no doubt that this is a very talented man whose impressions and observations should be heard by a great many people."

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"The *Oppression of Youth* grew out of my desire to describe a basic source of many young people's problems. As a therapist, a friend, a teen-ager at one time, I have known and experienced many of these problems directly and indirectly. As an adult I have unfortunately contributed to others' problems by doing some of what I describe in this book. My intention, and I think the intention of most adults, has not been to hurt youth, but to help them. However, I have come to understand intentions and actions are not necessarily the same thing. We must look at what we do."

—from the Preface

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