JOURNAL OF SOCIAL ISSUES
VOLUME 30, NUMBER 2, 1974

On the Decline of Age Grading in Rural Hippie Communes[1]

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Ethnographic data from a study of rural hippie communes suggest a clear attenuation of the normative differences usually ascribed to children on the grounds of their age. The participation of children in drug use and sex, as well as their autonomy in the settlement of their disputes, are cited as examples of this decline in age grading. Interpretations are offered of the ways in which this equalitarian conception of children is systematically sustained by other facts of communal life and by the ideological postures of parents. Finally, inferences are made from the decline of age grading in the communes of the counterculture for possible changes in the relations between the generations in the future.

Age is still one of the universal criteria of role allocation and social stratification, in communes as anywhere else, and there is no good reason to expect this fact to disappear soon. But over the past generation, the salience of age grading has been sharpened as attacks have been mounted with increasing success on some of the traditional and enduring bases of ascriptive differentiation, like race and sex. In this process, the status of chronological age as a "natural" criterion of social differentiation has become more problematic. Age may well be the last major structural barrier to the pervasive equalitarianism which de Tocqueville (1954) saw as an irresistable force in democracies, a force which he reminded us nearly 150 years ago might lead to tyranny or to liberty.

[1]The research on which this paper is based was supported by Grant #MH-16579-01 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Changes in the ascriptive meaning of race and sex have been occurring recently in a context of increasing ideological controversy over the "oppression" of groups burdened by ascriptive definitions made primarily by people other than themselves. Blacks, for example, have argued that regardless of any other objective measures of their oppression, the fact that most "knowledge" about who and what they are has been formulated by whites constitutes a part of the racism oppressing them. Women have argued similarly about men regarding sexism.

Voices are not so insistent about age. But this may have something to do with the fact that the increased sociological interest in age has been disproportionally concentrated on both ends of the life cycle. The prolongation of childhood and adolescence created one set of problems concerned with schools as age ghettos and as the source of youth cultures, and the prolongation of life itself created another set of problems concerned with old age and retirement—indeed, a whole new field of social gerontology.

This should be no surprise. From its very inception, sociology has tended to preoccupy itself more often with the study of relatively vulnerable and dependent groups, rather than with those who have the power to refuse access to them by investigators or to define the terms of the investigation. Kids maybe lack the words and the aged maybe lack the vigor to object. Nevertheless, apparently caught up in the movements of black and female liberation, there are at least more middle-adult voices these days talking about children's liberation and about "offing" the gerontologists from the backs of old people. In any case, interest in children's liberation comes at a time of increasing suspicion regarding ideas about groups which are formulated by people who aren't members of those groups, at a time when we are predisposed to be sensitive to the self- and group-serving functions of white definitions of black, male definitions of female, and, by extension, adult definitions of children and aged.

We make these remarks as a preface to our discussion of the decline of age grading in rural hippie communes in order to convey our appreciation of the fact that it is indeed radical to tamper with a system of age grading or with any ascriptive system—to attempt, for example, to regard children as simply younger members of a community rather than as a special and distinctive category of persons. Age grading, we know, is universal and subtle and profound (Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972). A 16-year-old may be jailed and labelled delinquent for behavior

completely legal in an 18-year-old; a middle-aged man may be humiliated as a "dirty old man" for behavior which is routine and expected in a 21-year-old. Thomas Cottle (1973) describes a college girl's disgust at her mother's wearing a mini skirt, and the actual nausea of another girl whose roommate's mother became a college student—poring over catalogues and discussing courses and professors as if she were a . . . kid!

Still, despite the universality and profundity of age grading, definitions of appropriate age-specific behavior vary enormously over time and space. Phillippe Aries's (1962) great contribution has been to document clearly how historically recent in Western civilization are our now dominant conceptions of what childhood and adolescence "are"—as if they are anything other than what we have made them—reminding us once again that the exteriority and the constraint exercised by Durkheimian social facts, having been made by human beings, may be changed by them to suit their changing historical circumstances.

Although passage of the 18-year-old vote, the revision of juvenile laws to provide civil rights to minors, and the small academic gains won by student activists in the 1960s suggest the beginnings of a reversal of the long historical trend toward the prolongation of adolescence, there is no good reason to expect any smashing success for children's liberation soon. But something interesting and important is happening to the age grading of children in the communes of the counterculture, and what we want to describe is the equalitarian ethos in rural hippie communes, as it bears upon the conceptualization and treatment of children.

By "equalitarian ethos" we refer not to a sharply defined creed, but to the reluctance, even resistance, of many communards to being defined in terms of almost any kind of standard which indicates differentiation even remotely conceivable as exploitive or binding or restrictive of one's broadly human characteristics. Even where a division of labor appears to be natural, as when some persons claim or appear to have special skills or aptitudes for gardening or construction or mechanics, they are likely to disavow being described by others as the gardener or the carpenter or the mechanic.[2] Thus, just as women will insist that they are

[2]The Communist Chinese too discourage narrow role segmentation in favor of broadly human or community responsibilities in their communes by rotating job occupancy—although we do not suggest that there is a close or deliberate connection between the American and the Chinese practice.

people first, and men will insist that they are not just bus drivers or timber fallers or sociologists but human beings as well, so also young people (or "small persons" as they are sometimes deliberately, perhaps preciously, called) are not regarded as primarily members of an autonomous category of "children," but as persons, members of the communal family just like anyone else—not necessarily less wise, perhaps less competent, but recognized primarily by lowering one's line of vision rather than one's level of discourse.

Despite their aversion to roles, the adults who inhabit these settings exhibit a high degree of self-consciousness regarding the social structure. The language of social roles is understood, but roles are regarded as something "mere," something one may be coerced into "playing" and thus threaten one's basic humanity. The rational separation of person and role, a staple for sociologists, is sufficiently well understood by communards that their sense of the arbitrariness of occupational roles extends itself to the apparently more primordial categories of sex,[3] and finally to age itself. Disinclined to sociology as a trade (for among other things what they regard as the dehumanizing character of its detachment), many of our research subjects are nonetheless skilled at *suspending* the social structure—albeit for purposes more moral than analytic. Their argument that one is more authentically a person than a role might be quarreled with; but challenges to the naive or taken-for-granted character of social roles provide some leverage for the development and support of an equalitarian point of view.

In this article, we will describe some of the ways in which children are integrated into adult life in the communes. We will then offer some suggestions regarding the ways in which this integration becomes ideological—the way in which an "equalitarian" conception of children is systematically sustained by the posture of communal parents toward the responsibilities of parenting. Finally, we will speculate on the potential consequences of changes in age grading in the communes of the counterculture

[3]This is not to suggest that sexism does not survive in the communes we have studied. It does, but only to the extent that traditional female roles seem natural to the women involved (e.g., undertaking primary care of infants when they are nursing). Women who opt for leadership or heavy labor are not discouraged from doing so. Communards, that is, do not practice "affirmative action."

for relations between the generations in the future.

The research sites from which our data are drawn comprise eight rural communes, or non kin "families" (at least five adults and two children per unit, with a modal population of about 18), located in the Western United States, principally California. The spirit of these hippie or posthippie settlements is one of relatively anarchistic self-sufficiency, in spite of continued dependency on the larger society and indeed distinct tendencies toward reintegration at least with local and regional communities. Our data are based on more than two years of intermittent observation and participant observation by ourselves and a group of assistants. As researchers we visited and/or lived with these groups for periods ranging from a few days to several months at one stretch. In all cases the aims of the researchers were known to the study population. Excluded from consideration here are survey data obtained in formal depth interviews conducted in the last few months of the research with these and other communards; excluded also are additional field work data we have obtained from urban and formally creedal (religious) communes.

The Equality of Children and Adults

We are concerned here with behavior that makes children seem adult and deviant for seeming so, and which implies the "deviance" of adults for permitting it. Adults and children are, of course, equal in a number of large and small respects which are irrelevant or not meaningful so far as age grading is concerned. Equality can also be *enforced* because children lack the power to command on a regular basis the sometime ironic privileges of the underdog: to be carried rather than having to walk, for example. Age grading more commonly refers to normative differences in the rights and obligations ascribed to persons on the basis of age. Our data suggest the commonplace attenuation of many of these differences, at the apparent discretion of the kids.

Drug Use

If a joint is passed around a family gathering, it will routinely pass to any of the children present who show an interest in it—interest being shown primarily by older children, those over 5 or 6 years of age (although we have witnessed stoned two-year-olds, and at least one visiting sociologist's five-year-old son was initially "turned on" by a companion whose father regularly

included two carefully rolled joints in the boy's kindergarten lunchpail). Small children are occasionally encouraged to smoke dope—as are cats and dogs—for the amusement of adults,[4] but such deliberateness seems rare. The pattern rather is that in these rural anarchist settings children are not excluded, shielded, or protected from any significant dimensions of adult communal life which are not demonstrably harmful to them. This is a pattern consistently affirmed not only by our observations but by our formal interviews as well.

Even the use of stronger psychedelics (acid, peyote, or mescaline) has generated little deliberate policy of exclusion of children. But these drugs are not often used frivolously; there is an increasing tendency to ritualize their use, to embed them in ceremony to solemnize special occasions: to welcome a season, to celebrate a birthday, to cope with some intracommunal problem perhaps perceived in terms of tensions or bad vibrations which the drug may help the participants to transcend or to understand more clearly. When children participate in such occasions, it is generally with the supervision that respect for ceremonies and powerful drug experiences implies. But despite the absence of any self-conscious policy about drug use, it is nonetheless clear that psychedelic drug use is regarded by these communards as a relatively normal and largely benign family activity from which there is no good reason to exclude the children. Childhood, some communards believe, "is a natural acid trip from which maturity brings you down," but they are not missionaries about drug use (as was true of many in the early days of the hippie movement, and is still true of some). They are likely to believe that in the absence of good reason to impose age graded restrictions on the participation of children, readiness and willingness to participate are probably reasonable indicators of at least incipient competence.

Sex

Something of the same sort is true with respect to sexual behavior. We have known about infant sexuality for a long time, but our data fail to indicate the existence of the classically posited "latency stage" in childhood (during which interest in genital

[4] Phillipe Aries (1962) reports a perhaps historically comparable practice of courtiers playing with the penis of three-year-old Louis XIII of France for the amusement of the assembled dignitaries.

sexuality is supposed to disappear, reappearing at puberty). Admittedly, our data are not as good as we would like them to be here, since they include Christian missionaries' reports, which have been known to support the urgency of missionary work. But we have at least two fully verified cases of sexual intercourse between six- and eight-year-olds, a few not fully documented cases of intercourse between children and adults, and one instance of multiple rape of a small girl by several boys only slightly older. In this last case, the parents of the girl expressed a good bit of anger (although not furious rage) at the boys, but attempted to make it clear to the researcher that their anger was not about the sexual episode itself, but rather about the fact that the boys had forced her (she had willingly engaged in sexual intercourse previously).

Parents (and other adults) do seem to have mixed feelings about the sexuality of their prepubertal children. Coming themselves from backgrounds where feelings about such matters are deeply socialized, it is perhaps not surprising that communal adults are sometimes surprised, even shocked to discover the sexuality of their children. But neither is it surprising that, given their favorable predisposition to natural morality, they would examine their own shocked response to test it for natural virtue. Often, they cannot find "reasons" with which to rationalize their initially shocked response. If sexual behavior seems to do no visible harm to children, the burden of proof tends to fall on those who disapprove. Like the rationale for drug use by children, the appeal seems to be to some natural sense of propriety: If we (adults) believe that making love is a good thing, and if the kids want to participate in something that we have found rewarding or beautiful, and if there is no persuasive evidence to suggest that what's good for us is bad for them, then let us not obstruct erotic equality, regardless of race, creed, color, or age.

Quarrels

Children are also notably "adult" in the degree to which it seems taken for granted that they will enter into agreements with each other without adult supervision, and conclude their quarrels, fights, and disputes without adult intervention. In more than two years of field work in hippie communes we have observed many quarrels and fights between children, but we have only rarely seen parents or other adults intervene to settle them, and then mostly because of possible severe injury. Personal aggression, of course, is not generally approved in communal settings, but

there is a widespread belief that hassling is a permanent part of group life. The apparent rationale for the civil inattention to quarreling children is that if they are primarily persons, members of the group, they will learn to live collectively by learning to get through their hassles by themselves.

There are problems working this out, of course. But the relevant sanctions seem again to be natural ones. If the smaller and weaker kids get victimized, they will learn to respect size and strength; size and strength are respectable. Bullies will learn that there are always others bigger and stronger than themselves—adults, for example, who, like kids, being persons too, will not hesitate to express their irritation with a child who is hassling or nagging or otherwise annoying an adult who is not in a mood to be tolerant of it. We have seen little guilt or anxiety by communal adults (as we have among middle-class parents) when they lose their temper with a child—perhaps because the equalitarian ethos permits adults to treat an aggressive child as a troublemaking peer rather than having to repress their own anger on the grounds that the offender is after all "only a child."

If the habitual bully or hassler does not eventually modify his or her behavior, avoidance or ostracism may follow, and if necessary a family meeting in which encounter techniques may be invoked to explore the issue. And if all this fails, there is an undercurrent of belief in the inevitability of hassling. In an excellent master's thesis on a New Mexico commune (where, as in many communes, there is a good bit of hippie passivity), Margaret Hollenbach (1971) describes as a major source of leadership in that group the willingness to hassle relatively passive others and to persist in hassling them until they submit.

There are, then, important respects in which the status of children is not age graded in rural anarchist communes. This is true of sex and drug use and the right to autonomy in the settlement of disagreements. It is true in general also with respect to work roles and the right to a political voice in family affairs. There are, of course, limits here. An adult carpenter or mechanic may be reluctant to lend fragile or expensive tools to a child regarded as irresponsible; adults may exercise strong, even furtive, pressures to discourage children from becoming addicted to television. But in general there is a prevailing predisposition by hippie communards to assume that a strong relationship exists between a child's expressed interest and a probable competence to engage in the behavior. There is a sense in which it might be embarrassing to assume otherwise. Fresh from conflicts with

campus establishments from whom they demanded a "right to participate in the decisions that shape our lives" and were met with rebuttals that they were "too young," "too inexperienced," "too incompetent" to shape university curricula or judge the competence of professors, hippie communards might well be receptive to the idea of children's rights. At the very least they might be sensitive to the self-serving character of arguments by elders for the exclusion of the young on the grounds of incompetence.

Ideas as Managerial Ideologies

What is the status of the practices we have described? Are they in some sense definitive of the group, indicative of a culture fundamentally different (at least as pertains to child management) from that exhibited in the mainstream of middle-class American life? In our view at least, the culture seems real enough, and not simply the result of errors in sampling, observer bias, or "Hawthorne" effects. Surely the same patterns would not be found in any settlement that is closely watched.

There is a danger in this kind of ethnography of overestimating the amount of normative culture which is there—imputed to the scene by the ethnographer who sees evidence of that normative culture expressed in the words and actions he observes. The danger of interpreting words and deeds in this way is to exaggerate the established or institutionalized character of the patterns one sees by ignoring the fact that much of the behavior may be more or less tentative, exploratory, improvisational, that some of the beliefs may be clearly or vaguely conceived, deeply or superficially felt.

It is therefore worth considering the possibility that the attenuation of age grading we have observed is more situationally induced (hence perhaps temporary) than, as it were, constitutional of a radically different culture. The major theoretical basis of this interpretation is that no difference in culture need be adduced in order to explain apparently deviant behavior when the settings in which it appears are socially safe for such behavior. The communes we have been studying are, for example, relatively removed from the moral centers of the larger society, insulated from the prying eyes of police, welfare officials, schoolteachers, public health nurses, psychiatrists, probation officers, grandmothers, and other social caretakers. Moreover the settlements reported on here are on the whole small and socially homogeneous

"families"—a fact that promotes a substantial amount of mutual toleration of unconventional behavior so long as it is "kept in the family," the unconventionalities of a family being, indeed, those features of it that remind the members of the distinctiveness of their membership.

Without invoking ideologies or other systems of belief, situational exigencies in the facts of rural communal living may go far to explain the inclusion of children in adult life. Leaving children to settle their disputes by themselves often involves spillage, breakage, or other damage to property. But if most of the endangered possessions are not costly enough to warrant aggressive protection from battling children, an indifferent attitude toward the battle is viable. The virtual absence of any risk of pregnancy when prepubertal children engage in sexual intercourse permits a tolerant posture toward it (as the prevalence of birth control techniques has permitted an enormous growth in public toleration of premarital intercourse among adults). When life is rural and poor, there is always important work to be done that children are competent to do. If an eleven-year-old boy becomes fascinated with an old wringer washing machine and likes to play with it to the point where he begins to do the family laundry regularly, no important property is risked to probable incompetence and a boy does useful work which interests him. (And a small blow is struck against the sexist division of labor.)

The settings moreover are usually benign, in the view of some even medicinal (birds, trees, flowers, woods, fresh air), so that children can be left to do their own thing with little risk to their well-being. The men and women are usually nearby for children to work and play with, to imitate, learn from, and interact with. Not only the physical settings but the internal social arrangements of communal life make the inclusion of children a relatively "normal," relatively routine affair. The closeness of living quarters means that hippie kids, like ghetto kids, are exposed to sex between their parents and other adults at an early age. The parents and other adults are themselves young and because stable nuclear units are not modal, courtship is regularly in process and babysitters are rarely there to facilitate it. Under these circumstances the status of children begins to approximate other domestic animals such as dogs, cats, and (increasingly) goats; within a semi-isolated communal compound, all may be included, in the bedroom as well as at the dinner table, even if relatively disattended in both places.

Given the fairly routinized character of this inclusion pattern,

there is little need to make a virtue of these arrangements, to defend them with abstract moral argument unless an explanation is requested, a question raised, or a problem encountered regarding such virtue as might be implicit in them. This fact of course presents an important and frequently noted methodological problem for sociologists, because in treating research subjects as informants the questions we ask sometimes contribute to the genesis of the culture we are trying to study—including explanations of how and why things are as they are. Questions may disrupt the civil inattention communards routinely accord to inclusion behavior; they may sometimes generate rationales based upon the immediate circumstances, but more often they simply interfere with what seems to be the presumption of agreement that such practices are normal and need no explanation—which presumption helps to ward off requests for explanation in the first place.

But that there is little need to make a virtue of these arrangements until an explanation is required does not mean that commune adults don't think their arrangements are virtuous. The presumption of normality itself suggests the presence of ideological forces; without them, the clearly observable patterns could be understood only as coincidence or as ad hoc or drift-like responses to immediately existing circumstances. This would do violence to common sense, since the circumstances themselves are logically consistent with other ad hoc or drift-like responses. Like any other routine or taken-for-granted social patterns, the pattern of equalitarianism between children and adults reveals a structure of moral assumptions which may not be consciously or thoroughly formulated or explicitly rendered until questions are raised, but which is, if anything, even more salient and more deliberate in an intentional community (which, after all, does have moral intentions) than in a community whose values are "received" or traditional.

Although the pattern of inclusion of children, then, does not directly reflect an explicit policy of child raising, it does rest ultimately on the presumed validity of many aspects of the counterculture critique of modern life (concisely stated by Davis, 1972), whose ideological resources may be selectively exploited to provide systematic legitimation for that pattern of inclusion. One approach is to emphasize the irrationality of the straight world, the poor fit between means and ends: Smoking dope is intrinsically harmless, a danger to life and limb only if and when one is caught in the act; the dangers of sexual activity are similarly

socially constructed by the punitive response to it. This distinction between straight and hip can be reasoned into a generational argument as well: There is an association between the "innocence" of childhood and a certain kind of elementary intelligence or wisdom, since children have not yet had the opportunity to learn the taboos in terms of which an adult perspective is defined. The degradation of the adult-straight world can in turn carry in its wake any strong association between competence and learning, thus strengthening the belief that it is necessary to unlearn much that we were taught in order to reacquire the "natural" competences to enjoy the highs of dope and sex and freedom.

By such more or less diligent reasoning is the inclusion-disattention pattern legitimated or "made sensible" as an approach to the management of children. Regardless of their merits, we see these arguments as *managerial ideologies* because they seek to cope with a pattern of behavior produced neither by the arguments themselves nor by immediate circumstances, but by the interaction between the beliefs that bring hippies to communal living in the first place and the situational exigencies (many of them unanticipated) which facilitate or obstruct their ability or will to institutionalize them through routinized or established practice.

In some instances that interaction weakens, alters, or destroys original intentions, for example when the hippie bias against technology yields to the situational utility of the chain saw, or when a resolute commitment to consensual decision making leads to political paralysis or a drift toward authoritarianism. In other instances, however, the interaction strengthens or reinforces moral predispositions, for example when their distaste for urban middle-class life drives them to the country where they must develop primitive survival skills the eventual possession of which reinforces their belief in the prospect of urban apocalypse and their confidence in their ability to survive it, which in turn further strengthens their belief in the probability of urban catastrophe. Similarly, the favorable predispositions in the counterculture toward "outfrontness," bluntness, and candor are reinforced by the close quarters and the dense interactional texture of communal living, which makes it objectively difficult if not impossible to hide or disguise or euphemize things. Where people know each other so well that their motives and feelings are transparent to each other, dissembling is likely to be vain, and openness and honesty may come to be regarded as major human virtues.

So it is with the inclusion-disattention pattern. What might be seen as the ordinary middle-class responsibilities of child care do not, as we have noted, mesh easily with courtship—to say nothing of their conflict with the quest for the broadly defined personal freedom in which many youthful communards are engaged. A philosophy of child care that diminishes the apparent need for, or even desirability of, child care itself, which emphasizes the natural intelligence or maturity of children, reduces thereby the degree to which child care may be said to be fateful or self-implicating for parents; it reduces, that is to say, the degree to which one's reputation in the community is contingent upon how one manages one's children, thus preserving the freedom and mobility of adults even in the midst of fertility and poverty.

All children, as we have said elsewhere, are viewed as intrinsically worthy of love and respect but not necessarily of attention or deliberate socialization. This conception of children (as well as the contrasting conception, held by many modern middle-class parents, of children as a distinctive social category with stages of development requiring continual monitoring, and elaborate principles and systems of rational child management) implies a complementary conception of adulthood—which should be no surprise to sociologists trained to think of role structures as reciprocal. The modern middle-class conception of children, regardless of its cognitive merits, requires full-time mothers and at least part-time fathers, or functional equivalents like nurseries, day care centers, and schools, and the assembled professionals to apply the principles, do the conscious work of socialization, and keep the system going.

Hippie parents, on the other hand, are not into "growing up" to meet dominant middle-class standards of responsibility or maturity; these are symbolic of what they dropped out of and dropped out for. Hippie parents in rural communes are busy seeking their identities, creating their settlements, experimenting with new family forms, looking for psychological frontiers to cross, all the while trying to get the bills paid and make ends meet, like anybody else. Unlike settled middle-class parents they don't see their futures as extensions or extrapolations of their presents. The conditions of communal living in rural locales—principally California—reinforce the predispositions of hippie parents, reluctant from the start to perform full-time roles as socializers, to believe in the benignity of nature's unseen hand, to see children as essentially healthy plants needing only a little sun and a little water to grow up straight and tall.

In rather clear contrast to middle-class views in which the behavior of children reflects on their parents who are in some sense responsible for it, communal parents tend to resist being characterizable in terms of the consequences of what they do with or to their children. Ideas prominent in the counterculture—karma, fate, astrology, God's will—lie about like so many ideological resources to be used to explain the behavior of persons, large as well as small, by reference to the impact of nonhuman, nonmanipulable forces upon them.

If these arguments seem self-serving for hippie parents, they are no more self-serving than the modern middle-class conception of children which, by requiring high socialization inputs by parents and parent substitutes, creates thousands of "meaningful" jobs in child care and dignifies the days and nights for millions of women who want to devote the major part of their adult lives to mothering. In either case, a distinctive conception of a parental role is involved which, upon reflection, is based on very little certain knowledge of what kinds of parental treatment produce what kinds of consequences in children. All through modern society parents raise children with only the dimmest consciousness of the relationship between the causes and consequences of behavior, yet burdened by responsibility for that relationship; all through modern society parents raise children according to principles defining what is good for them, which may or may not be valid but their commitment to which has clearly self- and group-serving functions for adults.

Aside from revealing these self-serving functions in either conception of children, our own explanatory traditions do little in themselves to disparage the contention of communards that much of middle-class child management is arbitrary and unjustifiably restrictive as well as self-serving. A set of attitudes born in the attempt to cope with the problems of living with children in rural communes can nonetheless make a real contribution to the critique of dominant practices, and perhaps even help to generate more viable ideals. The sometimes "neglect" of children we have witnessed is usually benign enough, at least in comparison to some of the more aggressive practices of middle-class parents seeking to produce adults from the raw materials presented by their offspring. And it draws some intellectual respectability from a tradition that stretches from Rousseau and de Tocqueville to Philippe Aries, Paul Goodman, A. S. Neill, and large numbers of contemporary "free school" theorists who have all in one way or another pointed to the potential and actual conflicts between

raising children—especially, perhaps, pedagogically—and having them "grow up."

It is, however, not always benign. Just as the anxiety of middle-class parents may be regarded as an unanticipated outcome of being responsible for how their children turn out, while they are largely ignorant of the relationship between what they do to their children and the developmental consequences of the doing, the easygoing inclusion of children in adult communal life can have its own unanticipated consequences. Communards are not always unconventional in their view of the care required by children, but may be pushed in that direction out of a need to defend their integrity against demands that they explain their behavior. Such defense may place a virtual interdict on the expression of the kinds of worries about the welfare of their children that any parents might reasonably have, whatever their philosophy of child care, thus creating interpersonal tensions or anxieties whose origins are not perceived.

Moreover the reluctance of communal adults to exercise parental authority sometimes leads them to neglect to make authoritative distinctions between the social boundaries of the commune itself—between those who are truly "into the trip" and those who are not—and thus to forget that the values of the commune are distinctive and, above all, precarious. Sociologists may, indeed, occasionally and uneasily redeem themselves in those precarious circumstances by asking the kinds of difficult questions which, despite their tendency to call forth a defensive ideology, may also serve to remind their subjects of what it is that was worth defending in the first place.

Age Grading, Counterculture, and the Problem of Generations

How relevant is all this at a time when it is increasingly asserted that the dream is over, the movement dead, the communes disappearing, the counterculture in disarray? The campuses, it is true, seem quiet; too many petty and vicious arguments over who took whose apple juice from the refrigerator have probably discouraged many people from naively believing that they can make a commune simply by sharing a household. But in Northern California we have seen the elements of rural hippie community taking shape, and the character of the age graded relationships we have described is an important part of the shape of that community.

These relationships are relevant both to Aries's (1962) influential work on the history of childhood, and to the late Paul Goodman's (1971) also influential writing in behalf of preserving the natural wildness of children. Aries taught us in an unsentimental way about the *invention* of childhood in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a means of separating, even segregating, the experience of the young from their elders. Goodman has added to the traditional romantic view of childhood as innocence or noble savagery the argument that helping to preserve the natural wildness of children involves adults *as* children; that is, it calls upon adults to reach for the residues of their own childhoods from which they may have only reluctantly "come down" into maturity.

Here we have an idea relevant to commune life in two important respects. First of all, most hippies, communards or not, have rejected most of the conventional models of adulthood or maturity as repressive and unrewarding, a bad bargain with life in which one gives up more than one gets in return. The influential ideas of Aries and Goodman provide historical and philosophical support for that judgment. Second, Goodman's insight about children's liberation's necessarily involving adult liberation from those aspects of adulthood which repress the residues of childhood in grownups is a perfect analogue to feminist arguments about women's liberation's necessitating the liberation of men from the repressive burdens of the masculine role. Perhaps more so than even some radical thinkers realize, the counterculture argument is systemic, and therefore, of genuine sociological interest. Moreover, confronting as it does such fundamental categories as age, sex, and familial roles, it strikes right to the heart of social structure and to the implicit culture which helps to sustain it.

The rejection by the counterculture of dominant models of maturity in middle-class society can be regarded as a profound "generational event," in Mannheim's (1952) sense of the term. A group of young people were shaped by common exposure to a set of diffuse and frustrating major events (the Vietnam war, pervasive racial injustice) which their specific institutional location (the universities) permitted and even encouraged them to oppose, providing them with resources and facilities (living groups, organizations, ideas, finances, meeting places) in an "enlightened" atmosphere whose liberal custodians were initially reluctant to repress tendencies they regarded as excessive or unwholesome. The "generation unit" was born largely to material affluence,

and socialized to seek psychological goods directly, as part of the domestic "revolution of rising (psychological) expectations [Berger, 1971]."

This generational unit sought these psychological goods largely through the idea of intentional community (no generation unit ever celebrated more intensely its sense of solidarity)—in college living groups, political collectives, rock festivals, communal families, religious ashrams, group therapies seeking liberations from oppressions as abstract and distant as imperialisms in far away places and as specific and close-to-home as impotence or frigidity in the bedroom. Well, how consequential has the "movement" been? What are its implications for the life course of the people involved? Many have burned their bridges to the past; some are irrevocably alienated from their families of orientation, have dropped out or flunked out of school, and are therefore cut off from some of the sources that might help facilitate their dropping back in. Many, more or less deeply committed to commune or counterculture life by virtue of five to ten years of experience in it, and eventually finding unavoidable need for some cash income, take occasional work for wages at jobs like waitress, busboy, or janitor. They develop working-class skills like carpentry, plumbing, or mechanics; or they engage in marginal farming, barter, and scavenging which may gradually accommodate them to a working-class life. The decisive generational event may, that is to say, be downward social mobility, the phenomenon that Peter Berger (1969) spoke of as "the blueing of America," the eventual transformation of hippie dropouts into a new blue collar class, leaving vacant places in the middle for ambitious blacks, chicanos, and Puerto Ricans to rise into.

The hypothesis is not without evidence to support it. But the prospect of large scale downward mobility by the sons and daughters of the middle class begs most of the interesting questions which the image suggests. What will a rural blue collar stratum with a higher education and a heritage of urban sophistication look like? Is a person with a master's degree in political science or philosophy or education adequately described sociologically as "working class" because he scratches a living out of the soil or scavenges wood from lumber trucks overturned on the curves of mountain roads? In rural parts of Northern California, where a hippie population has merged with a local population of loggers, fishermen, and farmers, it sometimes takes more than a second look, it is true, to distinguish one group from the other. Both are often bearded, long haired, and dressed in rough clothes.

But the hippies (or ex-hippies) have the kinds of faces that reveal the culture that shaped them: cool, ironic, cultivated, "educated" chic, mouths ready at a moment's notice to lay a rap on. The loggers and fishermen are not like that; they have the faces of peasants and proletariat. On the other hand, after five to ten years of hippie experience with the rural life (and with some of the hippies *becoming* loggers and fishermen), it is sometimes hard to tell the difference, particularly after four or five beers and a few joints.

But in addition to the scratching and the scavenging, many of our respondents will say they prefer living in domes and teepees because rectangular rooms unnaturally constrict the spirit; they will hitchhike a hundred miles to attend a yoga workshop; they will advertise for lessons in belly dancing, organize the showing of silent films and provide tinkly piano accompaniment, maintain a library of three thousand books. "Cultural revolutionaries," as many such communards fashion themselves, are not likely to feel that a social scientist's definition of them as working class (with its conventional baggage of cultural implication) conveys an adequate suggestion of their style of life.

There is a sense in which many of them are practicing ethnomethodologists, who know intuitively that the fundamental categories of culture are socially constructed; of all people, those who do a lot of construction should know that. And they know that those categories may collapse if they are neglected by enough people who behave as if they didn't exist. They know that the persistent interest of the mass media in them reflects their obsessive appeal to the imaginative life of the nation. They know that the alternative to downward mobility is the collective attempt to redefine status, to redefine cultural priorities. They know that used blue jeans are now being sold at inflated prices in chic stores as high fashion, and that hippie music, graphics, film, food, exterior construction, and interior decoration have already indelibly affected the cultural mainstream.

One could of course interpret these changes (and many have) as evidence of the genius of American institutions for absorbing dissent and coopting innovation without permitting them to affect fundamental economic arrangements or power structures. But much of the I-told-you-so talk about the failure of the revolution and the death of the movement misses an important point about the meaning of revolution in America. Most revolutions (perhaps all of them) are lost or compromised when measured against the initial visions which inspired them. But short of successful counter-revolution (and a tragic example in Chile is currently

before us), "failure" does not mean that important changes have not been accomplished, that people are not left a little looser, in somewhat altered circumstances, which then permit new revolutionary surges when political conditions are again ripe.

Despite the deep and recalcitrant racism of most Americans, few will doubt that black Mississippians are freer in the 1970s than they were in the 1950s; the movement can take some credit for that. Major tobacco companies, it is widely believed, are ready to market marijuana commercially when (not if) it becomes legal to do so; the movement can take some credit for that. Gallup has reported recently that at least half the American population now approve of premarital sexual intercourse. Among the more "liberated," high school girls now live with their teen-age lovers in their parents' own home (better that she should be safe with a nice boy than out in the streets doing God knows what with God knows whom). Twenty years ago the film star Ingrid Bergman was ostracized in America at the height of her career for having an illegitimate child, today, famous or not, a woman can have a child (or abort it) without benefit of clergy and in the full glare of publicity, without serious negative sanctions. The movement can take some credit for all of that.

At the communal frontiers of social experiment, changes in the norms governing sexual conduct have gone even further, and they are more than gossipy or epiphenomenal because they directly affect age, sexual, and familial roles. Love is hardly ever "free" if only because intimate relations usually breed either a sense of obligation or a sense of exploitation. And if the term "serial monogamy" carries less opprobrium today than it did ten or fifteen years ago, it is at least partly because in a good commune, "the family" accepts the responsibility for dealing with the pain engendered when fragile nuclear units crack or break. Formal monogamous coupling, but without a norm of exclusive sexual access, seems modal in the anarchist communes we have studied, and uncoupling and recoupling are predictable consequences of it. But in a good commune, the child of a broken couple generally retains his or her family, and in a very good commune, the more reluctant party to a break-up may be comforted and persuaded to stay, with the reassurance that he or she may have lost a lover but has retained a brother or sister.

Such coupling processes require relatively strong personalities, in both sexes, autonomous enough to sustain the inevitable tensions of these processes, which are visible to all. They also require child care practices that bring the young away from dependence and toward equality as early as possible. There is an ironic image

in our popular culture of mothers attempting to prolong the childhood of their daughters in order to keep themselves young by contrast. It is ironic because the juvenilization of the young tends to emphasize the continuing authority, and hence the "elder" status of parents and other caretakers of dependent children, contributing therefore to distance, separation, even "generation gaps." The fraternal treatment of children, on the other hand, seems to help them grow up fast. By exposing them to the possible delights of adult-peer relations early, it seems to motivate them to achieve it fully as soon as possible. By minimizing the extent and the duration of authority relations among parents and children and by maximizing the experience of equality, a good commune keeps parents "young," brings the generations closer together by virtue of the decline of the age graded differentiations between them. We have seen very few "adolescents" in the communes, but if this analysis is correct there should be very little adolescence in them because children will have had several years of experience as participating members of a good commune by the time they turn the corner into puberty.

Of course, not all communes are good communes; most aren't. The failure rate is high, although probably no higher than other forms of small enterprise. Indeed, that so many fail is less surprising than the fact that so many succeed, given the enormous obstacles that they have to overcome. There is not much reason to believe that communes in their presently most publicized forms will become the wave of the future, but some of the communes we have studied demonstrate that, with the right people and under the right conditions, communal living can sustain the sense of kinship and human solidarity which large numbers of people no longer get from religion, neighborhood, occupation, or the nuclear family. It is, in any case, already clear that parts of "alternative family styles" will be selectively adapted to middle-class life, that experiments in communal living will continue, involving now older and more affluent people seeking the sense of community that has eluded them, and that no future textbook on the family will be complete without proper attention to the communal experiments which weakened the authority of age graded distinctions in social groups.

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