

## Being Young: A Study in Contrast

AT TIME points in this country's development, whether at 1964, 1864, 1764, or 1664, there have been pressures on adults and children. The pressures and concerns have been different due to the country's changing life span in the history of man.

The twentieth century has focused attention on the particular needs of the child. As a result, parents have become more perceptive and better informed about child behavior than ever before. Although concern for the child has become intense under certain conditions and at certain times, the child has ultimately benefited from such concern, as has all of mankind.

Today's child, living in certain localities, is the most fortunate of all children in many respects. He has a well-established place in the total society. He has been accepted as a child and not as a small adult. For some time he has been the subject of a search for a better way of living. Parents, teachers, and research workers have been intent on more nutritious food, more healthful environments, and superior educational facilities

for him. Society has offered much and hoped for much in return. In other localities, the child lives in extreme poverty and neglect, a social paradox in an enlightened world community.

Periodically it is advisable to examine the environmental conditions under which the child lives. A study in contrast of his world now and that of the child growing up two or three decades ago does not seek to commend one and condemn the other. Rather, such a study attempts to clarify what a society may do toward educating its young for fully functioning adulthood. It focuses attention on the rapidity of change, technological advance, and struggle for survival. It also facilitates communication between different age groups. As the adult comprehends what it means to be a child today, he is able to understand what the child is saying to him by his behavior and to make necessary corrections in all educative agencies.

One hundred years ago, the population of the United States was little more than 31 million. In this country today, there are more than 41 million children under ten years of age. Approximately half the population is under twenty-five years of age. The uneven distribution of population and the presence of youth

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in such relatively large numbers has a tremendous impact on education, commerce and employment.

The future demands of education in physical facilities alone are beyond the abilities of most communities to meet. The teacher shortage is becoming more acute. There is a lag in social planning at the local, state and national levels. In most departments of public life there is failure to comprehend the new social structure occasioned by the shifting and increasing numbers of population groups.

There is a growing market in consumer goods for children and youth. Commercial advertisers traditionally attuned to adults are now appealing to the very young. The gold rush of the '60's is found in the market place that attracts children and youth and is characterized by much that is greedy, shabby, vulgar and cheap.

### An Expanding World

As the country grows older and more populous, the concept of survival, maintenance of an attained position, enters every facet of national life. Forests and fields are reduced continually by the urban sprawl. There is a greater demand for food, shelter, fuel and services. There is the necessity also of discovering newer ways of using better every national resource. This condition in itself creates anxiety among parents and an uneasiness about government and regulation.

It is difficult for the child today to believe that his parents grew up without radio, television, jet planes, freeways, and space capsules. At that time, there was one living room where different members of the family read, studied, or worked together at common tasks.

Usually there was one car for general use. Television and radio have now almost eliminated family conversation in some homes except during commercials. In others, different members of the family listen to favorite programs in separate rooms and ride in separate cars. Noise and tension from excessive speed have invaded quiet times and places.

Parents now are faced with social conditions relatively unknown twenty-five years ago. Chronic unemployment has increased and contributed to slums, crime, explosive race relations, and dropouts from school. A lack of fiscal responsibility reflected in the family's unbalanced budget, free use of credit, and the rising national debt has supplanted the "pay as you go" policy.

There is general knowledge of mass destruction. The threat of nuclear war has contributed to a phobia for security. The organized church is not changing fast enough to fill the void created by removing religion from the public schools. Continuous compulsory military service has marked psychological effects on young parents and their children. Instead of a vital love for country and respect for its flag and tradition, there exists a too prevalent apathetic attitude of "putting in the time," or "getting it over with."

Increased speed of communication has expanded the child's world. Through television and radio he is better acquainted with Khrushchev than with Ken living next door. By the turn of a dial he is able to witness a national triumph or tragedy. He is informed of events as soon as they occur. Time for acceptance of shocking incidents has been removed. The child has less to cushion the bizarre, sensational, and unusual happening.

## Struggle for Personal Worth

As space contracts, more regulation is needed to discipline human behavior toward others. The individual is helpless to protect himself against the consequences of ill-used science and technology. Bureaucracy in private life expands. Little is being done to simplify and explain tax laws. Private enterprise is encouraged by the Federal government and strangled at the same time by strict regulation. Individuals have become numbers to be manipulated by electronic machines. There is a persistent struggle for personal worth.

The child of several decades ago had more supportive relationships from a larger family, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Mobility and other factors in an increasingly complex industrialized society prevent this. It is difficult at the present time for the child to define the roles of father and mother. Greater responsibility for creating a base of warmth and affection and for conceptualizing the roles of parents rests now upon the family in a nuclear age.

Middle class parents of yesterday gave their children education which supposedly would equip them to choose a mate, earn a living, and manage their lives for themselves with a minimum of help, advice or interference. Few human societies have encouraged young people to start a new family with such small backing from parents and the wider kin group. As a result, a large part of the disorganization of family life today, frequency of divorce, incidence of disease and pathology, may be attributed to discrepancies and contradictions between expectancies learned in childhood and the actualities of the present time.

The swelling population subjects the young person to more and more me-

chanical processes and impersonality in attempting to assess qualities that are essentially individual and personal. There is danger that these measures may actually determine what and how children would be taught, and that instruction may be aimed, not at mastery of a subject or idea, but simply of standardized tests.

## A Cultural Shift

The appalling gauntlet of tests that children must run from birth into adulthood is another social consequence of population explosion. In like manner sheer numbers have helped to create a cultural shift from cherished traditions of privacy, individuality, and uniqueness of a person to survival in the midst of massive mechanical systems.

The nation's search for talent and the measures used for discovering it constitute another threat to the child's personal worth. His success in academic learning has become a family status symbol. He is encouraged to read, to understand numbers, to excel in every type of school experience at an earlier age than his parents.

Medical science has lengthened the span of life and permitted many to live who would have died naturally several decades ago. Although technology has offered many conveniences to masses, it has encouraged conformity and removed inventiveness and originality in its packages of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and recreation. Consequently the child sees adults obtain from a society too much leisure with no education for it, and seek self-expression and excitement in fantastic, often harmful behaviors.

The culture has been intent on criti-

*(Continued on page 480)*

1. *Procedures which encourage youth to express themselves orally.*

2. *Procedures which encourage young people to write their feelings and to express what they are thinking.*

3. *Procedures which sharpen and improve observations by teachers and other professional workers.*

4. *Procedures which give specific responses to problem situations are useful.*

5. *Procedures which focus on the young person and his relationships with his friends.*

6. *Procedures which highlight the individual as a member of a family unit can provide helpful information.*

7. *Procedures which attempt to get at information, skill, choices, vocabulary, knowledge and understandings are of great value.*

8. *Procedures which portray over a period of time, work and progress.*

This listing of procedures is merely suggestive of the great need for researchers to use a variety of tools. To learn more about today's youth we must listen more. To learn more about today's young people we as adults must find ways of relating, working, playing and associating with these young people. To learn more we must find ways of using various disciplines and agencies which have contributions to make. Many are now aware of the role of the medical worker, the psychologist, the social worker in team approaches to helping students. Perhaps we need the assistance of many others, including vocational workers and other persons who are closely associated with young people.

An assumption is made that to help young people we must know them. The aura of research can help as we use our best knowledge, as we test our assump-

tions, as we seek new data and as we coordinate and synthesize our findings.

There are likely thousands of young people whose limited world may be described or measured in terms of city blocks, spelling lists, or meaningless bodies of content. The real person has feelings, aspirations and values which can make or break future generations.

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#### Being Young—Sutton

(Continued from page 443)

cally examining the schools without investigating other institutions for correcting excesses and imbalances that exist in the social and economic order. In appraisal, the culture has largely overlooked the family, church and community. The culture must avoid expectations from the child disproportionate to other age groups. Society should provide continuous education by all agencies for youth and adult so that gains of civilization will be shared with the entire human race.

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