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LIFE TRANSITIONS AND MOVIES

Contrary to the caricatured view of psychoanalysts' believing that human personality is largely formed in the first 5 years of life, contemporary theory regards development to be a life-long process. To be sure, the preoedipal striving towards a "depressive position" (Klein, 1975 [1935]), consolidation of an "intermediate area of experience" (Winnicott, 1953), and struggles of separation-individuation (Mahler *et al.*, 1975) as well as the oedipal phase establishment of generational boundaries, superego, and incest barrier give the individual's character a certain psychosocial bent, but later developments during latency and adolescence (Blos, 1967) also play an important role in giving shape to the adult character. Moreover, growth does not stop here. Young adulthood helps fine tune both work-related and family-directed skills. Entry into marriage tests the capacity for intimacy and optimal distance. Becoming a parent mobilizes a renewed inner dialogue with internalized imagos of one's own parents. Middle age forces one to face changes in the body, letting go of children, and coming to terms with limits of acquisition and achievement. Still later, retirement from "the job" brings one to the bifurcation of marginalization and rediscovery of self in the road of life. And, finally, one has to encounter the issue of one's approaching death. At each step of this sojourn, new challenges for the psychic structure and social adjustment occur. Each forward movement tests the ego's resilience. Development, in other words, goes on till the last moment of one's life.

It is with such a backdrop in mind, that I have gathered a series of papers here that share two common elements. Each is developmentally oriented in its approach and addresses a particular era and/or major transition in the course of life. Each utilizes a set of movies to illustrate and highlight its thesis. The movies selected by the authors of these papers underscore regressive and progressive movements in development and address a number of phases, namely adolescence, entry into marriage, divorce, middle age and retirement, and old age and struggle to evolve a dignified self-image while facing death. Now, viewing a movie and conducting psychoanalysis have some striking parallels. In the words of my late friend, Alexis Burland,

In both experiences, certain narrative is presented to a certain audience: a film is shown to a movie-goer; associations regarding a patient's life experiences

are communicated to an analyst. In order for the observer to explore what is presented sensitively and in depth, to understand it in an experiential manner, it must be 'entered.' This involves a willingness to undergo a certain alteration of consciousness, often thought of as a controlled and circumscribed ego regression, such that there is a blurring of self and object differentiation and an identification with the subjective reality of the characters in the narrative. (1998, p. 66)

It is this identification that allows the analyst to grasp his or her patient's inner experience and it is this identification that facilitates the movie-goer to understand the motivations and feelings of various characters on the screen. When we put the narrative of the movie and a psychoanalytically trained mind together, we get an exemplary avenue for understanding human psyche.

The psychoanalytic discussion of various movies here thus provides a nuanced depth-psychological look at the matters of human development, especially during the adult life. On the one hand, such elucidation pays attention to the reworkings of infantile and childhood conflicts under the aegis of a more sophisticated ego. On the other hand, it emphasizes the potential for new solutions, resilience, and surprising compromise formations. In this way, this Special Issue makes a contribution to the body of psychoanalytic studies of adult development initiated by Erik Erikson (1959, 1978, 1982), and carried on by Daniel Levinson *et al.* (1978), George Vaillant (1977), Stanley Cath (1965, 1966, 1989), John Munder Ross (1975), and Calvin Colarusso (1981, 1990, 1997). The fact that the last mentioned of these pioneers has written an original paper for inclusion in this Special Issue makes it truly special. Read on and enjoy!

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Guest Editor

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