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SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION PHENOMENA IN ADULTHOOD: GENERAL CONCEPTS AND THE FIFTH INDIVIDUATION

The elaboration of separation-individuation theory in the years beyond childhood has been a psychoanalytic focus for several decades. In this paper, the nature of separation-individuation phenomena in adulthood and the terminology and controversy surrounding the use of the terms *third*, *fourth*, and *fifth individuation* are considered first; a detailed elaboration of the concept of the fifth individuation in late adulthood follows.

This is the third in a series of articles on separation-individuation theory in adulthood. The first (Colarusso 1990) focused on the third individuation during young adulthood (age twenty to forty); the second (Colarusso 1997) dealt with the fourth individuation experience of middle adulthood (age forty to sixty). In this paper I will first consider general concepts and terminology covering the use of separation-individuation theory in adulthood; I will then proceed to a discussion of the fifth individuation: separation-individuation experience in late adulthood (age sixty and beyond).

PART I: DEFINITIONS, TERMINOLOGY, AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

What Constitutes Development?

Since separation-individuation theory is a developmental concept, a definition of development is in order. I have found René Spitz's

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Submitted for Publication April 1, 1999.

terminology most useful because it takes into consideration the effect on psychic development of the continuous, *lifelong* interplay of biological, environmental, and intrapsychic forces. Spitz (1965) defined development as "the emergence of forms, of function and of behavior which are the outcome of exchanges between the organism on the one hand, the inner and outer environment on the other" (p. 5).

It will become clear as my argument develops that I am in agreement with those such as Erikson (1963), Emde (1985), and Pollock (1998) who see development as a lifelong experience. Erikson was the psychoanalytic pioneer who extended the concept of development throughout adulthood with his Eight Stages of Man. Following in his footsteps, Emde wrote: "First and foremost, we must realize that the developmental thrust is not over in adolescence—far from it. There is a continuous dynamic process, and the adult personality continues to undergo structural changes. . . . It may be in fact that the psychology of adult development is as important for clinical psychoanalysis as is the psychology of early development" (p. 109). In anticipation of my discussion of separation-individuation phenomena in late adulthood Pollock's ideas are particularly relevant. "Development, obviously, is not the same as growth and can include progression, regression, new constructions, remodeling, and in some ways, decline" (p. 44).

I wish to note too that I am in broad agreement with Mahler's orientation with regard to ego psychology and drive theory: "Our contribution should be seen as the early life history of the ego, set in the context of concurrent libidinal development" (1975, p. 6). In a similar fashion, in my papers on the third, fourth, and fifth individuations I have attempted to describe the sexual and aggressive drives, object relationships, and other environmental influences that affect the continuous evolution of ego and superego throughout the adult years.

Mahler and Others on Separation-Individuation Experience in Adulthood

In the early 1970s, the American Psychoanalytic Association sponsored three coordinated panels under the title "The Experience of Separation-Individuation in Infancy and its Reverberations Through the Course of Life" (Marcus 1973; Sternschein 1973; Winestine 1973). The seminal ideas presented in these continue to be elaborated a quarter of a century later. In the panel on infancy and childhood Mahler stated that the human is "absolutely" and later "relatively" dependent on the mother (Winestine 1973, p. 135). A year later (1974) she elabo-

rated: "One could regard the entire life cycle as constituting a more or less successful process of distancing from and introjection of the lost symbiotic mother, an eternal longing for the actual or fantasied 'ideal state of self' with the latter standing for a symbiotic fusion with the 'all good' mother who was at one point part of the self in a blissful state of well-being" (p. 305).

Although I agree with Mahler that the early mother/child dyad is the foundation on which all future relationships are built, I do not believe that these two concepts—absolute or relative dependence on the mother, and distancing from and introjection of the lost symbiotic mother—are sufficient in and of themselves to explain separation-individuation phenomena in adulthood. If these concepts are extended literally to the adult years psychic reductionism is the result. Adults do not repeat the original separation-individuation process as it occurs in the first three years of life, and they are not involved in the differentiation of self from object. Issues of closeness and distance must be considered within the context of the primary relationships which shape the *adult* psyche: namely those with spouse, aging parents, children and grandchildren, coworkers and friends. The major emotional and developmental issues that characterize these relationships (sexuality, generativity, intellectual pursuits, work and play, etc.) are *qualitatively* different from those that shape the interaction between mother and child, and they occur within a physically and sexually mature body and a sophisticated, highly developed psychic structure.

Erna Furman made this point in the second panel, on adolescence and maturity (Marcus 1973), when she emphasized the central role of genital instinctual forces in adolescent development. Thus, the adolescent significance of pregenital events, including separation-individuation, depends on how the adolescent deals with current genital impulses and the developmental task of integrating sexual identity and activity. By the time adulthood is reached this point has even greater importance, since the results of the infantile separation-individuation process can only be inferred by studying the many layers of cumulative revision that result from the incorporation of these early experiences into later developmental themes.

Definitions and Terminology

In 1990 and 1997 I described broad definitions of the terms *third*, *fourth* and *fifth individuations*. I reserved the term *third individuation*

for the multidetermined, complex separation-individuation phenomena that occur in the developmental phase of young adulthood (age twenty to forty), and the term *fourth individuation* for the elaboration of these processes in middle adulthood (age forty to sixty). The term *fifth individuation* therefore applies to late adulthood (age sixty and beyond). This formulation follows logically upon the well-established use of the terms *first* and *second individuation,* proposed respectively by Mahler and Blos, to refer to childhood and adolescence, and thus provides a broad temporal framework for the entire life cycle.

The use of these terms outside of the context in which Mahler originally proposed them has been criticized. For instance, in the panel on adolescence and maturity (Marcus 1973), Schafer and Furman opposed Blos's use of the term "individuation" for adolescence because it did not deepen our understanding of the phase. Furman emphasized the need to see the phenomenon of individuation in adolescence in terms of oedipal resolution and current development conflict. Schafer did not see the adolescent experience with parents as individuation, since individuation from the infantile objects has already occurred. He emphasized the need for rigor in our definition of terms. I completely agree that reader, and writer, must understand that the terms separation and individuation do not have the same meaning in reference to adolescent and adult development as they have in reference to infancy. But the term *second individuation* has become an accepted concept in our thinking and our literature, and the terms *third, fourth,* and *fifth individuation* are rapidly increasing in use and in usefulness. A computer survey of the mental health literature from 1990 through 1998 discovered sixty-five articles with the term *separation-individuation* in the title. Nearly all dealt with adolescence and adulthood, and focused on a wide variety of subjects including normal and pathologic development, psychological testing, and therapy.

In summarizing the panel on adolescence and maturity, Marcus (1973) addressed the critical difference in the use of these terms in infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. In the first individuation, *representational differentiation* (Schafer's term) is at the core of the separation-individuation concept (p. 165). In later phases, *joining and separation* (p. 165), and *cohesion and differentiation from the object* (Spiegel's and Schaefer's terms; p. 165) are the significant elements in individuation; they reflect a continuity in the developmental processes related to separation and individuation that can be integrated with Mahler's theory.

In a similar vein, I wish to emphasize that the terms *stage* and *substage* in Mahler's theory (i.e., pseudo-autistic, symbiotic, and separation-individuation) have a markedly different meaning when referring to adult development. Mahler used the terms in a limited and specific sense to describe the steps leading to the emergence of the capacity for self and object constancy. By contrast, the terms *young*, *middle*, and *late adulthood* are broad concepts that encompass many developmental lines (A. Freud 1981) in a somewhat arbitrary temporal framework. As Robert Nemiroff and I have observed (Colarusso 1998), stage theory—the best-known temporal formulation is by Erikson (1963)—has a limited usefulness in adulthood because each phase covers an interval as long as all of childhood, and because basic experiences occur across phases (for example, one can become a parent at twenty or at sixty). Despite these limitations, adult developmental stage theory is one of several useful ways to organize and describe real experiences and intrapsychic processes that occur in most individuals at similar points in the life cycle.

Basic Similarities and Differences among the Five Individuations

If the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth individuations are to be useful theoretical and clinical concepts, the similarities and differences among them must be described. In this section I will make a beginning effort, fully realizing that this is a task for many minds over a number of years. All five individuations are similar in that reverberations of the achievement of self and object constancy occur throughout the life cycle as modifications are made in the ego in response to continuous physical and psychological changes. However, the three adult individuations are qualitatively different from the first in that they are characterized by interactions with individuals other than the primary objects, influenced by physical retrogression rather than growth, and interpreted by a complex and sophisticated psychic structure.

The *first individuation*, as described by Mahler, Pine, and Bergman in 1975, refers to the psychological birth of the human infant and results in the emergence, by age three, of the capacities of self and object constancy, on which foundation all future object relationships are built.

The *second individuation* (Blos 1967) rests upon the psychic structures established during the first, and describes the effect of the developmental processes of adolescence, particularly physical and sexual maturatation and the development of the capacity for cognitive

abstraction. A true metamorphosis or qualitative restructuring of the self results in a greater consciousness of self and the emergence of the capacity for the first complete sexual-psychological fusion through the progressive steps of adolescent infatuation, sexual intercourse, and the beginning development of the capacity for mature adult intimacy.

The *third individuation* is characterized by experiences in which self and other are defined, for the first time, primarily through relationships with individuals other than the primary objects. This physical and psychological separation from the infantile objects occurs in juxtaposition with new, profoundly influential experiences with others, particularly sexual and emotional intimacy in committed relationships, and fusion with genetic and biological extensions of the self, namely children. Young adult experiences with work, sexuality, education, and the first significant signs of physical aging also influence the changing conceptualization of self and other.

Shaped by the influences of aging and illness, the death of parents, the transformation of children into adults, the exercise and subsequent loss of power in the work place, and the appearance of grandchildren, the *fourth individuation* is characterized by the growing awareness of a personal end, and by the gradual acceptance of time limitation and personal death. In addition to real and contradictory experiences of being left by growing children and dying parents while fusing with new objects such as grandchildren, students, and mentees, midlife individuals must mournfully let go of youthful aspects of the self and replace them with the (in many ways more gratifying) realization that the midlife self can exercise the greatest degree of autonomy, competence, power, and relatedness to others possible in the human life cycle.

The *fifth individuation* is characterized by two contradictory trends: the intraspychic shift from *being left* to *leaving* as one contemplates and accepts the nearness of death and the loss of all human relatedness; and the simultaneous desire, stimulated by the acceptance of a personal end, to fuse with loved ones, community, culture, and the broad expanse of humanity by giving, without restraint or expectation of return, of one's wisdom and possessions. Erikson (1963) called this desire *generativity*.

Adult Separation-Individuation: Intrapsychic Separation from the Self, and Leaving vs. Being Left

A critical difference between the experiences of separation-individuation in childhood and adulthood is the degree to which the

intrapsychic experience is one of separation and individuation *from aspects of the self.* During infancy and childhood, during the first and second individuations, the *physical* presence of the infantile objects is essential to the process and, as described in the following comment by Settlage (1990), is a precursor of normal adult functioning. "Object and self constancy embody gradually established, lasting, predominantly good representations of the parent and the self as shaped by experience in the developmental relationship. They serve, respectively, the formation, regulation, and maintenance of relationships, of self-esteem, and of the sense of self and identity. The defining idea that becoming and functioning as an adult involves the *intrapsychic* integration, the 'owning' for oneself, of these regulatory structures at an adult level of autonomy of function" (p. 27).

Solnit (Sternschein 1973) noted that separation causes discomfort in children because of their limited ability to hold on to mental representations of the adult love-object for very long while the object is absent. However, individuation proceeds rapidly in the child, whereas in the adult "periodic review" (p. 633) advances individuation more slowly. Steinschein (1973) felt that self and object images and their mental representations continue to be modified "at critical affect-laden functions such as puberty, adolescent disengagement, marriage, parenthood, grandparenthood, the climacterium, retirement, senescence . . ." (p. 634).

Expanding on Solnit's suggestion of "periodic review" and Steinschein's notion of "critical affect-laden functions," I suggest that marriage, parenthood, work identity, the climacterium, retirement, and senescence, as well as physical aging, and the acceptance of time limitation and personal death, are *developmental processes that continuously alter self and object representations.* Further, there is a continuous separation from aspects of the self formed at earlier times: being married instead of single, a middle-aged mentor instead of a young student, or a responsible parent instead of a newly married husband or wife.

Clinical example. Andy married when he was thirty-five. In analysis at age thirty-nine because of minimal professional and financial success, he found the challenge of accepting his new role as husband and father of two rambunctious boys particularly difficult. I could almost visualize the painful separation from the intrapsychic representation of himself as a relatively carefree young bachelor, responsible only for

himself. "I wanted those boys but I didn't realize what I was getting myself into. I knew getting married and having kids involved sacrifices but sometimes it's a bit much. My life has changed so much I hardly know who I am anymore. They're on me when I walk in the door at night, and I'm already tired from work. Judy had them all day and she needs a break." His monologue soon shifted to sex. "We used to have ten times more sex before the boys. Judy is worried about getting pregnant again and she always has one ear listening for them even in the middle of it. Don't get me wrong, I love my wife and kids, and I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world, but, God, my life was so simple when I was single."

In the panel on infancy and childhood (Winestine 1973) Mahler said: "The growing-away process is a lifelong separation-individuation process, since inherent in every new step of independent functioning is a minimal threat of object loss" (p. 136).

Growing away is a lifelong process. The threat of object loss in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood may be minimal or profound, since significant object loss through death, incapacitation, or divorce may occur at any point in the life cycle. *But in middle and late adulthood a powerful intrapsychic shift occurs from being left to leaving* as one comes to grips with the universal developmental tasks of accepting the concepts of time limitation and personal death in midlife (Colarusso 1990), and the death of contemporaries and the self in late adulthood.

Of course, the attitude toward leaving, i.e., dying, is influenced by experiences with the mother during the first individuation and by subsequent experiences with leaving and being left; however at no point in the life cycle prior to middle adulthood is there a normative, universal preoccupation with death as an *inevitable* experience that will result in leaving everyone and everything for, depending upon religious and intellectual belief, either another existence or oblivion.

PART II: THE FIFTH INDIVIDUATION

The Nearness of Death

The fifth individuation may be loosely defined as the experience with separation-individuation issues in late adulthood; these are primarily focused on the psychological effects of the anticipation of personal death, and reaction to this idea.

During the first individuation death is not a meaningful conscious or cognitive concept. It may roughly be equated with prolonged, painful separation from the need-satisfying object as exemplified by Spitz's (1945, 1946) hospitalism and anaclitic depression. Death is understood conceptually during the second individuation, but in the absence of the loss of parents or siblings, the anabolic thrust of adolescent development and the awareness of a long, seemingly infinite future minimize the impact of this cognitive advance. During young adulthood the aging process (particularly the approaching loss of procreative capacity in women), experiences with personal danger (such as combat), and the deaths of grandparents and sometimes parents turn death into a painful but still personally distant reality. For most individuals in the course of normal development it is not until middle adulthood, when the concepts of time limitation and personal death are integrated (Colarusso and Nemiroff 1979), and late adulthood, when the end of the self is known to be near, that death has a significant impact on separation-individuation processes. In these last two phases of development death is increasingly recognized, and accepted, as the inevitable final separation. Death itself leads to no further individuation unless one makes the leap from analytic theory to religious faith. It is the nearness of death *while one is still alive* that is the pre-eminent intrapsychic influence on separation-individuation processes during the fifth individuation.

Psychoanalyst Leo Madow (1997) offered this vision of separation-individuation phenomena in late adulthood: After reaching a peak of autonomy during the third and fourth individuations "we pass back through the subphase of separation-individuation, second rapprochement, and practicing subphases, and so on, on the way to the second symbiosis" (p. 161). Not meant to be taken literally, the notion of a second symbiosis is an attempt to cast the impact of the increased dependency of late adulthood and death-nearness in Mahlerian terminology. Instead of describing death as the "ultimate loss" in this "second infancy," it can instead, be seen as "the final . . . fusion with mother" This notion of a fusion with a parental or godly figure at the time of, and in response to, death, lies at the core of religious belief.

The Effect of the Impact of the Deaths of Relatives and Friends

Emotional well-being throughout life is dependent in a significant way on object relationships, both in the real world with real people, and in the intrapsychic realm with internalized objects. By late adulthood,

longstanding relationships may have been in existence for more than half a century. These real relationships and their intrapsychic representations have an extremely powerful, continuous impact on all aspects of identity, emotional well-being, and psychic functioning. When separation occurs through the death of significant others, the impact on individuation is profound, and a shift occurs in self- and object representations. In response to the awareness of loss and the pain of the mourning process the self is redefined as more alone, more singular, isolated from irreplaceable objects. But conversely and paradoxically, the intrapsychic attachment to, and fusion with, the intrapsychic representations of a lost object may be intensified as the mourning process enriches the object representations with powerful affects and memories and organizes the experience (S. Freud 1917).

As time goes on, the intact individual attempts to compensate for the loss of important objects in both the real and the intrapsychic worlds. Intrapsychically there is a need for something akin to the gratifying emotional refueling that the toddler experiences upon return to the mother during the rapprochement subphase. In late adulthood emotional sustenance is engendered by reconnecting with affects and memories of mother and father and their adult replacements (spouse, children, etc.) from all phases of development. Older adults sustain themselves by dipping into emotionally charged memories of connectedness with the youthful parents of infancy and childhood; with the invigorating connectedness to, and emancipation from, the parents of adolescence; with the tender intimacy and strength generated by care for aging and dying parents; and with the multitude of memories of closeness to spouse, children, grandchildren, and friends that are fueled by affects as intense and as gratifying as those connected to the original infantile objects. As an illustration, consider Freud's thoughts as he contemplated his own old age and approaching death:

> Do not make the mistake of thinking I am depressed. I regard it as a triumph to retain a clear judgement in all circumstances. I know too that were it not for one trouble of possibly not being able to work, I should deem myself a man to be envied. To grow old, to feel so much warm love in my family and life, so much expectation of success and such adventurous undertaking, if not success itself, who else has attained so much at the age of eighty-one and one-half. I keep brooding on whether or not I shall reach the age of my father, and brother, or even that of my mother, tortured as I am by the conflicts between the desire

> for rest, the dread of renewed suffering (which a prolongation of life would bring with it), and the anticipation of a pain of sorrow at being separated from everything to which I am still attached. If I were alone, I should long ago have done with life [Letter to Marie Bonaparte, December 12, 1936; quoted in Cath 1997, p. 144].

In the real world, the intact elderly compensate for the loss of significant others by intensifying existing relationships with children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and friends, and by seeking out new friendships and sometimes new spouses. The healthy, creative cycle of loss, mourning, and reattachment continues in intact elderly individuals until death itself arrests the process; it is a major indicator of mental health and developmental progression during the fifth individuation. However, this process even when successful does not occur without considerable pain and conflict. Cath (1997) states that the elderly often make a "flight from rapprochement" (p. 151) based on the fear of additional loss: "A major adaptive challenge late in life has been how to protect the self from the terrible devastating fragmenting experience of emotionally investing in another person or marriage and experiencing that person's illness and/or death" (p. 151). But many elderly are unable to forge new object ties or intensify existing ones due to physical or mental limitations or unfavorable circumstances. These individuals turn inward, focusing on bodily functions and the nostalgic past; and on inanimate possessions of all types and values (Cath 1965).

Suicide As a Response to Late-Life Loss

Twenty-five to thirty percent of successful suicides occur in persons over age sixty-five. The highest rate occurs in white males over eighty-five, and suicide occurs most frequently in those who are divorced, followed by those who are widowed, and finally by those who never married (Busse 1998). I suggest that unbuffered by an existing tie to a wife, these men are unable to tolerate being alone—or that they cannot face the prospect of death without a sustaining symbiotic tie to a wife/mother. So they end the pain of aloneness by a self-initiated oblivion, or by an intended fusion with loved ones and/or God in the afterlife.

There are 130 women alive for every 100 men between the ages of sixty-five and seventy-four. After age seventy-five the disparity increases to 178:100. Two-thirds of men over sixty-five live with their spouses, compared to only one-third of women (Busse 1998). Yet the

rate of suicide is much less in elderly women. Why? I suggest that a partial explanation may include an understanding of the anticipation of widowhood. Since the likelihood of a husband dying before a wife is so great, this awareness prepares the woman for loss, and for the expectation of having to live alone for one or two decades. The preparation for this late-life developmental task begins in childhood and continues into adulthood as grandmothers, mothers, female relatives, and friends are observed confronting this challenge and relying on each other for attachment and sustenance. In addition, women put more emphasis on relatedness, and in the postmarital state they demonstrate a greater ability to engage others in emotionally satisfying ways than do men.

Clinical example. Ruby was seventy years old when John, her husband of forty-five years, died. The couple had moved from the Midwest to Southern California seven years before, after John had retired. They had little extended family, but traveled frequently to be with their three children who were scattered about the Midwest and East. Although John played golf four or five times a week, he rarely saw his golfing friends off of the course, had few other interests, and was "constantly underfoot, much like my children used to be," according to Ruby. She, on the other hand, had joined a garden club, volunteered at a local hospital, and quickly developed close attachments to numerous friends and neighbors.

Misunderstanding as pathology the intensity of her mourning response to her husband's death, her concerned children shepherded her into my office. A complete evaluation and a thorough child and adult developmental history revealed a very emotionally intact person of considerable intelligence, ego strength, and versatility, who was engaged in a normal mourning process. Although little therapy was indicated I was privileged to watch her stubbornly refuse to move in with her children, and begin to fulfill her emotional needs through increased familial and nonfamilial contacts while at the same time continuing to mourn for her lost mate. I believe that the mourning process extends over months or years in the elderly; this is partly due to the degree to which one's identity becomes fused with a mate of many decades, but it is also a means of maintaining an intense emotional connectedness in the absence of the desire, or the time, to begin another relationship.

I have seen Ruby's response numerous times in women, but infrequently in men, who in my clinical opinion tend to be lonely, anxious,

and at loose ends following the death of a spouse, and who often "solve" their uncomfortable emotional state by rushing into another relationship or by regressing and becoming unnecessarily dependent on their children.

Thus becoming a widow may have a stifling effect as the woman retreats into an inner world of memory; but the eventual outcome is often extraordinary individuation as potentials for talent, choice, and inclinations that were suppressed or repressed during marriage flower in multiple directions. These not infrequent occurrences are true examples of continuing adult development and late-life separation-individuation. Similar experiences, although less frequent, and less studied, obviously also occur in elderly men. I have named this phenomenon *postspousal individuation*. If the internal representations to the dead spouse are predominantly unambivalent the intrapsychic connectedness to the spouse is strong and sustaining, and the widowed survivor feels alone, rather than lonely. Sexual reawakening may be part of the postspousal individuation due to alterations in the superego and ego ideal. Myers (1990), for example, described the increase in sexual desire in a seventy-three-year-old man following the death of his wife.

Retirement and Redundancy

Sometimes in middle adulthood, but always by late adulthood—whether voluntarily, by force, or through sickness or death—comes a separation from work and the workplace. For most men, and for an increasing number of women, work and its expertise, relationships, and temporal rhythms define the self, and are a major aspect of identity throughout the adult years (Colarusso 1998a). For some the intrapsychic and real separation from work is liberating and wonderful, and for others it is sad and depressing; but all separation from the workplace forces a significant individuation. One becomes a retired person, a non-worker, outside the mainstream of the economic forces that energize society and drive it toward the future.

Retirement produces a growing awareness of redundancy, of no longer being in the center of a world which rapidly, even frantically, rushes past the retiree, embracing and integrating new knowledge and technology. The retiree must struggle with the realization that he or she is separate from the younger generations: on the other side of an ever-widening chasm of time, knowledge, energy, and technology. The elderly are once again in the position they occupied in all four earlier

individuations, namely being left: by toddler, teenager, adult "child," and grandchild successively. As do the earlier separations, this one acts as a stimulus to further individuation and a new definition of the self. The loss is made narcissistically tolerable, even enjoyable, through a combination of generative activities, identification with the young, and an understanding and acceptance of the human life cycle possible only in one who has embraced life through all of its phases and become wise (Colarusso 1994) in the process. Whether retired or not, every person during middle and late adulthood must mourn for unrealized goals and ambitions. This process results in a major reworking of the ego ideal, where such ambitions reside, and of the superego, where the reactions of benign acceptance, or guilt and punishment, are determined.

Aging and Illness

Illness and the failure of organ systems in late adulthood force an intrapsychic separation from the perceived body image of an intact, functional body. For physically healthy children, adolescents, and young adults an increasingly competent body is taken for granted and enjoyed. In midlife the aging processes in the body precipitate mourning for the lost body of youth.

Unique to the fifth individuation is the genetically programmed failure of organ systems, which forces a separation from the sense of possession of a fully competent, functioning body. Because of the loss of function and capability, it forces a separation also from those interactions with others that require particular physical skills; significant loss of hearing or diminished vision, for example, may result in loss of the ability to drive an automobile. Such losses, and many others like them, diminish the sense of competency and limit the scope of gratifying interactions with others. Stanley Cath (1997) used the term "*mean time to failure*" (p. 144) to describe this aging process and its effects.

> Our destinies are very different depending upon whether our eyes, ears, heart, vasculature, immuno-competency, or brain integrity fail in what seems like an arbitrary sequence of genetically programmed inevitabilities. So, all these psychobiological failures are completely associated with losses of human attachments and the capacities needed to grieve and restitute . . . Freud's famous dictum, 'the ego is first and foremost a body ego,' might be rephrased to 'the ego is last and forever a body ego'—always vulnerable to the vicissitudes of separation-individuation [pp. 144–145].

To illustrate his point, Cath juxtaposes the importance of newly gained locomotion in separating from the symbiotic object during the first individuation with the loss of locomotion through stroke or illness during the fifth individuation. The freedom to come and go at will, to set distances between family members and friends, to control one's home, associates, and caretakers may be lost, forcing a return to a state of dependency upon others not unlike that of the young child. Although the mental state is very different during the fifth individuation, some of the affects are similar to those experienced during the first, because both toddlers and the elderly struggle to control sensory and motor functions and to exercise autonomy and choice in relationship to others and the environment. In a sense, the last individuation collapses into the first, producing an unconscious fusion of experience.

Adult Observation. Michael is an eighty-two-year-old acquaintance who recently shocked clerks at the Department of Motor Vehicles when he *voluntarily* gave up his driver's license. His request was so unusual that the forms needed to complete the process could not be located. Unable to see well, and unsure of his reflexes, this mature, otherwise healthy man chose to address the failure of his organ systems directly. With a mixture of feelings ranging from sadness and loss to resignation and acceptance he said:

> I've driven for sixty years, and I've been a good driver, too; I only remember one or two fender-benders in all that time. But last week I almost hit a woman in a crosswalk. I didn't see her until too late and then I hit the brake so hard that I caused the car to skid. Luckily she was watching. Enough, I decided, I can't end my life with that kind of an experience on my conscience. I don't know what I'm going to do to get around. I drove every day. I guess I'll have to impose on Evelyn, but she's a worse driver than I am. I'll use taxis, and walk more, but they're not real substitutes. Oh, to be young and vigorous again, or even sixty, I could do everything I needed to then. I'll get used to it, I won't like it but I will get used to it. I'll ride the bus, I'll call my friends on the phone, I'll promise my grandkids a buck or two to take me places. You know, up to now getting old hasn't been too tough. Not being able to get around on my own is, but I'll accept the change; there is still a lot of pleasure left in life.

Transitional Objects and Phenomena and the Divestment of Possessions

During the first individuation, transitional objects (Winnicott 1953) help the infant and toddler separate from the mother and move

toward self and object constancy. Although no longer used in the formation of psychic structure in subsequent phases of development, transitional objects and phenomena continue to be used to facilitate the lifelong struggle with separation and individuation.

During the second individuation, clothes, cars, and music serve a similar (but qualitatively different) function as the adolescent prepares to leave the family of origin. Possessions continue to facilitate autonomous development during the third individuation, particularly when they are acquired through the individual's own effort in the workplace, but the need for transitional objects in this phase of development is muted by the powerful trend toward fusion with, and the creation of, such new objects as spouse and child.

In the fourth individuation the value placed on transitional objects increases, to compensate for the narcissistic injury involved in mourning for the lost body of youth and confronting the central developmental task of recognizing time limitation and personal death. In the fifth individuation there is an increased attachment to things, both normal and pathological, to deal with the loss of loved ones and the approach of death. The increased value placed on things exists side by side with the seemingly paradoxical need to divest oneself of possessions. Yet in fact both are attempts to master the same developmental challenge: the ultimate separation—death.

The increased attachment to valued possessions in late adulthood, particularly those that belonged to parents or ancestors from earlier generations, serve as transitional-like objects by providing gratifying intrapsychic connections to a more youthful past and simultaneously to loved ones who have been lost through death. More pathologically, some elderly lose the ability to distinguish between personal possessions and meaningless things, and fill their space with worthless papers, boxes, and junk that become expressions of extreme emptiness and/or organic brain disease.

In late adulthood, the shedding of possessions by willfully giving them to others is a significant form of purposeful separation and an integral aspect of the fifth individuation. Each act of giving sharpens late-life identity, and results in a simpler, more sharply delineated sense of self as the end of the human life cycle nears. A man in his sixties described his reaction to sitting at his parents' dining room table, which he had given to his daughter upon his parents' death. As he sat there with his child and grandchildren, he lovingly touched the table

with the futile wish that he could recreate the times he had sat in the same place with his parents and grandparents. In his mind the table served as a means of connecting the five generations of significance in his life.

Willing worldly possessions, for distribution *after* death, is a similar process; but it is devoid of the narcissistic gratification and meaning that come when there is interaction with the beneficiary of the gift during life. The ambivalence implicit in all forms of late-life giving is very often expressed through wills that inappropriately dictate the use of funds and possessions and thus attempt to control the quality of life of heirs from beyond the grave, as though death were not a total separation from life. The desire to be remembered by the young after death, and to live on through them, perfectly compliments the desire of the young for possessions to enrich their lives. This fifth individuation shift away from possessions and toward generative connections to those who will live on is another of the hallmarks of late-life wisdom (Colarusso 1994).

Symbiosis and the Reversal of Generations

The reversal of generations refers to the late-life shift in the relationship between parent and child in which the elderly parent becomes dependent on the adult "child." This transformation affects every aspect of their relationship, but has a particularly powerful impact on separation-individuation processes in both. Symbiosis is an integral, necessary part of the first individuation. Although aspects of symbiosis may be observed during the second and third individuations, the emphasis is on individuation and autonomous functioning in both generations. However, when a middle-aged child assumes responsibility for his or her increasingly needy, dependent progenitor, the symbiotic aspects of their interaction become prominent once again, but in reversed form. The ability of child and parent to tolerate these increased symbiotic aspects affects all child-parent relationships during the fourth and fifth individuations. As Joan Fleming (Sternschein 1973) described it, when the reversal of generations occurs and the "reversal of vectors of the symbiotic relationship" cannot be accepted by middle-aged child or aging parent, "the separation-individuation process has been derailed or is incomplete" (p. 64).

Grandparenthood: Symbiosis and Rapprochement in Middle and Late Adulthood

In my 1990 paper on the third individuation in a section entitled "Intimations of the Fourth Individuation" I wrote:

> Margaret Mahler described how the breaking of the symbiotic tie between mother and infant is as inevitable as biological birth. The same sense of irreversible change, for child and parent, is evident during the third individuation. Normal, sexually mature children will inevitably leave their parents and reproduce, thrusting the parents into a new relationship with another child who is a further genetic extension of themselves. The result of this new relationship, which can have such a powerful enriching effect on the middle- and late-life development of the new grandparents, is the fourth individuation.
>
> When their child becomes a parent, new grandparents must define their standing among the generations, alter their internal representations of their "child" and develop new object ties to the grandchild. Because they are struggling with the middle- and late-life developmental tasks of dealing with retirement, illness, deaths of friends or spouse, and other experiences attending normal aging, new grandparents are developmentally primed to turn their attention toward children and grandchildren, objects who represent their (genetic) future, a future which will endure even after death, the final separation [pp. 193–194].

As they idealize their grandchildren and engage them with intense love and devotion, the interaction is similar to the relationship between mother and child during the rapprochement crisis. The similarity is present because both toddler and grandparent have an intense need for fusion as they face developmental challenge: the toddler must be refueled before venturing again into the ever-expanding world, and the grandparent must consider crossing into the great unknown void beyond human existence. This symbiosis-like fusion with the young stimulates a conscious and unconscious reworking of the grandparents' experience as children during the first individuation, and as new parents during the third individuation. This is an example of how phase-specific events in adulthood, for example grandparenthood, alter the way basic lifelong paradigms such as separation-individuation are experienced and reworked in the present. Thus, the intense investment in, and idealization of, grandchildren serves several developmental and defensive purposes, namely: (1) as a narcissistic buffer against the traumas of old age and the nearness of death; (2) as a wish for continuation of life through genetic immortality; and (3) as a denial of imperfections

in the self through selective identification with desirable qualities in the grandchild.

In his seminal paper on grandparenthood, Cath (1989) noted that becoming a grandparent activates aspects of the first individuation. "Lifelong repressed yearnings for an ideal father's or mother's love becomes intensified when one becomes a grandparent" (p. 101). Midlife separation-individuation processes are also stimulated by the bonding together of the oldest and youngest generation against their child and parent, respectively. "Both may be struggling with autonomy from the middle or 'sandwich' generation, both searching for new identities, greater interdependence and new anchorages" (p. 104). In addition, grandchildren provide grandparents with the greatest potential for late-life emotional refueling, and screen one of the most powerful forms of separation anxiety in the entire life span, namely that of a shrinking self and selfobject world.

Becoming a grandparent in middle adulthood (forty through sixty-plus), although ambivalent, is usually filled with joy and awe because of the intense conscious love and idealization of the new extension of the self. However, during the fifth individuation, in late adulthood (sixty and beyond), dominant feelings often veer toward disappointment and detachment. This shift is due to developmental changes in the grandchild that impact the relationship between the generations. As grandchildren advance into latency and adolescence they increasingly invest their time and affect in peers and new activities and pay less attention to, and have less need for, their grandparents. As one grandfather put it, "He used to love being around me when he was little; now that he's so involved with his friends, all I get is an occasional crumb." Further, as latency and adolescent egos and superegos develop, and as experience with other families increases, grandchildren observe their elders more critically and lose the pure, naive idealization of their grandparents (and parents) that was so gratifying to the older generations.

CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME SENSE AND SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION

According to Bernice Neugarten (Sternschein 1973), individuals have a time perspective for major life events. "Each person's view of himself and of the world changes as life-time lengthens and as his experiences accumulate" (p. 639). The healthy adult personality can be distinguished

from the unhealthy on the basis of the ability to anticipate and accept as inevitable the sequences of events and the turning points in one's own life that are continually observed in the lives of others who grow up, grow old, and die. The expectable losses in middle and late life are accepted well by most persons if time to process and compare them with the experience of peers is present. Menopause, the leaving of children, retirement, even death are examples.

In a series of six papers (Colarusso 1979, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1998b, 1999), I proposed a psychoanalytic developmental theory of time sense throughout the life cycle. The last two papers in the series dealt with middle and late adulthood. Attitudes toward time greatly influence the separation-individuation process throughout life, but particularly in middle and late adulthood, as individuals gradually change their perspective from, to use Neugarten's words, time-since-birth to time-left-to-live. This shift in time perception leads mid- and late-life individuals to focus on, process, and gradually accept the inevitable separations that occur, both intrapsychically and in the real world, from others and from no-longer-authentic aspects of the self. As parents and friends age and die, the awareness that the same thing will happen to the self is integrated and accepted. This time-induced shift becomes an extremely powerful stimulus driving separation-individuation processes during the fourth and fifth individuations.

The acceptance of time limitation and personal death engenders a need to understand two contradictory trends in human experience: (1) the inevitable predictability of the linear temporal progression from the present to the future, from the beginning to the end of personal time; and (2) the unpredictability of loss and change in human experience. The common element in both trends is loss: in separation-individuation terminology, loss of relationships, both to the self and to others. The mature individual in the midst of the fourth and fifth individuations uses this understanding and integration to value and seek out intimacy while at the same time recognizing the time-limited nature of all human ties. This bittersweet mature understanding of time leads the older individual to a most exquisite understanding of relationships and the human condition.

Although separation-individuation theory is only one of many complimentary theoretical frameworks available to psychoanalysts, it is particularly well suited to understanding late-life development because it sheds light on the near-constant attempt to reconcile the

incomparable pleasures of wisdom and mature loving and living with the incomprehensible awareness of death.

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