AN EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTAGATION OF IDENTITY CONFUSION AS EXEMPLIFIED BY ADOLESCENT SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

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ABSTRACT

It is well established that Erik Erikson introduced the 'identity crisis' as a normative aspect of adolescent development, one constituted by the tension of identity vs. identity confusion'. While the 'identity' dimension of this tension has received widespread recognition, the problematic pole of ‘identity confusion’ has been comparatively neglected. This study seeks to remedy this research deficit.

The study's literature review serves a twofold purpose: 1) To explicate the controversial issues concerning the psychological conceptualization of human identity, and 2) To establish adolescent suicidality as an especially suitable experiential sphere within which to research the phenomenon of identity confusion. Initially, a review is presented of Erikson, Winnicortt and Kohut's respective psychoanalytic perspectives on the ego psychological, object relational, and self psychological conceptions of identity. Next, the study explicates Lacan's view of identity formation in the 'mirror phase' and its modification through the accession to the symbolic order. Further, there is a review of the convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological conceptions regarding identity. Finally, the literature review summarizes select cognitive, social, and family perspectives on identity, which are explored with an eye toward their intersection within the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification.

In the empirical portion of the project, four adolescent suicide attempters between ages 15-17 were each interviewed twice. These interviews were subjected to an extensive qualitative-linguistic analysis. The research findings indicate that the problematic pole in each of Erikson's psychosocial stages names experiences which collectively constituted the adolescent subjects' suicidal desires (i.e. the experiences of basic mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, isolation, stagnation, and despair). The experiences of helplessness and hopelessness also emerged as significant. Further, shame was explicated as playing a pivotal and pervasive role in the phenomenology of the adolescent suicide attempter.

In attempting suicide, the study subjects sought to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose or destiny. Suicidality was borne of the subjects' desire to destructively transform the anachronistic ego identity structures within which they had become imprisoned- an imprisonment experienced as enforced by others with whom the subjects had identified and on whom they had depended for assistance in becoming emotionally emancipated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the relation of identity issues to adolescent suicidality was initiated when, at the conclusion of the 1986 fall semester, I wrote a psychotherapy practicum integration paper (Bonner, 1986) on my work with a 19 year old female client who had attempted suicide two weeks before our first session. Based on the themes I presented in group consultation, I was encouraged to dialogue my client's issues with some of the psychological literature on identity. This dialogue proved to be quite rewarding, especially in terms of the way it illuminated the meaning of my client's suicide attempt.

In researching my integration paper, I was also impressed by the relevance of existential-phenomenological themes to the issues developed in the identity literature. This impression was deepened as I did further reading during the Spring, 1987 advanced research seminar, and it was then that I decided to make 'identity' the initial focus of my dissertation research. I was most interested in phenomena related to Erikson's famous concept of 'identity crisis', and I came to focus upon a cognate phenomenon he described as 'identity confusion' (Erikson, 1968a). I wondered what descriptions of such 'confusion' could reveal about the character of identity. It was evident to me that the 'identity confusion' my client had experienced in good part occasioned her suicide attempt. I then became curious about what other instances of 'identity confusion' could reveal about the structure of identity.

At that point I temporarily shifted my focus away from suicidality, and wrote several pilot questions to elicit descriptions of situations where one's identity is in doubt or called into question, if not catapulted into confusion (Bonner, 1987c). In brief, my protocols depicted a wide range of situations in which one may experience confusion regarding identity, but they did not seem to exemplify the phenomenon as originally described by Erikson. Erikson (1959/1980) summarized the experiential constituents of acute identity confusion, describing how it consists of

> ... a painfully heightened sense of isolation; a disintegration of the sense of inner continuity and sameness; a sense of over-all ashamedness; an inability to derive a sense of accomplishment from any kind of activity; a feeling that life is happening to the individual rather than being lived by his initiative; a radically shortened time perspective; and finally, a basic mistrust, which leaves it to the world, to society, and indeed to psychiatry to prove that the patient does exist in a psychosocial sense, i.e., can count on an invitation to become himself (p.135-36).

Upon further reviewing Erikson's extended discussion of this definition, it became apparent that access to the phenomenon of identity confusion would not be gained through descriptions of heterogeneous situations and that I would have to investigate a specific situation in which identity confusion is integral.

I next decided to return my focus to the area where my interest in identity issues had been initiated-- that of the suicidal situation. I had temporarily abandoned my interest in suicidal phenomena not only due to my interest in the identity literature, but because I felt somewhat intimidated by the complexity of the area. However, in deciding to investigate adolescent suicidality as an exemplification of identity issues, I realized that this would be an ideal strategy for narrowing the scope of <u>both</u> areas to researchable di-

mensions. Despite the fact that in my practicum paper I had concretely understood my client's suicide attempt as an exemplification of the identity confusion with which she was struggling, I had not thought of doing further research along these lines. Rather, I was sidetracked by the desire to learn more about identity issues 'in their own right', and I had not yet fully recognized the relevance of adolescent suicidality for contextualizing and concretizing the study of identity.

Once I began thinking of the two areas in terms of one another, I was given a more specific interpretive starting point from which to conduct my literature reviews. I have thus generally read identity literature with an eye toward its relation to suicidality as well as reading suicide literature with an eye toward its relevance for understanding identity issues. The global goal of my literature review is thus to delineate the mutually illuminative convergence between identity and suicidality, with an eye toward researching the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts.

The literature reviewed in Chapters 1-7 will therefore serve a twofold purpose: 1) To explicate the controversial issues concerning the psychological conceptualization of human identity, and 2) To establish adolescent suicidality as an especially suitable experiential sphere within which to gain access to the phenomenon of identity confusion and concretely address the issues raised by my review of the identity literature.

Chapters 1-5 review four major dimensions of the identity literature. Chapter 1 introduces the respective psychoanalytic perspectives of Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut regarding the ego psychological, object relational, and self psychological conceptions of human identity. I have chosen to focus on these three theorists since their work is among the most frequently cited if not the most influential contribution to contemporary Anglo-American psychoanalytic accounts of identity. In Chapter 2, I explicate French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's view of identity formation in the 'mirror phase' and its modification through the accession to the symbolic order. Chapter 3 elucidates the ways in which Lacan's theory both challenges and complements the three dominant psychoanalytic perspectives respectively represented by Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut. Relative to these three authors, the less familiar work of Lacan has yet to find a significant place in the identity literature. In this connection, I consider my review of Lacan's thought to be this project's primary theoretical contribution.

Chapter 4 explicates the convergence of psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological conceptions regarding identity and identity confusion, particularly with regard to the influence of Erikson, Lacan, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, as well as with reference to the roles of narrative theory and deconstruction. In Chapter 5, I review a range of contemporary perspectives on human identity and critique them in light of the issues raised in Chapters 1-4. Select cognitive, social, and family perspectives on identity are explored with an eye toward their intersection within the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification. It is at this point in the dissertation that adolescent suicidality is introduced as a paradigmatic experiential domain in which to research the identity issues raised in Chapters 1-5.

Chapter 6 returns to the work of Lacan, bringing it to bear on the relation between identity and suicidality as reflected in the existential-psychoanalytic literature. Chapter 7 clarifies Erikson's definition of identity confusion, establishes its relevance for understanding adolescent suicidality, and reviews a host of other psychoanalytic perspectives which further substantiate the profound relation between adolescent identity and suicidality.

Chapter 8 opens by critiquing the limitations of contemporary research on identity and adolescent suicide. It concludes by detailing the conceptual and practical aspects of the qualitative-linguistic methodology that I employed in carrying out the dissertation's empirical component. I propose several modifications in Giorgi's (1985) model of qualitative data collection and analysis. Chapter 9 presents the empirical findings of my research project, while Chapter 10 discusses these findings both in light of the literature reviewed in Chapters 1-7 as well as in dialogue with references that prove to be more significant than originally anticipated. Finally, Chapter 11 concludes the study by reviewing related qualitative studies, making recommendations for further research, and summarizing the psychotherapeutic implications of the study findings.

It should become evident through the course of Chapters 1-7 that, in addition to Erikson's work, Lacan's contributions have been a central source of inspiration for the direction I have taken in the dissertation as whole. Indeed, my motivation to undertake this project was in large part drawn from a desire to further comprehend Lacan in a way that was meaningful for both theoretical and clinical purposes-- particularly in terms of the convergence between existential-phenomenology and psychoanalysis. I believe that I have sufficiently balanced my interest in Lacan with a fair review of the other thinkers relevant to my dissertation topic. Although Erikson's work is subjected to considerable critique from the perspective of Lacan and others, by the conclusion of the dissertation Erikson's relevance in fact emerges as enhanced rather than diminished.

Finally, it should be noted that this study's conceptual strategy moves in a direction opposite many of the previously completed psychology dissertations at Duquesne University. Despite the diversity of psychological phenomena studied in these works, identity themes have been consistently present as a significant dimension of their empirical findings-- particularly with regard to the ‘existential projects' of the respective study subjects. However, whereas these other studies conclude with an emphasis on explicating the thematics of identity, the present dissertation makes these thematics the starting point of a sustained inquiry. This study therefore departs from related Duquesne dissertations by systematically exploring the identity literature prior to specifying a psychological phenomenon which promises to productively further this literature. For reasons that I have alluded to in this introduction, and which I will more fully review beginning at the conclusion of Chapter 5, I believe the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts will permit a particularly productive dialogue with a literature that has yet to be sufficiently appreciated in mainstream psychology.

CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY: THE EGO PSYCHOLOGICAL, OBJECT RELATIONAL, AND SELF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS

A review of Erik Erikson's conception of the ego, identity, and their relation to adolescence

The work of Erik Erikson (1959/1980, 1963, 1968, 1982, 1987) remains the most influential contemporary contribution to the conceptualization of human identity. Erikson has maintained a perspective which views human existence as dependent on the interrelation among three processes of organization-- "... the biological process of the hierarchic organization of organ systems constituting a body (*soma*); the psychic process organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (*psyche*); and... the communal process of the cultural organization ... of persons (*ethos*)" (1982, p.25). Although Erikson (1982) maintains that these three aspects of human existence are significant 'in whatever order', it is clear from elsewhere in his work that he considers the bodily dimension to be the foundation for psychosocial identity and development. Through his descriptions of the interrelation among the psychosexual bodily zones, organ modes, postural changes and social modalities, Erikson has articulated a conception of the 'body subject' that is similar in spirit to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and other phenomenologists who define the human "... as a bodily being-in-the-world" (Ver Eecke, 1974, p.256).

Viewing the development of the ego as correlative with the gradual mastery of a body conceived as the center and source of experience and action, Erikson is compelled to portray the ego's synthesizing function as unconsciously contributing to a 'conscious I' that is the center of both awareness and existence. In so doing, he has articulated a conception of an ego-centered human subject that is quite akin to that set forth by Husserl (1913/1982) and his followers in the phenomenological tradition.

Although Erikson certainly acknowledges the largely unconscious defensive functions of the ego, like other ego psychologists (e.g. Hartmann, 1950) he prefers to construe the ego as having adaptive, unificative, and integrative capacities that come into play both on the account of and despite its defensive functions. With its functions of synthesis and integration, the ego for Erikson is in large part responsible for establishing the individual's 'sense of identity'. He is much more ambiguous, however, in specifying the parameters of one's sense of identity-- an ambiguity he takes to be reflective of the phenomenon of identity itself. In his earlier essays, Erikson (1959/1980) used the term 'ego identity' to describe

> ... the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the

> ego's synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others (p.22) .... ego identity could be said to be characterized by the more or less *actually attained but-forever-to-be-revised* sense of the reality of the self within social reality... (p.160).

Here clearly Erikson defines ego identity to be primarily a matter of social identity insofar as he stresses the continuity of one's 'meaning for others' within 'social reality'. As Roazan (1976) has stressed, "Erikson's concept of ego identity... is intended to be ineluctably social" (p. 33).

Later in his work, despite his emphasis elsewhere on the foundational significance of the body, Erikson replaces the phrase 'ego identity' with 'psychosocial identity' -- in this way making more explicit his conception of identity as a conjunction between the ego and the social. In defining psychosocial identity, Erikson continued to stress the role of the ego in establishing the social dimension of identity-- e.g. "psychosocial identity depends upon a complementarity of an inner (ego) synthesis in the individual and of role integration in his group" (1968a/1987). Erikson (1963) was especially interested in the relevance of one's sociocultural and ethnic group for the formation of psychosocial identity. In Chapter 3, I review the problematic aspects of Erikson's egocentered sociocultural conception of human identity.

Erikson's concern with the significance of temporality for identity formation is a less problematic aspect of his work. This concern is most apparent in his treatment of adolescent development (1959/1980, 1963, 1968, 1982)-- upon which I will focus to further exemplify his core contributions. In describing the central psychosocial crisis of adolescence as that of 'identity vs. identity confusion', Erikson has made this stage and its accompanying issues the centerpiece of his entire developmental theory. Regarding temporality, Erikson has emphasized how the rapid physical, social, and cognitive transformations of adolescence constitute this period as one where discontinuity is dominant-- with the adolescent being confronted with a rift between past and future that can make for a very confusing present.

Erikson maintains that the virtue of *fidelity* is essential to resolving the temporal discontinuities introduced by adolescence. Erikson (1964) has defined fidelity as "... the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems" (p.125). In saying this, Erikson is pointing to the importance in identity formation of making and maintaining commitments. For Erikson, the achievement of a continuity between past and future entails the redefinition of one's history in light of one's anticipated commitments.

In Erikson's view, it is in good part the uncertainty surrounding the choice of basic life commitments that contributes to the turbulence of identity formation during adolescence. Erikson observes that most societies offer adolescents a sanctioned 'psychosocial moratorium' during which they are expected and encouraged to struggle with making commitments formative of adult identity. Adolescents' active and often painful efforts to

redefine themselves during various psychosocial moratoria are constitutive of what Erikson has termed the ‘identity crisis'. Later in my dissertation (Chapter 7), I further review Erikson's ideas on ‘identity crisis' and distinguish them from the more specific meanings he reserves for the phenomenon of ‘identity confusion'. For now, though, I will move to reviewing the contributions of those who have been influenced by Erikson's richly descriptive clinical and theoretical formulations regarding identity.

James Marcia's identity status paradigm

In the years since Erikson's landmark publications on identity, the most influential research in the area has been carried out by James Marcia. Situating himself in the ego psychoanalytic tradition and Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, Marcia (1966) introduced what has come to called the ‘identity status paradigm'-- an attempt on his part to operationalize Erikson's identity conceptions for the purpose of empirical and experimental research. Marcia proposed four ‘identity statuses', with each status designating a different mode of response to the identity issues that dominate adolescence. Each identity status is defined in terms of two dimensions introduced by Erikson and refined by Marcia: the extent to which the individual has come to make occupational, ideological, and interpersonal commitments, and whether or not the person has experienced a crisis or decision making period in coming to these commitments.

Marcia designed a semi-structured interview to determine an individual's ‘identity status'. This interview seeks to assess the subject's past or present experience of crisis and his current commitments to occupational choices as well as ideological and sexual-interpersonal beliefs. It has become an extremely popular research instrument, inspiring over 150 studies (Marcia, 1987) seeking to establish correlations of the various identity statuses with a variety of variables-- including intelligence, cognitive style, personality traits, academic performance, moral reasoning, interpersonal relationships, and sex differences (Bourne, 1978).

A central debate among the proponents of the identity status approach is whether identity has been conceptualized too much with regard to ‘process' as opposed to ‘content'. Waterman (1985) has addressed this issue and critiqued the tendency of ego identity researchers to focus on articulating a single ‘overall identity status' while ignoring the likelihood that adolescents differ with respect to the identity domains in which they have struggled to make commitments. Thus, while one adolescent may be more committed with respect to occupational choice and less so with respect to interpersonal values, the reverse may hold true for a second adolescent despite the fact that both could be characterized as ‘identity achievers'.

To some extent, Marcia (1987) acknowledges this criticism in allowing that one limitation of the identity statuses is that they represent ‘outcome categories' that may obscure differences in how a similar ‘identity outcome' has been attained. However, Marcia (1987) takes this shortcoming to justify a further focus on the process rather than

the content aspects of identity, with him supporting research efforts that seek to distinguish "... the processes underlying identity, [i.e.] exploration and commitment, so that these can be considered separately rather than lumped together in the rather unwieldy form of identity status categories" (p.169). Marcia (1988) moves somewhat in this direction by describing these identity processes in terms of their interrelation with the assimilation-disequilibrium-accommodation processes of cognitive/moral development and the attachment-separation-individuation processes posited by object-relations theorists (Bowlby, 1973; Mahler, et. al. 1975). Archer and Waterman (1990) have more decisively resolved this issue, electing to employ the identity status labels in an adjectival fashion to describe "... the manner in which individuals handle the task of identity formation in a variety of life domains.... [since] people may use different [identity status] processes in different domains" (p. 98).

Josselson (1973, 1987a, 1988), whose work on adolescent and female identity has built on the contributions of both ego psychology and object-relations theory, attempts to overcome the dichotomy of ‘identity process and content' by concluding from her research that across content areas both adolescents and women are most concerned with cultivating interpersonal possibilities. Picking up on the work of Mahler (Mahler, *et. al*., 1975), Josselson (1988) argues that the separation-individuation processes initiated in infancy and intensified in adolescence are the most critical aspect of identity formation in adulthood, especially the rapprochement subphase insofar as it concerns "... preserving bonds of relationship in the presence of increasing autonomy..." (p.95).

Josselson's work distinguishes itself from the contribution of Marcia and the critique of Waterman (1985) in affirming that the tension between sameness and difference in relation to others is a core issue in identity formation regardless of the specific identity domain or content under consideration. Josselson's attempt to consistently describe female and adolescent identity development in relational terms is a departure from the more ego-centered language of most identity status research. In this connection, Josselson (1987a) maintains that "... the aspects most salient to identity formation... have been overlooked by psychological research and theory, which stresses the growth of independence and autonomy as hallmarks of adulthood" (p.191). I believe Josselson's point here can be expanded to say that the most salient aspects of identity formation and deformation have been overlooked by researchers in the ego identity status approach due in good part to their conception of the ego in terms of autonomy and independence. It is precisely this stress on the growth of independence and autonomy, particularly in regard to the ego and identity formation, that has been the target of psycho-analytic critique by proponents of the object-relations perspective as well as, more recently, by the supporters of Heinz Kohut's self psychology.

Object-relations theory and Winnicott's concept of the ‘true and false self'

The basic ambiguity in Freud's use of the term ego has been attributed with occasioning the divergence between the ego psychological and the object relational perspectives (Reed, 1982). Freud's (1923) later view of the ego as a psychic agency facilitating adaptation is the dimension of his thought seized upon by Hartmann (1939/1964) and made the cornerstone of ego psychology. Freud's (1914, 1923, 1938) understanding of the ego as formed through identifications with abandoned objects both proceeded and survived the structural view, and is a precursor of the object-relations perspective. This perspective values the concept of ‘self' rather than ‘ego' for describing individual development in terms taken to be more interpersonal and experiential.

As I noted above, the work of Mahler (1967, 1975) and Bowlby (1973) has come to occupy an increasingly significant place in enriching Erikson's conceptualization of identity formation. However, Winnicott (1960, 1971) is the object-relations theorist whose work is most frequently cited as relevant to conceptualizing identity development and pathology. Particularly pertinent are his descriptions of the role of maternal mirroring in engendering the ‘true and false self'. Winnicott (1971) emphasizes the significance of the mother’s face in looking at her infant, highlighting the way in which she holds and handles the child. Winnicott (1960) maintains that the ‘good enough mother' is one who actively mirrors the omnipotence of her infant's spontaneous gestures and expressions, in this way allowing the infant's ‘true self' to emerge. The ‘true self' for Winnicott (1960) is primarily embodied and expressed in the form of "...sensori-motor aliveness" (p.149). When the caretaker does not respond to this ‘true self', but instead substitutes her own gestures for those of her infant, the infant is forced into a position of compliantly mirroring the mother and becomes cut off from his own spontaneity and creativity (Harwood, 1987). This progressive compliance contributes to the development of a ‘false self' whose main function is to hide and protect the ‘true self' by adapting to environmental demands. Winnicott (1960) notes that the degree of the false self defense ranges from "... the healthy polite aspect of the self to the truly split-off False Self which is mistaken for the whole child" (p.150).

Winnicott (1971) placed particular emphasis on the mirroring role of the mother's face in reflecting back the infant's sensory-motor aliveness, raising the question of

> What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that ordinarily, what the baby sees is him or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby, and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there* (p. 112).

If the mother is depressed or cannot take pleasure in her infant's spontaneous gestures, there is the danger that her unresponsive face will reflect an image of deadness to her baby (Wright, 1991). Winnicott (1971) imagines that in such a scenario the child becomes preoccupied with monitoring his mother's face to predict her mood and determine when it

is safe to be spontaneous, ever ready to withdraw a spontaneous expression upon the first sign/sight of her gaze reverting to its previously petrified posture.

Winnicott also stressed the inevitability and necessity of the mother's responses gradually being experienced as imperfectly mirroring her child's needs, with this discrepancy serving to engender an incipient sense of psychological separateness in the infant. However, with this initial experience of difference, the infant will seek to reclaim a unity with mother through a relationship with a 'transitional object'-- e.g. a piece of blanket. The 'transitional object' and 'transitional phenomena' represent another of Winnicott's (1971) major contributions to object relations theory. The transitional object for Winnicott is a precursor of symbol formation insofar as it seeks to sustain a sense of the mother's presence in her absence. Wright (1991) notes how the transitional object

> ... is not yet a fully fledged symbol... [in that] the baby does not yet accept difference and similarity, which are based on a realization of separateness. On the contrary, it has forged an identity between blanket and mother and so perpetuates the union that is on the point of being lost (p.72-73).

In Chapter 3, I return to Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object' to further explicate its significance for the relation between identity formation and the subject's symbolization of separateness/absence.

Self psychology and Kohut's conception of the 'selfobject'

Over the past 20 years, the American psychoanalytic scene has become endeared by the 'self psychology' of Heinz Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984), a perspective which has much in common with the object-relation position in general and Winnicott's work in particular (Bacal, 1989; Harwood, 1987). Kohut's basic position is that the classic psychoanalytic emphasis on intrapsychic conflict is inadequate for the treatment of psychopathology which is pre-Oedipal in origin. He proposes that such psychopathology is predominantly the product of deficits rather than conflicts in the development of 'the self' (Akhtar, 1988), with Kohut focusing on the infant's experience of the mother's responsiveness as the most crucial element of this development. In this connection, Kohut developed the concept of the 'selfobject' to describe the "... inner experience of those relationships that evoke and maintain the feeling of selfhood. Selfobject refers to the intersubjective context within which the self emerges as a psychological organization" (Wolf, 1987, p.263-64).

Kohut deemed the development of a 'cohesive self' to be of paramount importance, with the maintenance of self-cohesion being regarded as the primary motivation for a significant proportion of human behavior (Wexler, 1991). Kohut (1971) specified that the cohesive self comes into being essentially through two basic types of empathetic selfobject functions provided by familial caregivers-- mirroring responses and

idealizing responses. Mirroring responses affirm the child's ‘innate grandiosity', providing recognition and appreciation of the child's inner experience and accomplishments (Wexler, 1991). Idealizing responses present soothing images of ‘calm omnipotence' with which the child may identify and by whom the child can feel protected. The absence or distortion of these basic self-object functions is taken by Kohut to contribute to the experience of fragmentation, emptiness, and identity confusion that characterize forms of psychopathology in which there is "... the continuing use of others as archaic, urgently required selfobjects.... or in the compulsive need to seek recognition from others" (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 1988).

The caregiver's capacity for empathy is a cornerstone of Kohut's theoretical system. An essential aspect of the empathic self-object relationship is the caregiver's ability to accurately identify and verbalize the child's early affective states, which then broadens the child's awareness of different affects and facilitates their integration so that a sense of cohesion is maintained (Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood, 1987). Wexler (1991, p.19) comments on this aspect of the self-object function:

> If the parent, for instance, is in some way threatened by sadness or states of depression in the child, the child may blame himself, feeling hopeless and helpless. He may, instead, dissociate from these normal feelings and have deficits in integrating these states, possibly leading to experiences of chronic emptiness and loneliness.

As the results section of my dissertation will demonstrate (Chapter 9), this affective scenario is quite relevant to the dynamics of adolescent suicidality-- where loneliness, helplessness, and hopelessness emerge as essential constituents.

From a phenomenological perspective, the value of Kohut's self psychology lies in the experiential and intersubjective emphasis brought to bear by the selfobject concept. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Kohut's work has proven quite controversial, particularly regarding its emphasis on deficit instead of conflict and its minimizing of the significance of the Oedipal complex for identity development (Akhtar, 1988). Kohut's concept of the ‘self-object' has itself been critiqued, with Hamburg (1991) highlighting how Kohut vacillated between 1) defining the concept as an intrapsychic structure and, 2) defining it as representing the child's actual parental figures-- with Kohut failing to address the intersubjective modes of mediation that translate the latter into the former. Further, analogous to Josselson's (1987a) above cited critique of ego psychology, Layton (1990) has criticized Kohut along with Erikson for making

> ... object love/intimacy something separate from and dependent on the establishment of the self/identity, constructs that exclude relationship (p.426).... as Kohut describes it, the self is born from relationships but not from relationships experienced as separate and distinct centers of initiative (p.421).

Indeed, it has been suggested that Winnicott's theory maintains greater fidelity to an intersubjective perspective than does Kohut's self psychology (Kishner, 1991).

Kohut has also been taken to task for making exaggerated claims as to the originality of his ideas, as he has often neglected to acknowledge the contributions of other major psychoanalytic thinkers who have covered similar ground (Akhtar, 1988; Rudnytsky, 1991). This neglect has particularly been true in reference to the work of Winnicott and object relations theory-- with Rudnysky (1991) critiquing Kohut for failing "... to realize that what he depicts as the unique insight of self psychology forms a mainstay of object relations theory" (p. 88). Kohut also chose to avoid dialogue with the work of Lacan, a neglect that is somewhat more forgivable given the limited availability and accessibility of Lacan's work compared to Winnicott. However, since Kohut's death in 1981, there has been a burgeoning of primary and secondary Lacanian literature. Therefore, a fuller dialogue with the Lacanian corpus is now possible. In Chapter 2, I pursue a portion of this dialogue by reviewing Lacan's work on the relation between the ‘mirror phase' and ‘ego identity'. In Chapter 3, I present a Lacanian critique of the psychoanalytic contributions of Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut.

CHAPTER 2

FROM IMAGINARY TO SYMBOLIC IDENTIFICATION: LACAN ON EGO IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SUBJECT

Lacan on the mirror phase as the foundation of ego identity

As Lacan's work (1938/1988, 1953b, 1977, 1978, 1988a, 1988b, 1990) has gradually infiltrated contemporary American psychoanalytic circles (Muller & Richardson, 1982; Schneiderman, 1980; Smith & Kerrigan, 1983), it has entered into critical debate with the assumptions of ego psychology, object relations theory and, to a lesser extent, with the still emerging tenets of self psychology. In reference to Lacan's critique of ego psychology, Thompson (1985) notes how American psychoanalysts "... have tended to interpret the Freudian notion of the ego as an agent of synthesis, integration, power, autonomy, and adaptation [to reality]" (p.1). It is the judgment of Lacan (1988a) and his increasing following of interpreters (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986; Clement, 1983; Evans, 1979; Gallop, 1985, 1988; Leavy, 1983, 1990; Muller, 1982a, 1985, 1986, 1988; Ragland-Sullivan, 1986; Schneiderman, 1980) that this conception of the ego is an ill-informed departure from the characterization most consistently given by Freud (1914, 1917, 1923, 1938), wherein the ego is primarily a narcissistic agency of defense and distortion-- differentiated out of the id, founded on the infant's perception of its body, and built up through identifications with abandoned objects (Muller, 1982a). Despite this apparent status of the ego as object, though, many post-Freudian psychoanalysts, beginning particularly with Hartmann (1939/1964), have imbued the ego with subjectivity-- viewing it as an autonomous agency responsible for facilitating adaptation to the ‘external world' and organizing inner psychic reality.

In setting up his discussion of the ego's genesis, Lacan (1949/1977, 1953b, 1988a, 1988b) punctuates the ‘specific prematurity' of the human infant's birth compared to other species. He points to the infant's anatomical incompleteness and, as Muller (1982a) has written, Lacan accentuates

> ... the ontological status of *beance*, an abyss, gap, lack, or dehiscence marking the human being from birth, which... dispels any talk of a preformed, preadapted, or harmonious relationship of man to his environment (p. 234).

Lacan emphasizes how the infant's intra-uterine body organization is deficient relative to the demands of extra-uterine life, with there being insufficient coordination among his sensory systems and motor movements. In Lacan's view, the infant's birth irrevocably disrupts the homeostasis that-- at least retroactively-- is experienced by the infant as having characterized intra-uterine existence. Therefore, contrary to what has been posited and presupposed in countless developmental theories, Lacan conceives extra-uterine life as

introducing a ‘fundamental discord' that cannot be understood to include any inherent sense of unity or self.

In the midst of the infant's sensory-motor incoordination, Lacan (1938/1988) is impressed by the infant's precocious ability to recognize his mother figure's face, an ability which is evident within the first 10 days of life (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Lacan (1938/1988) observes how "the reaction of interest that a child shows in the presence of the human face... cannot be separated from the development by which the human face will assume its value as a mirror of psychic expression" (p.14). In this statement, Lacan anticipates the superiority that the sense of sight will gradually gain relative to the infant's other, less developed sensory-motor modalities. With the advent of what he called the ‘mirror phase' between 6-8 months, Lacan will attribute profound developmental consequences to the precocity of the infant's visual perception.

Lacan (1953a, 1949/1977) seizes upon the fact that by the age of 6-8 months
1) the infant's visual perception is significantly superior to his motor coordination, and
2) that the child becomes fascinated by the sight of his image in a mirror. Not yet able to stand up, and supported by a caregiver or a prosthetic device, the infant enthusiastically responds to the upright posture presented by his mirror image as if he has already achieved the motor mastery depicted by this image. For Lacan and his followers, the infant's behavior in front of the mirror provides a profound metaphor of how he comes to experience his mother's more coordinated movements as bestowing upon him a unity that he otherwise lacks (Ragland-Sullivan, 1986). Through his reflection in actual mirrors and the metaphorical mirror of his mother's image and reactions, the infant is for the first time able to imagine himself as a corporeal unity or Gestalt (Muller & Richardson, 1982; Jalbert, 1983), henceforth allowing him to experience his body parts and movements as integrated and coordinated in a way not yet physically possible.

With its placidity and stability, the infant's mirror image offers a seductive alternative to his motoric insufficiency and ‘specific prematurity'. As Benvennuto and Kennedy (1986) have described, "the mirror image is held together, it can come and go with a slight change of the infant's position, and the mastery of the image fills him with triumph and joy" (p.54). The infant's mirror image thus provides the promise of a bodily mastery of which he is not yet capable. As Lacan (1949/1977) puts it, through his mirror image the infant "... anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power ..." (p.2). In jubilantly identifying with the unified body-image of the other, the infant borrows an ‘envelope of mastery' (Lacan, 1988a, p.170-71) which serves to contain and coordinate the anarchy of his otherwise chaotic bodily experience (Boothby, 1991; Jalbert, 1983; Lacan, 1988a; Ver Eecke, 1989).

The mirror phase inducts the infant into what Lacan (1988a, 1988b) called the ‘imaginary order', from which only varying degrees of escape will ever be possible. It is therefore Lacan's (1949/1977) central contention that the mirror phase culminates in "... the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development" (p.4). That is, the infant's identification

with his mirror image provides the basis for the formation of the ego as well as for subsequent identifications, introducing a "... formal stagnation... which constitutes the ego and its objects with the attributes of permanence, identity, and substantiality" (Lacan, 1949/1977, p. 17).

In Lacan's view, the mirror image is a mirage in that it has no depth, it is not real, it is imaginary. Still, the infant is convinced that his image is really him, and longs to incarnate its unity, completeness, and tranquility. Lacan maintains that in being so captivated by his image the infant effects an alienation of himself from himself-- not primarily be- cause the image represents him as other, but due to the way in which the assumption of the imaginary *Gestalt* entails the exclusion and restriction of the heterogeneity of bodily experience and desire. Boothby (1991) has most eloquently explicated this aspect of Lacan:

> .... the unity of the imago remains forever inadequate to the fullness of desire. There is always a remainder, always something left out. Desire is split against itself insofar as only a portion of the forces animating the living body find their way into the motivating imaginary *Gestalt (p. 57)*.

Lacan introduced the category of 'the real' to designate the undifferentiated and unsymbolized dimensions of bodily existence, those that Boothby specifies as initially alienated by the formation of the ego in the mirror phase-- with the temporal fixity of the ego serving throughout the life span to limit the human subject's openness to the vicissitudes of desire.

Boothby emphasizes that, contrary to a common interpretation of the Lacanian imaginary order, the alienation inaugurated by the mirror phase does not initially pertain to the relationship between ego and other, which would prematurely assume the existence of an intersubjective relation at a time when there is minimal self-other differentiation. In this regard, Lacan (1949/1977) is quite clear in declaring that the identification with the mirror image "... situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction..." (p.2) Boothby (1991) elaborates on the meaning of this distinction when he notes how

> what is alienating is not the relation of the nascent ego to another ego, but of the inchoate subject to its own ego (p.45).... alienation in the imaginary is first and foremost an estrangement of oneself from oneself. The imaginary formation of the ego is alienating not just because it is modeled on an other outside the subject but because imaginary identification somehow splits the subject from itself (p.47).

In Chapter 6, I will explicate the implications of this intrasubjective form of alienation for the relation between identity and suicidality. For now, there are nonetheless significant intersubjective aspects of the mirror phase worthy of sustained attention.

Stranger anxiety and the intersubjective dimension of imaginary alienation

Having recognized that he possesses an external appearance, the infant next becomes aware that this external appearance is actually much more readily available to be viewed by others than viewed by himself. That is, as the infant begins to distinguish between his proprio-interoceptively experienced body and his unified body-image as revealed in the mirror, it becomes apparent that only he can directly experience the first corporeal dimension, while his outer appearance must always be mediated by the gaze of an other. A split is therefore introduced into the child's experience of his body, a split which will eclipse the previous sense of jubilation with one of anxiety.

The infant's jubilation in identifying with its mirror image had indicated that he initially experienced "... his exteriority as an enrichment" (Ver Eecke, 1984, p.75). However, following this initial experience of enrichment, the infant gradually discovers the alienating and threatening dimension of depending upon others for the appropriation of his body as a unity. This discovery is usually made by age 8 months and is exemplified by the phenomenon of ‘stranger anxiety', which was first described by Spitz (1965) and has more recently been referred to as ‘stranger wariness' (Kaplan, 1978). Spitz observed how at 8 months many infants for the first time engaged in various anxious behaviors upon the approach of strangers, such as covering their eyes or hiding their heads under pillows-- the purpose of these behaviors being to erase the visual image of the approaching stranger, as well as to erase oneself from the other's visual field.

It has been philosopher Wilfred Ver Eecke (1975, 1984, 1989) who, based upon a systematic study of Lacan, has seized upon the relation of stranger anxiety to the mirror phase, in essence revising Spitz's original formulations within Lacan's theoretical framework. Ver Eecke speculates that the look of the stranger serves to alert and remind the infant of the alienating experiential split engendered by the fact that his external appearance is accessible predominantly through the eyes of others. As the child comes to see himself as being seen by others, the drama of the mirror phase therefore enters a significant new scene.

Ver Eecke (1984, 1989) makes the important observation that during the ‘stranger anxiety' phase the child does not usually experience the gaze of his mother with anxiety. Further, when in the presence of his mother, the child does not typically experience anxiety in the face of a stranger's gaze. Ver Eecke speculates that this is so since it is the mother who, hopefully, has already recognized and responded to the infant's inner experience, in this way reassuring the child that he will not be reduced by her to his exteriority-- which is precisely the anxiety-inducing threat posed by the gaze of a stranger (Ver Eecke 1975, 1984, 1989).

The infant thus depends on his mother to affirm and support the appropriation of his body both as a unified body-image and as a body-subject with experiences and desires distinct from her. In addition to the infant's radical dependence on the mirroring

mother for facilitating the exteroceptive appropriation of his body as a unity, the infant is therefore also profoundly dependent on her for recognizing his inner bodily experience as valued in its own right-- in this way allaying the experiences of anxiety, shame, and paranoia that can come to characterize a more problematic relation to bodiliness (Lacan, 1953a; Sartre, 1953).

The phenomenon of stranger anxiety thus exemplifies the intersubjective dimension of the alienation that Lacan considered to be an essential dimension of the mirror phase's transformative effects. In initially identifying with the specular image, the infant had already to some extent become alienated from his interoceptive bodily experience and captured by the ‘imaginary me' offered by the image. Merleau-Ponty (1964) has described this dynamic as a ‘de-realizing' function of the specular image, within which there is a ‘confiscation' of the ‘immediate me' by the ‘imaginary me'-- that is to say, in intersubjective terms, there is a "... ‘confiscation' of the subject by the others who look at him" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.137). Particularly insofar as the infant's desire becomes invested in-- if not fused with-- the specular image, there exists the danger of his desire becoming alienated in and rigidified by the desire of the other who most incarnates this image (who, at least initially, is typically the mother figure).

This intersubjective aspect of the mirror phase structure becomes particularly problematic to the extent that the mother's desire is for her child to fill her own lack and make her whole-- that is, for the child to be her mirror image or, to use alternative Lacanian terms, when the mother desires her child to be her phallus (Jalbert, 1983; Ver Eecke, 1988). The unity granted by his visual Gestalt is imagined by the infant to also represent the object of his mother's desire. To the extent that he identifies with this imaginary Gestalt, the child therefore experiences himself as the all-fulfilling object of his mother's desire (Muller, 1989). The mirror phase therefore includes as an essential constituent the identification of the child's desire with his mother's desire. The inclusiveness of this identification will be diminished by the mother's ability to recognize and affirm the separateness of her child's body and desires.

The modification of the mirror image and ego identity through the accession to the symbolic order: The Oedipalization of the subject

During the course of the mirror phase the child gradually recognizes that others are not completely responsive to his or her primarily inarticulate demands for love and compliant mirroring. It is at this time, usually between 15-18 months, that the child begins to appropriate language as the means to make his demands. The mother's ability to affirm her child's claim to autonomy will become especially significant as the child begins to appropriate speech as the main means of claiming a distinct point of view.

Ver Eecke (1984, 1989) has cogently described how the period of ‘no-saying' initiated between 15-18 months is the most significant linguistic index of the child's effort to ameliorate the intersubjective alienation of the mirror phase. Initially in the form of

shaking his head from side to side, and soon with the vigorous use of the word ‘no', ‘no-saying' by the child conveys the attempt to claim a point of view independent of the mother and to rupture their symbiotic bond. As Ver Eecke (1984) asserts, "to say *no* to a demand of the mother.... means that the child is no longer in need of his mother in overcoming the alienating dimension of appropriating his body" (p.77). In saying ‘no' to the mother, the child is affirming ownership of his body as a source of desire separate from the image his mother and others may have of him. That is, "the child refuses to automatically be [or want] what his mother thinks him to be [or want]" (Ver Eecke, 1984, p.80).

The crucial question during the child's period of negativism is therefore whether and to what extent the mother can tolerate the aggressive refusal of her desire contained within her child's no-saying. The aggressive intention of no-saying is clearly described by Ver Eecke (1984) when he states that "to say *no* is precisely to make use of a linguistic expression whose first function is to destroy the point of view taken by another..." (p.80). Here we see perhaps the earliest instantiation of Lacan's famous dictum that the word is "... the murder of the thing..." (1977, p.104), with the specification that the word can also execute the symbolic murder of the other.

Ver Eecke (1984) emphasizes how the child's ability to productively employ ‘no-saying' depends upon his already having experienced his desires as frustrated by the prohibitions and no-saying of his parents. That is, the child identifies with his parents' prohibiting position and imitates their no-saying as a way to frustrate them as he has been frustrated-- in more traditional psychoanalytic terms, there in an ‘identification with the aggressor'. Although the no-saying of the mother is initially of greatest consequence for the child's ability to begin separating from her, the mother's capacity for no-saying is in turn dependent upon her recognition of the law of the father-- a law which dictates that her child is not the exclusive focus for the fulfillment of her desire, which is instead delimited by a ‘third term' that is often but not necessarily occupied by the child's father. Ver Eecke (1984) summarizes this cluster of Lacanian concepts when he states that ".... the mother's *no* is possible only through her recognition of the phallus of the father...." (p.81), a recognition which acknowledges her finitude and permits the child through his own no-saying to affirm the phallic attributes of the father.

In referring to the father figure, I am of course alluding to the imminent Oedipalization of the child's desire. For Lacan, the Oedipal and castration complexes are intrinsically related to the child's acquisition of language. It is with the beginning of speech and the gradual entry into the Oedipal drama that the mirror phase subsides and the child passes from specular to the social forms of identification (Lacan, 1949/1977, 1988a). In becoming a ‘speaking subject', the child no longer lives exclusively in the ‘imaginary order', but accedes to what Lacan (1988b) called the ‘symbolic order'-- that system of signifiers that constitute the subject's native language.

Lacan places particular importance on the influence of the signifier in the symbolic order insofar as the signifier is defined by the "... interplay of opposition between

sameness and differentness" (Jalbert, 1983, p.65), an interplay which assists the child in differentiating himself from others in a way that is problematic during the mirror phase. Lacan (1988a) considered the child's proper name to be one of the most important signifiers through which difference is introduced and ego identity is modified through the accession to the symbolic order. One's proper name is perhaps the most basic means by which a differentiation can be made between ‘who I am' and ‘who I am not.' As Muller (1989) notes, "to be identified with a name as this *one* is to be placed in a symbolic network that sets one apart precisely as not being someone else" (p. 370)-- a bestowal that Lacan terms ‘symbolic identification'.

For Lacan, the ego and its claims to identity are therefore situated both in the symbolic as well as the imaginary order. In this connection, Jalbert (1983) summarizes how

> The ego in the symbolic sense is the ‘speaking I' [or, ‘the speaking subject']. The ‘speaking I' then refers to the one who is in the act of speaking. The imaginary ego becomes a symbolic ego when it shifts from representing the ideal ego or the perfection of the narcissistic state and the fusion of the perceiver with his mirror image, to the role of directing the subject towards the ego ideal.... the ego ideal which is thus established assists the person in knowing what he or she desires and not just that he or she is.... the ego ideal allows for the interplay between sameness and differentness... [that is] one of the main characteristics of the symbol for Lacan. (p.158)

The interplay and tension between sameness and difference, as has been well documented, is also one of the main characteristics of any conception of human identity. In the above passage, Jalbert indicates that this interplay is not only essential to establishing identity in terms of ‘who I am' and ‘who I am not,' but also in terms of ‘who I am' and ‘who I aspire to be'. With this, there can be a shift from the ‘ideal ego' of the mirror image to the ‘ego ideal' which speaks to "... a discrepancy between where the subject's ego is and where the subject would like to go." (Jalbert, 1983, p.159) Along similar lines, Muller (1989) notes how "it is the ego ideal that enables one to channel desire... [in contrast to] the ideal ego, which, in striving for competitive mastery, resists the assumption of one's desire" (p. 369).

Lacan emphasizes the child's acquisition of the ‘paternal metaphor' or the ‘name of the father' as essential to the restructuring of its identity in terms of ego ideals. Along with the proper name, the introjection of the ‘Name-of-the-father' in the context of the Oedipal drama is taken by Lacan (1953c, 1963) as further contributing to the modification of the imaginary through the assumption of the symbolic.

Where the imaginary order had previously been characterized by sameness, unity, continuity, and immediacy, the child's entry into the symbolic order therefore introduces difference, multiplicity, discontinuity, and mediation. This shift has significant consequences for the Oedipal child's identity formation insofar he can no longer

exclusively define himself as the sole object of his mother's desire. In this connection Ver Eecke (1988) describes how the Oedipal child gradually

> ... accepts deprivation of an original but illusory identity and conquers a new identity. Even though this is a new identity, the child must create a kind of continuity for itself and must therefore feel that it is both the same and not the same as before. (p.113)

Particularly important for this period of transition and transformation is the child's assumption of a sexual identity, a process which is initiated during the waning months of the mirror phase when-- concurrent with the period of ‘no-saying'-- there is an incipient awareness of sexual difference (i.e. of having or not having a penis). Contemporary psychoanalytic research on the infantile origins of sexual identity agrees that the second half of the second year is an especially critical period for the establishment of a core gender identity (Roiphe & Galenson, 1981). Between the ages of 15-19 months, the genital zone "... emerges as a distinct and differentiated source of endogenous pleasure...." (Roiphe & Galenson, 1981, p.284). There follows a burgeoning awareness of genital difference, with clear divergences becoming apparent between the way the male and female infant symbolize this nascent knowledge.

The significant fact for Lacan is that the discovery of genital difference itself engenders symbolization insofar as this discovery fragments the previously established unified body-image and calls upon child to name through speech the discrete body parts that subsequently become apparent-- with the penis or lack of a penis being of particular concern. Indeed, the child's Oedipalization and concomitant castration complex entail the reappearance of the fragmented body images that had previously been contained by the imaginary bodily unity constituted in the mirror phase. Boothby (1990) has documented how during the Oedipal period there is a preoccupation with fragmented body images and fantasies of dismemberment. He emphasizes how this preoccupation, rather than being a regressive event, plays an essential role in the child's transition to symbolic modes of functioning insofar as the transition to the Oedipal includes a shift from the homogeneity of desire defined by the imaginary unity of the ego to the heterogeneity of desire engendered by the diversity of signifying elements available through the linguistic system-- a system "... in which meaning [and desire] is free to circulate among associated elements without necessarily referring to a particular object or signified" (Boothby, 1990, p.219). This shift from the homogeneity to the heterogeneity of desire, Boothby (1990) notes, "... finds a perceptual analog in... [the] contrast between the integrity of the body gestalt and its dismemberment into fragments" (p.222). Boothby (1990) is particularly articulate and suggestive in summarizing this aspect of Lacanian theory, describing how

> ... Lacan's theory locates the birth of the symbolic function in relation to a certain deconstruction of the Imaginary [order]. The fantasmatic violation of the body

> imago effected by castration furnishes a precondition for the unfolding of the capacity for signification. It is upon the site of the body image, or better, upon the *sight* of its dismemberment that the insertion of the subject into the symbolic order begins. The first movements of signification find their material support in the parts of the fragmented body (p.227).... The imaginary body-gestalt provides an initial organization of unitary form upon which the differentiating function of linguistic signification can go to work. The body imago functions as an originary frame or matrix against which difference within identity can first be registered (p.224).

Thus, whereas the formation of the unified body image and ego identity had functioned to quell the anxiety of fragmented body images in the mirror phase, these fragmented body images in turn function to incite both the castration anxiety in and the symbolic transformation of the Oedipal child.

The child's Oedipalization therefore entails the anxiety evoking edict that the previously constructed ‘unified body-image' must fragment and be reassembled in a less rigid form-- a form which of course must now also include the recognition of being either a male or a female. Ver Eecke (1984) frames the child's discovery of sexual difference as a confrontation with the fundamental bodily dimension of his finitude-- that of either being a boy or a girl, but not both. Fantasies of bisexuality or the denial of sexual difference represent the child's ambivalence about accepting bodily finitude and renouncing the desire for absolute fulfillment. The Oedipal child appears to be more vulnerable to these experiences of sexual identity confusion when he or she emerges from the mirror phase without having integrated the function of ‘no-saying' for claiming ownership of his or her body and acknowledging the law of the father. Analogous to the reassurances required for the mirror phase child not to be overwhelmed by ‘stranger anxiety' and its ensuing counterpart ‘separation anxiety', the Oedipal child's tolerance for ‘castration anxiety' will be contingent upon the recognition he receives for his distinct desires within his family milieu-- recognition which ideally includes an acknowledgement of his finitude (i.e. his desires will never be totally fulfilled as depicted in the ideal ego) and the promise of some more limited form of fulfillment in the future (through ego ideals).

Implicit in the preceding discussion of the child's Oedipalization is the formation of the superego as the agency responsible for deconstructing the imaginary unity of the ego and facilitating the transition to symbolic modes of functioning in which the integrity of the body and the identity of the subject are transformed. Boothby (1991), borrowing Erikson's famous phrase, highlights how this transformation entails a

> ... crisis of identity that makes possible a new mode of relation to the child's own impulses and to the surrounding world (p. 152).... By means of the institution of the superego, a new and more complex identity can begin to coalesce. The personality is delivered from the totalizing tendency of imaginary formations and opened to complexity and internal differentiation... It is on the basis of this shift that

> secondary identifications can be formed and that the superego can be said to make possible the formation of an ego ideal that is a composite of borrowed traits (p.173).... [as opposed to the ideal ego, which is more inclined]... to assume the properties of the object as a whole... (p. 155).

However, regardless of how ‘healthy' the subject's Oedipalization may be, the imaginary order as constituted in the mirror phase will nonetheless continue to structure the subject's desire and identity. Boothby (1990) has commented that "... even after the Oedipal transition, the Imaginary [order] and its reverberations continue to orient the Symbolic process as Lacan conceives it..." (p.225), and he concludes by raising the question of whether "... even on the far side of the Oedipus complex, the play of fantasy that lures desire... [retains] the stamp of the body image that originally structured imaginary identity" (p.226). Here, Boothby accentuates the significant role that body image continues to play in the constitution and possible pathology of human identity.

The influence of the mirror image is therefore by no means entirely tempered by the child's entry into the symbolic order and concomitant acquisition of language. Indeed, the mirror phase is seen by Lacan (1988a) as paving the way for the acquisition of language. That is, the child's acquires speech "... according to the same dialectic as that by which he assumed his mirror image. The child assumes the words of the other as though they were his own" (Schneiderman, 1980, p.4). Insofar as it makes self-objectification possible, the acquisition of language in its own way can support the child's identification with its ego (Thompson, 1985) and becomes a source of misrecognition (Leavy, 1983). As previously noted, the ego and its claims to identity are situated for Lacan in both the imaginary and symbolic orders, with the speaking subject (the *je*) coming to coexist with and to a great extent speak for the ego (the *moi*)-- although both are dwarfed by the unconscious subject constituted by language (referred to by Lacan as the Other). From Lacan's perspective, therefore, the precarious and potentially alienating sense of identity established through the ego's formation in the mirror phase is built upon throughout the human life cycle.

CHAPTER 3

THE IDENTITY CONTROVERSY: THE LACANIAN CHALLENGE TO THE CONCEPTIONS OF ERIKSON, WINNICOTT, AND KOHUT

Erikson/Winnicott/Kohut vs. Lacan on infancy, the birth of the ego, and the function of unity

Lacan's understanding of identity formation in the mirror phase, and its modification through the Oedipal complex, both converges with and distinguishes itself in similar ways from the ego psychological, object relational, and self psychological perspectives respectively represented by Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut. It should by now be apparent that compared to these theorists Lacan is significantly more convinced that the Oedipal complex and the accession to the symbolic order play a decisive role in influencing the direction of identity formation. In reference to object-relations theory, which was in its infancy when he began giving his annual seminars in 1953, Lacan (1988a, 1988b) was critical of its status as a 'two-person' psychology that did not sufficiently integrate the 'third term' of the symbolic order that always "... transcends and structures the intersubjective relation between two subjects" (Hamburg, 1991).

It is in regard to the metaphor of mirroring that Lacan's ideas on early identity development most overlap with the object-relational and self psychological perspectives -- although significant differences remain (Chessick, 1985; Denzin, 1987). The preeminence of the visual sensory modality in pre-Oedipal ego formation has been preserved and illuminated in Winnicott's work (Wright, 1991). However, Lacan's depiction of the mirror relation in terms of alienation and illusion are in decided contrast to the harmony, integration, and cohesion emphasized to varying degrees by Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut (Holland, 1985; Pines, 1987). While Lacan is in agreement with Kohut that the ego strives to maintain cohesion, he is as attuned to the costs as he is to the benefits of this essential aspect of this ego function. Lacan's theory of the mirror phase clearly appears to paint a more pessimistic portrait than those provided by Erikson, Winnicott, and Kohut (Flax, 1990; Wright, 1991).

Pines (1987) notes how for theorists such as Winnicott (1971) and Kohut (1978), the mirroring metaphor describes the relationship between infant and mother with a focus on the mother's modes of responsiveness to the infant. In a brief review of Lacan's mirror phase, Pines (1987) implicitly recognizes that Lacan's concern is more with the significance of the infant's being so captivated by his mother's modes of responsiveness--whatever they may be. Numerous authors (e.g. Flax, 1990; Hamburg, 1991; Rudnytsky, 1991) have been critical of this aspect of Lacan, particularly insofar as it appears to minimize the formative influence of maternal empathy that is such a central feature of both Winnicott and Kohut's theories. However, Hamburg (1991) is equally critical of the way in which "... Kohut's privileging of the empathic dimension in effect precludes an

empathic response to human alienation..." (p.354) and to the other manifestations of disharmony that are intrinsic to the imperfections of imaginary intersubjectivity.

The differences between Lacan's conception of infants' relation to their environment can be further summarized through a comparison with Erikson's position, which is similar in its assumptions with the work of Winnicott and Kohut. As do Freud and Lacan, Erikson begins with the bodily experience of the infant in articulating a developmental theory. In formulating a psychosocial perspective to complement Freud's psychosexual view, the key issue for Erikson regarding the child's bodily development is the way in which he or she is responded to by the childrearing methods of his or her social milieu. He thus portrays the encounter between the growing child and caring adults as a ‘dialogue' or ‘interplay', with him emphasizing the adaptive value of this encounter for all participants. Erikson places great faith in the power of even the newborn infant to elicit responses and create environments that are commensurate with the numerous changes of perspective and experience that accompany its bodily development (Erikson, 1953/1987).

While Erikson (1959/1980) acknowledges that the most radical change of perspective for the infant is the move from the intrauterine to the extrauterine environment, he does not attribute this change with profound developmental consequences-- as Lacan of course does. Rather, he takes this change to be the first in a series of ‘adjustments of perspective' that will include such postural changes as crawling, standing, and walking. Thus, where Lacan emphasizes the chaotic and fragmentary nature of the infant's experience, Erikson passes over this dimension and instead accentuates the infant's move toward adaptive integration of its organ modes, sensory experience and social modalities.

Further, compared to Lacan, Erikson ascribes a substantially different character to the encounter between infant and mother. In describing this encounter as a ‘dialogue', Erikson (1982) imputes a mutuality of recognition and a self-other differentiation that Lacan does not view as transpiring until the acquisition of language and the paternal metaphor. This is quite clear in Erikson's (1982) following series of statements:

> ... in the playful, and yet planful, dialogue that negotiates the first interpersonal encounters, the light of the eyes, the features of the face and the sound of the name become essential ingredients of a first recognition of and by the primal other (p.40).... [there is] a mutuality of recognition, by face and by name (p.44).... [and there is] the psychosocial capacity [of the infant] to confront the existence of a primary Other as well as to comprehend oneself as a separate self-- in the light of the other. At the same time, [this capacity] counteracts the infant's rage and anxiety... (p.45).

As we have seen, Lacan depicts the encounter between infant and mother as more unilateral than mutual, with him implying that while the mother may recognize the infant as

separate it is quite a leap to suggest that the infant recognizes her or himself in any similar sense. Flax (1990) makes a similar critique in reference to object relations theory, in which "mother and child are presented as misleadingly isomorphic" (p.123), with the mother's subjectivity being minimized in favor of her status as the child's object.

Further, where Erikson (1983) assumes that the ego and its accompanying "... sense of 'I' must be antecedent to concepts such as Me and Mine...." (p.427), we have seen that the ego for Lacan embodies the very meaning of 'me' and is formed prior to a 'sense of I' insofar as the social relation between an 'I' and an other awaits the acquisition of language. Lacan (1949/ 1977) is quite clear in declaring that the identification with the mirror image "... situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction... " (p.2) His position is thus a reversal of Erikson's in that he takes the 'concept of me' to precede the 'sense of I' (Larmore, 1981). From this perspective, Lacan is also at odds with Winnicott's (1960) notion of the infant's 'true self' being present from birth, Kohut's (1978) conception of a 'nuclear self' emerging between 2-5 months of infancy, and Kohut's positing the self to be "... an independent centre of initiative..." (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, p.414).

Insofar as he portrays the human subject as synonymous with the 'I' and as fundamentally centered by virtue of the ego's integrative work (as reviewed in Chapter 1), Erikson articulates a conception of a centered subject that is quite problematic from Lacan's perspective-- who contends that the human subject is fundamentally decentered through entry into the symbolic order. While he does acknowledge the ego's integrative function, Lacan insists on the illusory and imaginary status of this function. Although Erikson allows that the ego defensively maintains the subject's sense of unity in an effort to ward off feelings of fragmentation, as Lacan recognizes, he does not see defense as necessarily in the service of illusion or distortion and therefore does not doubt the authenticity of the ego's bestowal of unity and centrality on the subject.

Smith (1991) has taken up the antagonism between Lacan and ego psychology, seeking to reconcile their views in a way that remains faithful to Lacan's theoretical innovations. Smith (1991) summarizes his position thusly:

> The difference between Lacan and ego psychology is not that between an emphasis on lack in Lacan and an emphasis on unity in ego psychology; the essential difference is that ego psychology acknowledges both defensive and nondefensive unity and holds that the deepest concern for one's want of being is dependent on the achievement of nondefensive unity. Only on the basis of such unity can one acknowledge the inevitability of lack, loss, and limit (p.54).... The American [ego psychological] emphasis falls on the high degree of achieved nondefensive unity required to acknowledge the immutable lack of total unity (p. 9).

Smith's statement applies in principle to work of Winnicott and Kohut insofar as their respective emphases on integration and cohesion can be considered synonymous with

the unity of the ego. Smith's position implies that development proceeds only through the disruption, disintegration, and death of a previously achieved level of unity, which must be reintegrated into a higher level, presumably in the form of a less rigidified, more differentiated, and nondefensive unity. This position is not always explicit in Lacan's polemical tirades against ego psychology, but is implicit in his account of the relation between the imaginary and symbolic orders-- which, recalling my review in Chapter 2, requires the imaginary bodily unity as a medium for the "... differentiating function of linguistic signification..." (Boothby, 1990, p. 224). There can be no deconstruction without a prior construction to dismantle and reconstruct, and the Lacanian ego provides precisely the unified form required for a 'productive destruction' to be effected by the movement of signification accompanying the accession to the symbolic order. As I will next document, it is in the work of Winnicott rather than Erikson or Kohut that this aspect of Lacan finds its most fruitful counterpart.

Difference within identity: The 'Fort-Da' game as a transitional phenomenon at the juncture of the imaginary and symbolic orders

The work of Winnicott has proven to be a productive point of dialogue with Lacan particularly due to the way in which Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object' attempts to account for the transformation from the infant's fusion with his mother to symbolic modes of functioning in which the mother's separateness and absence are acknowledged (Bronfen, 1989; Flax, 1990; Rudnytsky, 1991). Winnicott accentuated the importance of the infant's early months being characterized by the omnipotent illusion that he magically controls the mother's responsiveness, an illusion that can only be engendered by the mother's dependability in satisfying her infant's needs. Without this early omnipotent illusion, Winnicott deemed the infant to be ill prepared to tolerate the disillusionment that will accompany the mother's eventual failure to completely mirror her child's increasingly diverse demands. Winnicott (1971) has written that "the mother's eventual task is to disillusion the infant, but she has no hope of success unless at first she has been able to give sufficient opportunity for illusion" (p. 11).

We can recall from Chapter 1 that Winnicott recognized the necessity and inevitability of the mother's responses gradually being experienced as imperfectly mirroring her child's needs, with this discrepancy serving to engender an incipient sense of psychological separateness in the infant. It is at this juncture in the child's development that 'transitional objects' assume such profound importance. The transitional object affords the child a creative role in sustaining the illusion of the mother's presence despite her absence. Winnicott's (1971) theory of transitional phenomena can be explicated through a dialogue with Freud's famed (1920) account of the repetitive 'cotton reel game' which he observed his 1 1/2 year old grandson play during his mother's absence. Freud (1920) described the game as follows:

> The child held a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it.... What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive ‘o-o-o-o'. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful *‘da'*.... This, then, was the complete game--disappearance and return. (p. 15)

The child's expression ‘o-o-o-o' signified the German word ‘fort', meaning ‘away', while the expression ‘da' meant ‘here'. Freud was intrigued to observe that the child, with much pleasure, more repeatedly enacted the first rather than the second part of the "Fort-Da" game-- i.e. more often vocalized the "o-o-o-o" accompanying the reel's being thrown from the crib. Freud speculated that his grandson's game was an effort to symbolically master the anxiety of his mother's absence, with her departure being embodied in the casting away of the cotton reel.

As a transitional object, the cotton reel for Winnicott functions primarily to preserve the child's internal image of his mother-- which Winnicott refers to as the ‘internal object'. The child's ability to employ a transitional object depends on the internal object already having been established as enlivened rather than persecutory, a state of affairs which in turn depends upon the previous availability and ‘good enough' qualities of the external object-- i.e. the ‘real mother'. The absence of the real mother challenges the viability of the child's internal mother, with the use of the transitional object serving to reassure the child that the internal mother will survive this absence. In the Fort-Da game, Winnicott (1971) describes how the child "... externalizes an internal mother whose loss is feared, so as to demonstrate to himself that this internal mother, now represented through the toy on the floor, had not vanished from his inner world..." (p. 68).

Whereas Winnicott interprets the Fort-Da game as primarily reflective of the child's efforts to preserve the internal mother, Lacan interprets the game's significance to exceed this understanding. Lacan (1977, 1988a) notes how the child's phonemic opposition of ‘Fort' and ‘Da' expresses the assumption of an elemental linguistic structure, wherein 1) every signifier is meaningful only in a binary opposition to another signifier and 2) the signifier evokes the presence of an absent signified. Bronfen (1989) highlights how the Fort-Da game exemplifies a shift from the mode of representation coextensive with Winnicott's ‘internal mother' to

> ... a secondary form of representation... [which] for Lacan.... [illustrates] the fact that once subject to the laws of signification, the subject will identify himself only imperfectly, in relation to signifiers whose identity is determined by their difference to other signifiers. That is to say, the subject is faded from any sense of self-presence (p. 976).

The differential linguistic play of presence and absence that permeates the Fort-Da

game is therefore interpreted by Lacan as primarily reflective of the child's coming to terms with his own absence relative to the desire of the mother rather than simply her absence relative to his desire. Regarding the Fort-Da game, Lacan (1978) has written that the

> ... reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball by some magical game... it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained.... If it is true that the signifier is the first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognize here-- from the fact that this game is accompanied by one of the first oppositions to appear-- that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in the act, the reel, that we must designate the subject..... The activity as a whole symbolizes repetition, but not at all that of some need that might demand the return of the mother, and which would be expressed quite simply in a cry. It is the repetition of the mother's departure as cause of a *Spaltung* [splitting] in the subject.... (p.62-63)

The child of the Fort-Da game has identified with the perspective and desire of his absent mother, who is elsewhere desiring something that is not him (Kirshner, 1991). As Smith (1991) puts it, "... it is the lost *object* that is constituted for a lost *subject*" (p. 91). This interpretation is in fact supported by a further observation Freud made of his grandson's solitary behavior during his mother's prolonged absence. Freud (1920) notes that

> ... during this long period of solitude the child had found a method of making himself *disappear*. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror image ‘gone'. (p.15, n.1)

Freud (1920) also notes that his grandson, upon his mother's return, exclaimed "Baby o-o-o-o!"-- i.e. "Baby gone!". Weber (1991) highlights how this exclamation, and the mirror-play that preceded it, reflects the narcissistic identification characteristic of the mirror phase structure-- i.e. the child has identified with the desire of the mother and accordingly declared himself as having disappeared. Lacan (1953a/1977) speaks to this point, noting that

> it is precisely in his solitude that the desire of the little child has already become the desire of another, of an *alter ego* who dominates him and whose object of desire [i.e. what the mother desires] is henceforth his own affliction (p.104).

Lacan's re-interpretation of the Fort-Da game therefore accentuates the divergence between his theory and those of both Winnicott and Kohut. In contrast to Winnicott and Kohut, the important issue for Lacan is not the child's ‘object relation' or ‘selfobject relation ' to the mother, but the child's relation to the mother as a desiring

subject-- with the mother's desire in turn being mediated by her relation to the ‘law of the father.' Whereas Winnicott and Kohut cite empathic maternal mirroring as the most crucial dimension of identity development, Lacan (1953c, 1963) insists that the child's and mother's relation to the ‘paternal metaphor' will have the more profound influence (Abelin 1971, 1980; Forrester, 1981; Jager, 1988b; Muller, 1989; Ragland-Sullivan, 1986; ver Eecke, 1988, 1989).

In this connection, Pines accentuates how the child's internalization of the ‘Law of the father' is so significant precisely because "knowledge of differences is a different kind of knowledge from the knowledge of sameness" (p.32). In contrast to Winnicott and Kohut's intersubjective perspectives, Lacan is as much concerned with relation of the subject to language as he is with the intersubjective relation of the ego to others and images, where sameness reigns. J-A Miller (1987) alludes to this distinction in highlighting how in Lacan's later position "... the subject's dependency is not constructed on the image in the mirror, but as a dependency on the speech of the other" (p.26) M. Mannoni (1970) similarly notes how for Lacan

> language precedes the formation of the subject's image and can be said to engender it. For example, the infant has a place in parental discourse before he is born; he has a name; he will be "spoken" as long as he is the object of care; the neglect of his needs-- to which we sometimes attach so much importance-- will have far less effect on him than the nature and the "accidents" of discourse that surround him. The specifically human environment is neither biological nor social, but linguistic (p.263-64).

From Lacan's perspective, parental discourse is significant both before and after their child's birth. In regard to Lacan's concept of the subject's ‘prehistory', Kirshner (1991) notes that "... the child's identity as subject... is prefigured in the desires of the parents and the words they speak of him..." (p.178). How the parents subsequently respond to the child's no-saying and questions about sexuality are two additional crucial issues for identity formation from Lacan's perspective. In her Lacanian work on the psychoanalysis of children, M. Mannoni (1970, p.vii) emphasizes the significance of "... that which in the parents' discourse will or will not allow the child to accede to words of his own", while qualifying the influence that such theorists of Winnicott and Kohut attribute to environmental contingencies. Boothby (1991, p.148) makes a similar point in noting how "for Lacan, the key issue in the Oedipus Complex is not the availability of the mother to the desire of the child but the position of the child in relation to the desire of the mother."

<u>The social dimension of identity for Erikson</u>

vs. the uniqueness of desire for Lacan

Although the work of Winnicott has had a significant impact on psychoanalytic theories regarding identity, Erikson's contribution remains amendable to productive dialogue with Lacan-- especially regarding the role of the social dimension of existence. Despite his contention that the ‘sense of I' precedes the ‘concept of me', throughout Erikson's work his understanding of identity remains predominantly bound to his egocentered conception of the social. Lichenstein (1977) has pointed out how Erikson's emphasis on the social dimension of identity formation defines identity "... as a process of self-objectivation [through which]... the individual is, within the social context, capable of talking about the ‘who' that he is, in ‘objective' terms: these objective terms are defined as the social role of the individual" (p.159).

As we have already seen, it is precisely the self-objectifying dimension of identity formation that Lacan and his followers describe in terms of the mirror phase's alienating influence. Further, insofar as he often appears to limit human identity to an adaptive dimension of the social sphere, Erikson has been accused of confusing identity with uniqueness (Thompson, 1985; Golding, 1982). Mannoni (1971) has spoken most directly to this point in declaring that the

> ... feeling of uniqueness has its origin in the initial family relationships-- in a family [where] each member is irreplaceable, recognized, and loved simply *because he is*. The identifications which are mingled in it will not alter anything, and in a latent form the feeling of uniqueness exists prior to that of identity.... If, as Erik Erikson states so precisely, identity must be achieved (and he is clinically correct), it is simply because uniqueness must be repressed. Identity is nothing but the socially accepted form of lost uniqueness (p.185).

Thompson (1985) expands upon Mannoni's critique by specifying that "the identifications which inevitably become intermingled with the unique structure of his desire do not really alter his desire but simply gives him the power to repress it" (p. 20). From the Lacanian perspective, it is thus the uniqueness of one's desire that is sacrificed and repressed by the demands of imaginary identification that inevitably accompany identity formation. Along similar lines, Muller (1989) highlights how the symbolic identification constituted by the bestowal of a proper name "... marks the subject as *one* (p.373).... The effect of this mark of ‘one' is not to unify but rather to make unique. Unification remains an illusion of the ego" (p.374).

Where human identity is central for Erikson, then, human desire is central for Lacan (Rose, 1981). For Freud and Lacan alike, human identity in its psychosocial sense "... is born of frustrated desire and abandoned objects" (Golding, 1982, p.555). Erikson and Lacan therefore considerably differ in the significance they attribute to the social dimension of human existence and identity formation. Roazen (1976) underscores how

"... instead of highlighting tension, Erikson has concentrated on describing the integrative relationship between the individual and his society" (p.47). Ver Eecke (1974) is also quite clear on this fundamental difference between Erikson and Lacan.

French child psychoanalyst Maud Mannoni (1970) gives a more generous reading to the relationship between Erikson and Lacan. She affirms that Erikson recognized the child as early on developing an identity separate from that of his parents, but that this separate identity must often be renounced and replaced by ‘blind identifications'. Mannoni particularly praises Erikson's (1963) clinical work in the case of Sam, a three year old boy who developed a series of psychosomatic symptoms following the death of his maternal grandmother-- a death which his mother initially denied by telling Sam his grandmother had gone on a ‘long trip to Seattle'. The other significant clinical fact was Sam's guilty belief that his aggressive teasing was what killed his grandmother-- aggressiveness which conflicted with his parents' desire for him to not identify with their Jewish heritage and but rather to behave like the ‘polite' children of the non-Jews in their neighborhood.

Mannoni (1970) accentuates how Erikson's treatment of Sam included interviews with his parents and how, along Lacanian lines, Erikson maintained that "... the psychic origin of disorder in a young child invariably has its origins in a neurotic conflict in the mother" (p.37). In addition, Mannoni notes how what was and was not said by both Sam and his parents was of paramount significance for Erikson in the treatment process. In Sam's case, his symptoms were revealed to be an expression of his mother's wish to 1) deny her own mother's death and 2) have Sam disown his ancestry and be like the ‘good children' of non-Jewish mothers, in this way obstructing Sam's identification with the masculine image presented by his father. Mannoni is critical, though, of how at the theoretical level Erikson's sociocultural account of Sam's case obscures what actually transpired in his clinical work. Referring to Erikson, Mannoni (1970) declares that

> the importance he attaches to sociocultural factors leads him perhaps to lose sight of the strictly analytical meaning that such factors can assume in treatment, and which justify their being explored. The important aspect of Sam's case is not so much the history of an uprooted Jewish couple as the part played by the child in his parents' fantasies. It was his parents' wish to break with their Jewish ancestry that produced an identification problem in Sam.... The problem is not the situation of a Jewish family in a Gentile environment, but the mother-child link in the mother's fantasy relationship.... [Erikson] leaves the clinic when he works out his theories, which never appear to be a natural extension of the text we have been reading (p.40-41).

Parental fantasies, discourse, and desire for Lacan therefore mediate sociocultural considerations in accounting for the formation and deformation of identity.

Drawing on Freud (1914, 1917, 1923) and Lacan (1988b), Golding (1982) has addressed the pitfalls of linking psychoanalytic and sociological thought. Golding is particu-

larly critical of any theorizing that describes a dialectical relationship between the individual and society, and notes how such theorizing problematically asserts that "individuality, the very realization of oneself, comes not from the renunciation of society but through its affirmation" (1982, p.546). This view, represented by a sociological tradition that includes such thinkers as Durkeim (1897/1952), Simmel (1950), and G.H. Mead (1977), is critiqued by Golding as "... imprisoned in a series of assumptions which, among other things, treats subjectivity as epiphenomenal and identity as an unmediated reflection of some external [social] reality" (p.545).

Erikson (1959/1980) himself is rather explicit in expressing his position on these issue. He declares that

> instead of emphasizing what social organization denies the child, we wish to clarify what it may first grant to the infant, as it keeps him alive and as, in administering to his needs in a specific way, it seduces him to its particular life style (p.19).

It is statements such as this, where Erikson speaks of the societal seduction of the individual, that have led thinkers such as Roazen (1976) to question the conformist implications of his position. Roazen warns how Erikson's "... emphasis on the need for an identity confirmed by social institutions may give undue weight to conformist values" (p.43). Roazen questions whether there are not any advantages to experiencing personal discontinuities, particularly when to maintain continuity and social sameness may be self-deceptive and illusory if informed by cultural/familial myths and distortions.

In a similar vein, Roazen faults Erikson for overextending the use and meaning of the word ‘sense' in his expressions ‘sense of identity' and ‘sense of continuity'. While the use of these expressions reflects Erikson's admirable attempt to give an experiential flavor to his conceptualizations, Roazen wonders whether the phrase ‘sense of...' might too readily come to mean ‘illusion of...'. Along allusively Lacanian lines, he notes how

> each of us may need to rely on at least some illusions, and some may develop elaborate myths about themselves. But there is still, however, Erikson may avoid it, an important difference between truth and falsehood (Roazen, 1976, p.27).

Roazen's critique includes a concern with Erikson's emphasis on the significance of continuity in conceptualizing identity. The value of continuity is exemplified for Erikson (1959/1980) by adolescent development wherein, in order to overcome a sense of discontinuity, the adolescent must selectively repudiate and assimilate childhood identifications in light of the plethora of new roles and identifications that are offered to him as an aspiring adult. This is another point at which Erikson is vulnerable to a Lacanian critique, particularly insofar as he sometimes appears to remain at the level of identification and preoccupation with images so characteristic of adolescence. For example, Erikson (1959/1987) has written that

> All through childhood, an individual develops images of himself, evokes images in others, and experiences continuities, and discontinuities in these images.... in order to establish an ongoing sense of identity then, an individual must learn to manage a lasting hierarchy of all these various images of himself (p.635).

Thompson (1985) again brings a Lacanian perspective to these issues when he suggests that all adolescent attempts to ‘establish an identity', whether considered ‘negative' or not, arise from the tension between the uniqueness of the adolescent's desire and the demands for conformity implicit in the social aspects of identity formation. Thompson (1985) asserts that

> Inevitably, the adolescent is confronted with the double bind that he needs to conform to the expectations of his teachers [and parents], while having to assert his uniqueness for the recognition of his peers with exploits that are often anti-social. If it becomes necessary that he achieve an identity that stands out, it is only because his uniqueness has been repressed. And this holds equally true whether his identity takes the form of a troublemaker or that of the most popular student (p.20).

For the purposes of my dissertation, this critique will later prove quite relevant in reviewing contemporary identity theorists' attempts to reconcile the social and psychological aspects of identity formation. This debate is resumed in Chapter 5, which will include a further focus on the problematic aspects of Erikson's theory. For now, there is more to be said about a redeemable dimension of Erikson's theory-- its convergence with existential-phenomenological perspectives regarding identity, which orients the literature reviewed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONVERGENCE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC AND EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES REGARDING IDENTITY

Knowles' reframing of Erikson in light of Heidegger, viewed in light of Lacan: The intertwining of identity, temporality, and desire

Despite the limits of Erikson's definition of psychosocial identity, the work of Knowles (1986) demonstrates that Erikson's theory of development implicitly provides a place for a fuller conception. Knowles picks up on the fact that for each stage in his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson articulates a corresponding 'strength' or 'virtue' that-- although they build on the present centered functions of the ego-- describe experiences that are all fundamentally future oriented and open-ended. Most significantly, Knowles contends that these experiences are central for identity development and that the bodily, egoic, and social aspects are ultimately of secondary significance.

In making this claim, Knowles recasts Erikson's ego centered psychosocial perspective within an existential framework informed by Heidegger's (1927/1962) characterization of human existence (i.e. Dasein) as inextricably intertwined with the structures of temporality. Knowles argues that the main dimensions of Erikson's developmental theory-- the body, the ego, the social and the virtues-- can be interpreted in terms of the Care structure Heidegger (1927/1962) took to express "... the fundamental characteristics of Dasein's Being.... existence, in the 'ahead-of-itself'; facticity, in the 'Being-already-in'; [and] falling, in the 'Being-alongside'" (p.293).

Facticity for Heidegger refers to the fact that all humans are born into and inevitably limited by familial, cultural, and social traditions into which they are 'thrown' without choice. In terms of temporality, then, facticity involves our relation to the past and the way in which we are restricted by its irreversible aspects. Knowles notes how Erikson recognized facticity in his emphasis on the social constituents of human identity, such as being born a male female or a member of a particular race-- i.e. "... those elements of an individual's identity which at the very minimum comprise what one is never not..." (Erikson, 1969, p.266; cited in Knowles, 1986, p. 9) Erikson, like most other theorists in the psychoanalytic tradition, also paid special attention to those aspects of facticity delimited by bodily form, function, and experience.

As we have already seen, Lacan is attuned to this dimension in his emphasis on the psychological processes set in motion by the newborn infant's fundamental prematurity. The facticity of human identity is also recognized by Lacan in his appreciation of the subject's 'prehistory', whereby one is born into a symbolic order that preceded his birth and prepared a place for him (Larmore, 1981). Lacan appears to be more radical than Erikson in this regard insofar as even such 'biological givens' as being born a male or female are subject to variation depending upon the discourse and desires of the

familial milieu into which the child is thrown (Bonner, 1990).

Fallenness, also described as ‘inauthenticity' by Heidegger, refers to our everyday attitude of "... getting things done, of classifying and manipulating, all the while assuming that things [and others] have static given natures" (Fischer & Alapack, 1987, p. 102). In terms of temporality, fallenness involves our relation to and absorption in our present concerns and tasks, wherein we strive to be rational, calculative, and consistent. Knowles (1986) makes the important point that what for Heidegger are the fallen or inauthentic modes of existence capture what for Erikson and other psychoanalysts are the ego functions assumed to be so central and essential to human identity.

Heidegger's (1927/1962) discussion of fallenness and everydayness warrants further review. Particularly relevant to my project is Heidegger's raising the question as to "... *who* it is that Dasein is in its everydayness" (p.149). Heidegger does not accept "I am" as an adequate answer to the question of the "who" of everyday Dasein. Interestingly, he does cite a traditional definition of identity when he allows that "the ‘who' is what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its Experiences and ways of behavior..." (p.150). However, Heidegger is quickly critical of how this definition conceives ‘the who' in terms more appropriate to things and objects-- that is, ‘the who' becomes ‘a what', which is precisely the problem of ‘self-objectivation' that Lichenstein (1977) has critiqued in regard to Erikson. It is on this basis that Heidegger raises the question of whether "it could be that the ‘who' of everyday Dasein just is *not* the ‘I myself"' (p. 150).

Heidegger (1927/1962) goes onto note how despite the fact that in our everyday Being-with-others "... there is constant care as to the way one differs from them..." (p.163), insofar as Dasein is usually looking to either ‘catch up with' or subordinate others, this ‘constant care' is inconspicuously determined by Others who are for the most part indeterminate and anonymous. It is on this basis that Heidegger asserts that the ‘who' of everyday Dasein is dictated by ‘the they' of this anonymous Other.

Heidegger's portrayal of the ‘who of everyday Dasein' as the ‘they-self' provides philosophical support for Lacan's characterization of the ‘ego as other' and the speaking subject as the vehicle of expression for the ego (Boothby, 1991; Wilden, 1968). Heidegger posits a relation between the ‘they-self' and the ‘speaking I' that is a precursor of Lacan's position on the relation between the *moi* and the *je*. Casey and Woody (1983) also indicate how Heidegger's insistence on "... the primacy of language over the speaking subject ..." (p.89) is an important precursor of Lacan's central contention that the truth of the subject ultimately lies not in the anonymous Other that is ‘the they', but in the discourse of the Other constituted by the effects of the signifier on the subject (De Waelhens, 1978; Richardson, 1979, 1980).

Not surprisingly, it is in regard to the place of discourse in the coming-to-be of the subject that Erikson's work has the least affinity with that of Heidegger and Lacan. Erikson appears to understand the acquisition of language as simply another support for the ego's move toward mastery and social integration. He thus does not radically distinguish between speaking and other ego functions, and therefore is not in a position to

acknowledge language as constitutive of human subjectivity. These limitations on Erikson's part are clear when he writes that "...a child who is learning to speak... is acquiring one of the prime functions supporting a sense of individual autonomy and one of the prime techniques for expanding the radius of give-and-take" (1968a, p.161). Erikson's view of speech as a communication tool at the disposal of an autonomous ego is precisely the position that Lacan (1988b) considers "... an alternative without mediation..." in relation to his conception of the human subject as decentered by entry into the symbolic order. Mannoni (1970) notes that although in his clinical work

> ... Erikson renders the patient's words, he does not undertake to study them at the textual level. It is *patterns*, habits, education, and customs that attract him. He is preoccupied with the problem of communication.... Lacan, on the contrary, studies the manner in which the subject is changed by language-- a conception that does not allow for a thought which is anterior to the word (p.42).

Indeed, exemplifying Mannoni's mention of "... the manner in which the subject is changed by language...", Lacan deems the accession to the symbolic order as essential for the constitution of temporality. Boothby (1991) has spoken to the temporalization of identity through the symbolic order, highlighting how

> A new dimension of identity emerges through symbolic castration that is decentered in relation to the imaginary ego. It is an essentially temporal dimension, mediated by the unfolding of signifying chains. Unlike the imaginary, in which a fictive sense of identity is given all at once in the perceptual *Gestalt*, the symbolically mediated subject cannot be represented in any instant of time but is bound up essentially with the three extases of time, past, present, and future (p.186).

Despite his neglect of the linguistic dimension of identity, Erikson's convergence with Heidegger is nonetheless most significant in regard to the fundamental temporality of the subject. This convergence can best be explicated by examining existentiality, the most essential characteristic of the Care structure for Heidegger. Existentiality, in designating our orientation to the future and possibility, conveys in the most radical way what Heidegger intends when he describes human being as Da-sein, ‘being-there', or being-in-the-world (Casey & Woody, 1983). Existentiality makes possible the unity of temporality wherein Dasein's present is always experienced with reference to a past and a future. This point is particularly important in its implication that the meaning of human identity is inseparable from the three-fold temporality of the subject in which the future takes priority-- that is, the question of the ‘who' is most authentically answered by the response ‘I am who I am not yet', a response which nonetheless is grounded in the facticity of the past and is a modification of the fallenness of the present (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Murray, 1986).

Thompson (1985) speaks quite clearly to this aspect of the intertwining of human identity and temporality when he states that "... the subject, who is always situated in the present, is also situated in his experience of a future which is coming toward him, of a desire seeking to be realized" (p.122). In speaking here of ‘a desire seeking to be realized', Thompson is adding a Lacanian flavor to Heidegger's formulation. Along similar lines, Wilden (1980) maintains that the Hegelian (1949) conception of desire, as interpreted by Kojeve (1969) and further appropriated by Lacan (1988b), is commensurate with the existentiality Heidegger deems so fundamental to Dasein.

Wilden (1980) agrees that "human time is that in which the future is primary..." (p.64), and goes onto to quote Kojeve's (1947) reflections on the relation between desire and existentiality. According to Kojeve (1947; cited in Wilden, 1980, p.66),

> The movement engendered by the future-- this is the movement which is born of desire, that is, of specifically human desire, of desire which creates.... Desire is the presence of an absence .... [and] is thus clearly the presence of a future in the present... If desire is the presence of an absence, it is not... an empirical entity... It is, on the contrary, like a lacuna or a ‘hole' in Space-- a void, a nothingness... (p. 367-68).

For Lacan, desire is fundamentally and irrevocably futural insofar as "it reaches beyond the satisfaction of any need or wish" (Smith, 1991, p. 90). In regard to the question of identity and the ‘who' of the human subject, Kojeve and Lacan alike can be summarized as saying "I am my desire." As such, and in line the Heideggerian "I am who I am not yet", human identity development is portrayed as a perpetual project and process which can never be completed due to the fact that, particularly for Lacan (1988b), desire is founded upon the *lack* experienced by the infant prior to the mirror phase and deepened by his assumption of the symbolic order. Indeed, Lacan's concept of desire includes a concern with the body that is not present in Heidegger's treatment of existentiality. As I summarized in Chapter 2, desire for Lacan is initially co-extensive with the heterogeneity of bodily experience that is excluded by the infant's identification with the mirror image.

This picture is considerably complicated for Lacan by the way in which human desire is saturated with the desire of the Other, leaving the subject to struggle with such questions as "What does the other want me to do?" and "What am I to be to please my mother?" (Mannoni, 1970). In Lacan's terms, human desire is defined as a ‘want-to-be' or ‘want-of-being' (Schneiderman, 1980) which is endangered by the efforts of the ego to fix one's identity on the model of a thing, and alienated through identifications with the desire and discourse of significant others in the subject's history.

The proximity of Erikson's work to Lacan's emphasis on desire is glimpsed by focusing upon his description of the relation between identity and hope. Hope was considered by Erikson to be the ‘basic virtue' to emerge out of the crisis of trust vs. mistrust that characterizes infancy. Erikson's description of infancy centers on how the

infant experiences the vulnerability that accompanies its horizontal helplessness and complete dependency on caregivers for survival. It is the consistency and quality of caregivers' responses to the infant's vulnerability and discomfort that is most significant in influencing whether the infant will experience basic trust or mistrust in the ability of the world to ease his discomfort. It is only on the basis of this developing sense of basic trust that the infant can be relaxed and open enough to the world to experience hope. As both Erikson and Knowles (1986) emphasize, infancy is a matter of life and death in which the emergence of hope is essential to the maintenance of life. In Erikson's (1964) words,

> hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive.... if life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired (p.115).

This point will assume particular importance in Chapter 7, when I move to consider the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality-- in which a sense of hopelessness will appear as an essential constituent.

More recently, Erikson (1982) has accentuated the existential dimension of hope, describing hope as "... ‘expectant desire' (p.59).... hope is, so to speak, pure future... (p.79)." The orientation and openness to the future inaugurated by hope becomes the basis for the basic strengths or existential modes emerging out of the successive psychosocial crises. Preceding the identity crisis of adolescence, the relevant basic strengths are the three built upon hope: will, imagination, and competence. With each of these existential modes, there is a widening of the individual's sense of identity. In the following statements, Erikson (1968) summarizes the contribution of each of the first four basic strengths to identity development:

> Stage 1: "I am what hope I have and can give." (p.107)
> Stage 2: "I am what I can will freely." (p.114)
> Stage 3: "I am what I can imagine I will be." (p.122)
> Stage 4: "I am what I can learn to make work." (p.127)

In this series of statements, we can see just how much weight Erikson gives to the temporal constitution of human identity. This is even more impressively apparent in Erikson's (1982) formulation that

> Gradually... and with every new strength, a new time sense appears along with a sense of irrevocable identity: gradually becoming what one has caused to be, one will eventually become what one has been (p.79).

It is of interest to compare Erikson's temporality of identity to Lacan's linguistically informed position, which is summarized by Boothby (1991) when he notes how "in the

defile of the signifier, the subject is determinable only in the future anterior, not as the one who is, but as the one who will have been" (p. 186). Compared to Erikson, Lacan's concept of temporality implies a continual deferment and indefiniteness regarding identity.

Knowles' (1986) contribution to conceptualizing human identity has been to reinterpret Erikson's 'basic strengths' in terms of existentiality and temporality, in this way giving them the priority that Erikson reserves for the ego. By reducing the temporal constitution and continuity of human identity to an ego function, Erikson misses the status of this constitution as a condition for the possibility of any mode of identity whatsoever. Although it is in regard to the relation between temporality and identity that Erikson is closest to assuming an existential position, Lacan's conception of desire presents a more radically existential understanding of this relation insofar as it does not revolve around the ego--instead emphasizing the constitutive role of language, the other, and death in deconstructing the temporal stagnation of the imaginary ego and permitting the liberation of human identity as desire (Felman, 1987; Jager, 1988; Lacan, 1988a).

Denzin's phenomenology of 'the emotionally divided self'

Further evidence for the convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological perspectives regarding identity can be found in the work of sociologist Norman Denzin. Dialoguing his own empirical research with many of the thinkers reviewed above (e.g Heidegger & Lacan), Denzin (1984, 1987) has explicated four structural constituents of what he has termed 'the emotionally divided self'-- these structures being differentiated into the categories of 1) others, 2) self and body, 3) situations, and 4) temporality. Regarding the first structure, Denzin (1987) eloquently describes how the emotionally divided self

> ... feels, sees, and hears itself through the voices and eyes of the other.... He has 'fallen' in his own eyes and in the eyes of the 'they-other'. The subject becomes indistinguishable from the 'they-self'.... The 'they-other' is given the qualities of emotional solidity, calmness, serenity, and a sense of superiority that makes him feel inferior to them.... the other overwhelms the subject, setting (in the eyes of the subject) standards that are impossible to attain.... The other may be imitated, or copied. Their mannerisms are interiorized.... The subject hates the persons he imitates, yet he complies with their perceived wishes.... Emotionally divided selves translate into action other people's definitions of who they are. They seem unable or unwilling to move forward in terms of their own self-definitions. The self that complies with the wishes of the other is perceived as a false or inauthentic self (p.290-91; also in Denzin, 1984, p.207-208).

In this rather remarkable introductory description of the 'emotionally divided self', Denzin's appropriation of Heidegger and Lacan is especially evident. In reference to Heidegger,

Denzin innovatively coins the phrase ‘they-other' as the correlative to the ‘they-self' that becomes constituted as the false core of an alienated identity. In reference to Lacan, Denzin's description expresses an appreciation of such ideas as the intersubjectivity of human identity, the alienating identification with the image and desire of the other, the attribution of harmony and mastery to the other, the assumption of unattainable identity ideals as emanating from the other, and a rivalry with the other that can come to include a range of competitive and destructive emotions (e.g. hatred).

Denzin (1984) goes on to describe the emotionally divided self as alienated from the body--- as ‘disembodied' by virtue of being alienated from the person's "... core, inner feelings [the ‘good-me']" (p.215), wherein "the good feelings that he feels are regarded as illegitimate, stolen, and fraudulent" (p. 215). Instead, the emotionally divided self is dominated by such affects as fear, anger, depression, anxiety, despair, hatred, self-pity, arrogance, shame, and guilt. Following Heidegger's (1927/1962) lead, Denzin highlights the distinct mode of temporality that characterizes these emotions-- i.e. they are preoccupied with the past. Denzin (1984) summarizes how

> emotionally divided selves experience their past over and over again.... Their dominant emotions are in the past.... They offer their pasts to others, as a measure of who they have been. Because they are unable to move into the future, the past is the only resource they have.... The moods, feelings, and emotions they cling to are attached to the actions others have taken toward them in the past. Other people control their emotionality and temporality (p.221).... He feels trapped by the other in a past that would not let him move into a future where he could be himself (p.230).... The negative emotions have a symbiotic quality that allows them to live off the past actions of the negative other who has controlled and destroyed the world of the emotionally divided self (p.231) .... The inner emotions of guilt and shame underpin the entire self-system of the divided self. These are deep, master emotions (p.232).

Denzin's allusion here to shame and guilt as a ‘master affects' for the emotionally divided self reinforce the significance Erikson attributes to these affects in the 2nd and 3rd stages of psychosocial development (i.e. autonomy vs. shame and doubt; initiative vs. guilt). Denzin's description also accentuates the ‘temporal stagnation' that plagues the ‘emotionally divided self', insofar as there is a preoccupation with the past and a limited access to the future. The symbiotic quality of these ‘negative emotions' bears a relation to the phenomenon of identity confusion insofar as there is an enslavement to the desire of others. Denzin's work provides a contemporary example of a productive convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological conceptions of identity, particularly regarding the description of psychopathology.

<u>Other psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological</u>

perspectives: From the phenomenology of the mirror experience to the narrativity of identity

As Denzin's (1984, 1987) work illustrates, the convergence of psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological perspectives regarding identity is by no means limited to the issue of temporality, but includes the body and intersubjectivity as significant concerns. For example, in addition his being indebted to Heidegger, Lacan (1988a) acknowledges the significance of Sartre's (1953) phenomenology of 'the look' for his ideas on the intersubjectivity of the mirror phase-- particularly the sense in which the other's gaze objectifies and alienates the subject. Ver Eecke (1985), though, notes how wherein Sartre sees human alienation as factically following from the bodily character of consciousness, Lacan views it as constituted by the identification with the ideal unity of the other's body-- with Ver Eecke (1975) deeming Lacan's account to be more developmentally accurate than Sartre's insofar as Lacan recognizes the look of the other as essential to the appropriation of human bodiliness during the mirror phase.

Merleau-Ponty's (1964) work also appears sympathetic to Lacan's ontology of bodiliness. Merleau-Ponty takes up Lacan's view on the specular image while grounding his thought in the corporeal precursors and concomitants of the mirror phase. He accepts the affective significance of the mirror phase, emphasizing that the acquisition and influence of the specular image cannot be reduced to cognitive processes, asserting that "if the comprehension of the specular image were solely a matter of cognition, then once the phenomenon was understood its past would be completely reassimilated" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.138). That is, the cognitive perspective-- exemplified for Merleau-Ponty by the work of Wallon (1949) -- assumes that the influence of the specular image disappears once the child understands that it is 'simply' a material reflection of his introceptively experienced body. However, Merleau-Ponty maintains that "... the operations that constitute the... [specular image] involve not only the intelligence proper but, rather, all the individual's relations with others" (p.138), with the specular image therefore becoming generalized as the child grows increasingly aware of himself as seen by others. Merleau-Ponty thus clearly acknowledges that the syncretic relations of the young child to others, in which identity confusion is focal, is by no means entirely surpassed through the development of cognitive abilities and survives into adolescence as well as adulthood.

Romanyshyn (1982, 1987) has articulated a phenomenology of human identity which draws less on Lacan than on Merleau-Ponty (1964, 1968). In spelling out his phenomenology of the mirror experience, Romanyshyn first emphasizes how the image that one encounters in the mirror has a depth that is denied by an explanation focusing on the physics of the mirror-- wherein one's reflection is taken to be located on a glass surface in a virtual space. In contrast to Lacan, Romanyshyn (1987) describes how "the image, the reflection, which one encounters 'in' the mirror lies as far on that side of the mirror as the one who is looking is on this side of the mirror..." (p.300), therefore *deepening* and not necessarily distorting the experience of human identity. With this

deepening, though, the question of "*Who* is the reflection?" nonetheless becomes quite ambiguous and complex. Romanyshyn observes how in looking at the mirror image one can just as easily experience the image as gazing back. He (1982) further notes how if one speaks with the mirror reflection,

> ... it is impossible to say who is listening and who is speaking.... The reflected and the reflection cross each other through the mirror, and there is at the heart of the experience of the mirror reflection a confusion which is as inescapable as it is fundamental (p.9).

This fundamental form of identity confusion, described by Merleau-Ponty (1968) as a *chiasm*, is taken by Romanyshyn to be a positive phenomenon. Romanyshyn (1987) elaborates its structure by noting that the image can deepen experience

> ... [insofar as] the mirror reflection is never merely a double or duplicate of the person on this side of the mirror... Between myself and the reflection, between the person who looks and the figure who is seen, there is a relation of identity and difference (p.301).

Romanyshyn (1987) compares this relation of identity and difference to that which obtains between an actor and the character he portrays, wherein the actor as person both is and is not the character-- a dramaturgical dialectic which allows for a ‘believable fiction'. Romanyshyn situates this dramaturgical metaphor in the narrative order by describing how the reflection transforms the reflected into a ‘figure in a story'. In this view, the empirical person is not who matters for identity conceived psychologically. Rather, what matters for Romanyshyn is the way in which the person's reflected figures are weaved into stories that refigure the person and collectively constitute his identity. In this connection, Romanyshyn (1982) asserts that "... the person I am, the ego, the self which recognizes itself as a coherent self and is so recognized by others, is not the condition of the existence and appearance of the [reflected] figures but their consequence" (p.16). Here Romanyshyn presents a decentered conception of ‘the who' of the human subject in terms of the intentionality of human identity, an intentionality constituted by narrativity and therefore firmly embedded in the symbolic order.

Wilshire's (1982, 1987) phenomenologically oriented work on identity complements that of Romanysyhn in two significant respects. First, he describes the phenomenon of identity confusion in terms of the self-deceptive ‘mimetic engulfment' that may ensue between two human bodies in a mirroring relation wherein there is a confusion and blurring of one's own desires and feelings with those of the other. Wilshire (1987) postulates that "as [mimetic] engulfment increases, the clarity and degree of individuation of individual self decreases" (p.240), with the depth of self-deception likewise deepening. He notes that ‘massive mimetic engulfment' is most common in

relation to culturally and socially prescribed roles since "successful role-playing is essential to the cohesion and survival of the group" (1987, p.245).

The phenomenon of role-playing is the second complementary point between Romanyshyn and Wilshire, as the latter emphasizes how the intentionality of human subjectivity limits the truth of the dramaturgical/theatrical metaphors that have been proposed as all encompassing accounts of human identity (e.g. Brisett & Edgley, 1975; Goffman, 1959; Sarbin, 1977). Wilshire notes how since subjectivity is "... inherently open and ever incompletely objectifiable" (p.226), human identity ultimately "... exceeds the sure grasp of theatre as metaphor (p.234).... one *is* one's ‘roles ' but not *just* one's ‘roles', for one is also an unobjectifiable consciousness of ‘roles' actual and possible... (p.227)." In explicating the limits of the theatrical metaphor for describing human identity, Wilshire implicitly justifies the necessity of narrativity in furthering this description.

The significant relation between narrativity and identity has also been developed by Barham (1985), who accentuates the necessity of narrativity for fostering the sense of continuity essential to human identity. Barham draws on Lacan's account of how in acceding to a preexisting symbolic order the child must discover his place in

> ... a dramatic narrative where his arrival has already been prepared for, and a ‘place' for him to some extent designated, and where answers to questions such as "Who Am I?" or "What should I do?" do indeed turn on an answer to the question "Of which story do I find myself a part?" (p.96).

Barham's view of human identity as a ‘narrative enterprise' recognizes the inevitable contradictions and conflicts encountered by the subject in his effort to determine his place in the multiple narratives in which he finds himself embedded. From this perspective, "problems of personal identity are... understood as problems in the narrative ordering of human lives, as difficulties that arise for the agent in his efforts to make his life intelligible either to himself or others" (Barham, 1985, p.98).

Psychoanalyst Roy Schafer (1983, 1987) has developed a position similar to that espoused by Barham, although the latter's incorporation of Lacan results in a greater emphasis on the role of the Other in the narrative constitution of identity. Schafer (1983) contends that persons' "... identities reside in what can be said in a general way about their actions" (p.103), with him situating such descriptions of action within the domain of narration. Schafer (1987) proposes that actions are most productively described in terms of particular ‘storylines'. He further notes that, regarding identity, the ‘single-self storyline' has been the most dominant narrative in psychology but that the ‘multiple-self storyline' has become increasingly influential. Schafer (1987) continues to favor the ‘monistic narrative', but states that his preferred storyline "... is not that of one self or one mind, but that of one person as agent.... [an agent who should be] viewed as a narrator, that is, as someone who, among other noteworthy actions, narrates selves" (p.338).

The work of Ricoeur (1980, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988) is particularly relevant to

understanding the relation of narrativity and identity, especially insofar as he explicates this relation in terms of temporality. The core presupposition for Ricoeur's (1980) contribution is his taking "... temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" (p.165). For Ricoeur, 'plot' is the point at which human narrativity and temporality intersect. It is through emplotment that human actions and events are established 'in time'. The relation in time of one event or action to another, either past or future, is made possible by the plots under which they are subsumed (Bonner, 1985a). Ricoeur (1980) further maintains that "... the plot does not merely establish human action 'in time', it also establishes it in memory" (p.176). With this, a relation of narrativity to identity is articulated by Ricoeur (1980) when he declares that "action deserves its name when... it aims only at being recollected in stories whose function is to provide an identity to the doer, an identity that is merely a narrative identity" (p.183). Ricoeur (1988) has further elevated the notion of 'narrative identity' in stating that "without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution" (p.246)-- although he adds that "narrative identity... becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it that of a solution" (p.249).

Critiques of the narrative perspective on identity:
The influence of Lacan, Derrida, and deconstruction

Loewenstein (1991) has highlighted the problematic aspects of Ricouer's concept of 'narrative identity', in addition to critiquing the efforts of Schafer (1983, 1987, 1990) and numerous others who have attempted to reformulate psychoanalytic theorizing in terms of narrativity. Informed by Lacan's emphasis on the inherently divided and discontinuous character of subjectivity, Loewenstein (1991) notes how narrative effects a "taming of lived experience" (p.11) in which coherence, continuity, and cohesiveness are imposed upon the otherwise multiple and contradictory identifications that constitute personal identity. Loewenstein accentuates the narrative perspective's affinity with the assumptions of ego psychology, with her highlighting how the ego functions of synthesis and censorship contribute to the construction of coherent life histories in which unity and consistency are especially valued. Loewenstein (1991) concludes by conveying that the curative effect of psychoanalytic praxis is "... accounted for by its very refusal to offer the analysand yet another false sense of unity but rather increase the analysand's capacity to withstand the ambiguity, contradiction, and discontinuity that mark our present experience and our past" (p.26). In accord with Smith's (1991) reconciliation of Lacan and ego psychology, it is only on the basis of a 'nondefensive unity' that lack, loss, and limit can be productively acknowledged.

Loewenstein (1991) and others (Spiro, 1979; Klein, 1989) have noted how the influence of existential-phenomenology on Schafer (1976) in part accounts for the latter's conception of subjectivity as unified through narrativity. Schafer's recent recourse to

narrative theory is particularly ironic insofar as in his earlier work (1976) he had noted how in using such terms

> as ‘the self', self is also a vague affirmation of the unity of personality; like ‘the ego' and ‘an identity', it implies a natural state of personal unity and harmony.... [that] is based far more on hope than on evidence or reasoned argument (p. 117).

Schafer further describes this hope as a ‘fantasy of undivided subjectivity', yet he later (1983) appears to presuppose precisely such an ‘undivided subjectivity' in describing the analysand as "... a single or unitary and fully responsible, even if conflicted and puzzled, agent" (p.247).

M.H. Klein (1989) has critiqued the degree to which Schafer (1976) has overestimated "... the ego's ability to function as an autonomous and self-determined agent" (p.591). Viewing Schafer's ‘action language' as the metapsychological heir to Hartmann's (1939) ‘autonomous ego' construct, Klein emphasizes how this construct can be considered a contradiction in terms insofar as Freud (1923) clearly defined the ego as "a poor creature..." (p.25) subservient to the demands of the id, superego, and the external world-- hardly a definition of autonomy. In addition to Schafer's allegiance with Hartmann, Klein highlights how Schafer's conception of the psychoanalytic subject as an agent has been informed by the work of such existentially oriented thinkers as Binswanger and Sartre. Klein reminds us of Ricouer's (1970, 1974) often repeated position that "... the very point of psychoanalysis, in contrast to a phenomenological-descriptive method of inquiry, is to call into question the ego's presumption of self-certainty which is taken for granted in [immediate consciousness]..." (Klein, 1989, p. 592).

Indeed, a more strictly descriptive phenomenology of identity has been especially challenged by the convergence of psychoanalysis with the literary/philosophic perspective known as ‘deconstruction'-- in relation to which Lacan was a precursor and Derrida (1974, 1978, 1981) has been the most influential contemporary proponent. Sampson (1988) has reviewed the relevance of Derrida's work for psychology's conception of identity. Sampson initially notes how North American psychology has propagated an ideal of the human subject as "... a self-contained individualism" (p.3) assumed to be an autonomous ‘center of awareness' and an ‘integrated whole' (e.g. Erik Erikson). According to Sampson, this ideal has evolved from a Western metaphysical tradition dominated by an ‘identity logic' in which binary oppositions and hierarchies are the key terms. Sampson (1988) sees Derrida as challenging this ‘identity logic' "through his close reading of texts, [in which] he seeks to discover *within* the meaning of any single term its opposite member: e.g. to discover within A the meaning of its presumed opposite, Not-A. This challenges the notions of identity, opposition, and entity because A is both *A* and *not-A*: each term contains both itself and its other" (p.8). Thus, whereas the traditional ‘identity logic' has been one of either/or, Derrida offers a ‘logic of the supplement' characterized by both/and. Sampson summarizes how the either/or ‘identity logic' dictates oppositional

relations between the defined terms or parties. Derrida's ‘logic of the supplement' undermines the contrastive oppositions of the ‘logic of identity' since, according to Sampson (1988),

> .... only by thinking in terms of a logic of both/and can one see that the matter is not one of opposition but only of differences.... The Derridean subject can never be set apart from the multiple others who are its very essence. Thus, the Derridean subject who would seek to oppose and enslave others can only suffer in kind, for those others are elements of the subject's own personhood (p.16).

It is of interest that the either/or ‘identity logic' summarized by Sampson can be read as a defining a significant dimension of Lacan's imaginary order, within which relations are characterized by rivalry and opposition-- a state of affairs clearly reflected in Lacan's appropriation of Hegel's (1949) master-slave dialectic as a constituent of imaginary intersubjectivity. Thus, whereas Derrida alerts us to the problematic philosophical status of the traditional ‘identity logic', Lacan has articulated how this logic participates in the problematic relationships played out within the imaginary order. Further, Lacan's recourse to the more profound influence of the symbolic order in mediating imaginary identity is consistent with Derrida's deconstructive enterprise, as Sampson (1988, p.114) recognizes when he states that "... persons as subjects are constructed in and through a symbolic system [that precedes their birth].... [and] introduces a picture of a subject who is open-ended and indeterminate except as fixed in place by the culturally constituted symbolic order" (p.14). Sampson here alludes to how the symbolic order, which in general is governed by the fluid play of differential relations, also includes an ideological component that seeks to repress the indeterminacy of identity in favor of a fixed and static definition.

Holland's literary/psychoanalytic perspective regarding identity

Literary critic Norman Holland (1986) has published a major psychoanalytically informed book on human identity. In contrast to the deconstructive position summarized above, the two main influences for Holland's understanding of identity are Fenichel (1945) and Lichtenstein (1977). Fenichel's definition of character as "... the ego's habitual modes of adjustment..." (p.457) is taken by Holland to describe the continuity aspect of identity, with him accentuating the ‘habitual' and its relation to the contemporary literary/ psychological usage of the term ‘style'. Holland then incorporates Fenichel's influence within Lichenstein's ‘theme and variations' conception of human identity, stating that

> ... if we imagine a human life as a dialectic between sameness and difference, we can think of the sameness, the continuity of personal style, as a theme; we can think of the changes as variations on that theme (p.35).

Recalling Knowles' (1986) above cited existential critique of Erikson, it is apparent that Holland has limited his understanding of human identity to the fallenness of the ego-- the realm of the everyday, habitual modes of moving through the world. With its emphasis on the sameness constituted by personal style, Holland's model does not afford a significant place for the role of difference, death, and desire in human identity-- a role cogently advanced through Lacan's appropriation of Hegel's (1949) and Heidegger's (1927/1962) respective reflections.

It is worth noting that Holland does attempt to incorporate the contribution of Lacan into his identity model, but unfortunately he misinterprets many of the relevant Lacanian concepts-- particularly regarding the formation of the ego in the mirror phase and the radical difference of this conception from that of Erikson and ego psychology. This is evident when Holland (1986) maintains that "... if translated out of their pixilated jargon, Lacan's ideas sound like familiar and quite sensible concepts from ego psychology ..." (p.359). Holland, however, betrays his sense of Lacan's radical challenge to these 'sensible concepts' when he allows his identity theory could accommodate Lacan's scheme or vice-versa "... only by turning one or the other inside out" (p.363).

In short, Holland's admirably ambitious book on identity ultimately suffers both from the author's attempt to minimize differences among numerous psychoanalytic conceptions of identity and his effort to develop an understanding of identity that is in some way compatible with all of these conceptions. The movement of his book is analogous to that of the ego, ever seeking to establish integration, unity, and harmony. It is therefore not surprising that his understanding of identity is one that is in good part ego centered. As we will see in Chapter 5, such 'ego-centricity' characterizes those contemporary conceptualizations of human identity not informed by the convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological perspectives-- with the perspective of family theory proving to be a valuable voice in consolidating this convergence.

CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY POTPOURRI: ECLECTIC PERSPECTIVES WITH A FOCUS ON THE COGNITIVE, SOCIAL, AND FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY OF IDENTITY

In addition to the continuing research within the ego identity status paradigm founded by Marcia (1966), there has been an burgeoning of major contemporary publications regarding the conceptualization of and research on human identity. These publications have encompassed a variety of perspectives promoted under such headings as the psychosocial (Honess & Yardley, 1987a), the life-span developmental (Honess & Yardley, 1987b), the social psychological (Breakwell, 1986a), the cognitive (Beronsky, 1988), and the integrative (Lapsey & Power, 1988). There is agreement across these works that essential to any conception of identity are the issues of continuity through time and distinctiveness from others, with them differing with respect to how these two issues are conceptualized and which aspects of each are emphasized.

For example, the significance of narrativity for human identity has begun to be recognized in a rudimentary way by numerous contemporary theorists in psychology. Honess and Yardley (1987b) acknowledge the increasing popularity of the narrative framework for identity theory, especially in regard to the reformulation of cognitive Piagetian and social psychological principles on ‘giving accounts of oneself' (e.g. accounts pertaining to such identity issues as continuity through time and distinctiveness from others). However, a limitation is quickly apparent in these applications of a narrative framework to understanding human identity-- they remain bound to the ego-centered and cognitively weighted conceptions that have come to dominate psychological theorizing in general. Having already alluded in Chapter 4 to Merleau-Ponty's (1964) critique of the cognitive orientation, I will now further review the role of cognitive psychology in shaping contemporary identity theory.

The cognitive psychology of identity: The limitations of the information processing model and the resolution provided by eclectic perspectives

The contemporary resurgence of interest in the topic of identity has taken place largely within the context of the so called ‘cognitive revolution' (Lapsey & Power, 1988) and its accompanying fetish for ‘information processing' models of psychological functioning. The information-processing model of thinking has already been the object of a substantial phenomenological critique (Aanstoos 1983a, 1985, 1987). Despite this and other critiques, the information processing model has been extended to domains other than thinking, with human identity being one of its recent theoretical excursions.

The cognitive psychology of identity, however, is by no means entirely without merit. Indeed, Muller (1982b) has documented how numerous cognitive studies support "... Lacan's view of the ego as defensive, distorting, and self-serving" (p.272). Focusing

on the work of Greenwald (1980), Zuckerman (1979), and Keil (1981), Muller cites the common finding that the ego's "... self-serving bias is most in evidence when the domain of oneself is put into question" (p.277), with particular constraints consistently restricting self-knowledge. Employing the cognitive terms of contemporary theorists, Muller defines the ego as the set of constraints "... that structure the domain of knowledge about oneself..." (p.282), a modern day rephrasing of what Lacan (1977, p.306) meant when he described the ego as "... a failure to recognize that is essential to knowing myself...". Muller (1982b, 1985, 1986) also notes how cognitive theorists such as Gelman (1978) and Keil (1981) have acknowledged the implications of this 'ego constraints model' by extending through adult development the egocentrism that Piaget (1954) restricted to children ages 4-7.

Unfortunately, many contemporary cognitive identity theorists have uncritically adopted both Piaget's concepts and information processing models, without sufficiently modifying them. The recent work of Breakwell (1983, 1986a) on 'coping with threatened identities' exemplifies this problematic trend. Breakwell designates the cognitive processes of assimilation/accommodation as most essential to the development of human identity (which Breakwell apparently views as synonymous with 'self-concept'). She conceptualizes the Piaget (1966) inspired pair assimilation-accommodation as part of an information processing system where one's memory of 'social inputs' is the most significant aspect of identity formation. Breakwell (1986a) regards identity as "... both a cognitive system processing information and a cognitive product of that system..." (p.188), with her also accentuating this system's social context. However, the reductionistic bias of this predominantly cognitive conception of identity is revealed by Breakwell (1986a) when she speculates that "... if the processes of identity are pushed to their fundamental roots, it is the biochemistry of memory which will be the target for exploration" (p.187).

Berzonsky's (1988) work illustrates another contemporary attempt to characterize human identity solely in terms of ego-centered cognitive processes, with him viewing the "... structure of identity as a self-generated theory about the self.... [a] self-theory [which] serves the same functions and is composed of the same elements as a scientific theory" (p.244). Berzonsky goes onto describe Marcia's four identity statuses in terms of different 'theorist styles' regarding decision making and problem solving (see Endnote #2 for definitions of the identity statuses). Despite his allusion to the minimal relation of much identity research to Erikson's complex position, though, Berzonsky's work goes on to have even less relation to the spirit of Erikson's thought than those theorists he critiques.

Blasi (1988) is particularly critical of the way in which Erikson's complex characterization of human identity has been simplified and distorted by the cognitive preoccupation of contemporary psychology. Blasi notes how in Marcia's identity status approach, identity is largely reduced "... to the process of making important decisions" (p.227). More generally, Blasi (1983, 1988) is critical of recent efforts to reduce identity processes to such constructs as self-concept, cognitive schemata, and information processing (e.g. Markus & Sentis, 1982). He notes how such efforts reduce the self-as-subject to the self-

as-object, ignoring the intentional relation between the subject and the products of his or her cognitive activities. Blasi, without explicitly acknowledging it, takes a phenomenologically oriented position in emphasizing the significance of the subject's experience of and stance toward objects-- including cognitions regarding identity. He contends, in agreement with Knowles (1986), that Erikson's treatment of human identity "... should be understood from the perspective of the self-as-subject. Identity corresponds to a special mode (or some special modes) of experiencing oneself-as-subject" (Blasi, 1988, p.233; this position regarding Erikson is also taken by Bourne, 1978; Rappaport & Wilson, 1982; Schafer, 1976).

Blasi (1983) also notes how current cognitive approaches take ‘the concept' rather than ‘the judgment' to be the primary aspect of cognition, indeed reducing the later to the former. In these approaches, the concept is characterized as being in unmediated contact with the physical and social world, with the goal of this contact being adaptation. In contrast, the judgment is understood by Blasi as entailing the participation of the subject in questioning and comprehending the world, not merely adapting to it.

On this basis, Blasi (1983) observes how "it is hard to see how a conceptualistic approach can avoid making the self a slave of one's cultural categories and, ultimately, a conformist" (p.200)-- especially insofar as the social sphere is taken to the primary arena in which one can correct ‘individual distortions' regarding one's identity. Here Blasi comes close to Golding (1982) and Roazen's (1976) previously cited critiques. We can recall from Chapter 3 that these authors warned against the dangers of socio-cultural myths and distortions in identity formation. Broughton (1983) reaches a similar conclusion in his review of cognitive-developmental theories of adolescent identity (e.g. Gilligan & Kohlberg, 1978). Broughton notes that the development of formal operational/conventional thought has consistently failed to correlate with or account for the identity confusion and transformations characteristic of adolescence. Broughton (1983) maintains that current cognitive-developmentalism "... accounts only for the adaptation of individuals to currently existing social structures" (p.249). He concludes that even the identity status approach has come to value as ‘growth' "... little more than an increasingly internalized acceptance of conventional adulthood" (p.248).

Guidano (1991) has similarly critiqued the cognitive psychology of identity, which he deems to be epistemologically naive insofar as it remains bound to an empiricist tradition which posits an independent external reality to which the subject's knowledge and self-knowledge must come to correspond. Consistent with the phenomenological tradition, Guidano (1991) focuses on the subject's role in constituting and "... transforming the perceived world rather than merely corresponding to it" (p. 9). He emphasizes the distinction between the primacy of the subject’s immediate, lived experience and the secondary status of the subject's explanations for this experience. Regarding the phenomenology of identity, Guidano (1991) describes a dialectic of experiencing and explaining in which there is

... an endless process of circularity between the immediate experience of oneself

> (the acting and experiencing "I") and the sense of self that emerges as a result of abstractly self-referring the ongoing experience (the observing and evaluating "Me") (p. 7).

Again inadvertently consistent with a phenomenological position, Guidano goes on to note how the experiencing "I" continuously precedes and exceeds the explanation of experience provided by the "Me", thus rendering impossible any complete and final self-understanding or adaptation to an external social order.

Guidano (1991) further refines his cognitive psychology of identity by situating it within a developmental matrix in which the subject's "... knowledge of the world always rests on, and is mediated by, intersubjective experience" (p. 16). Guidano (1987) elsewhere speaks of the "... epistemic character of attachment processes" (p.36). Although he does not explicitly dialogue with any of the psychoanalytic conceptions I have thus far reviewed, Guidano's (1991) 'systems/process-oriented' approach nonetheless leads him to remarkably congruent conclusions, as indicated by this series of statements:

> The 'I' comes to see him- or herself as 'Me' (i.e. like other surrounding persons) only through the consciousness that caregivers have of his or her behavior (p. 19).... the other's image corresponds to a perception of self (p. 20).... the sense of being a unique and specific person is usually attained through an emotional identification with attachment figures (p. 20- 21).

There is a self-evident similarity between these conclusions and those advocated by Lacan, Winnicott, and Kohut. That Guidano formulated his position independent of the psychoanalytic perspective would seem to further affirm the value if not the veracity of conceptualizing identity formation in intersubjective and developmental terms.

The work of Fast (1984) demonstrates the advantages of explicitly dialoguing the psychoanalytic perspective with cognitive psychology in conceptualizing identity formation. Fast proposes a paradigm of identity development that employs Piagetian theory to reformulate Freud's ideas on infantile narcissism, with the transition out of narcissism being seen as congruent with the transition out of egocentrism. Fast (1984) modifies Freud in suggesting that

> ... narcissism is centrally a mode of understanding one's experience rather than an inward focus on the bodily self or the mother-child unit (p. 143) .... The transition out of narcissism, correspondingly, is not seen to be a change in the focus of experience (a newly discovered external world) but a cognitive reorganization (p. 124).

Fast (1984) describes a 'bimodal identity organization' in which there are two main modes of experience-- that which she terms the event-centered and category-centered

identity experience. Event-centered modes of experience characterize the symbiotic/pre-linguistic infant's narcissistic relation to the world, in which the infant maintains the omnipotent illusion that he is the creator of all events and objects, each of which are experienced as an independent and discrete product bearing no relation to other components in the past, present or future. Quite consistent with Winnicott, Cohen (1991) gives the prototypical example of an event-centered experience as the infant's relation to the mother's breast, wherein "... the breast is not perceived as part of the mother (the object), but as something created by the infant.... The same breast, on a second appearance, is perceived as a new event, a new creation" (p. 20).

Event-centered modes of experience are eventually supplemented and transformed by category-centered modes, in which objects are experienced as existing independent of the infant and as interrelated with other objects over time. With the recognition of the object's separateness, there is a corresponding recognition of a ‘stable self' independent of specific objects and continuous across time, cutting across events. In agreement with the developmental findings reviewed in Chapter 2, Fast understands the transition to category centered identity experience to be contemporaneous with the acquisition of language and the emerging capacity for symbolic thought, usually first apparent between ages 18 months to 2 years and bearing a significant relationship to the development of gender identity. Also in line with the psychoanalytic principles previously reviewed, Fast (1984) acknowledges how ‘narcissistic loss reactions' often initially accompany "... the recognition that aspects of existence are independent of the self..." (p. 126)-- with the recognition of sex difference and its accompanying ‘castration anxiety' being framed by Fast as a sharing the structure of other narcissistic loss reactions.

It may be evident that Fast's distinction between event-centeredness and category-centeredness corresponds approximately to Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic orders. This correspondence is confirmed by Fast's (1984) definition of event-centeredness as including "... a sense of self as the center of thought and will..." (p. 112), in contrast to category-centeredness in which there is the sense of "... self subordinated to an objective system of categories" (p. 112). Fast's (1984) cognitive contribution to the psychoanalytic conception of identity is further fleshed out when she notes how "... from a developmental point of view, it is the integration of self across event-centered units that makes children's entry into the complexities of the oedipal period possible" (p. 139). Without this integration, irreconcilable discrepancies will remain between self-representations, such as that between ‘self as boy' and ‘self as girl'.

As I will demonstrate in concluding Chapter 7, Fast's bimodal model of identity development proves to be quite relevant in elucidating the dynamics of adolescent suicide attempts. For the purposes of the present chapter, Fast's work represents a creative solution to the pitfalls of focusing exclusively on the cognitive psychology of identity, as she integrates this perspective with the contributions of psychoanalysis and contemporary developmental psychology. Fast's model, however, does not as explicitly address the ‘social adaptation' critique of the cognitive conception of identity-- a critique which was

summarized in the first half of this section. To further assess the implications of this critique, I will next review works which reflect this common contemporary understanding of the social psychology of identity.

The social psychology of identity: From adaptation to deconstruction

For the most part, at least in the contemporary mainstream literature, social psychological accounts of identity have become appendages to the cognitive constructs described above (Noam, 1988). The preceding critique of the cognitive/information processing perspective therefore dovetails with a critique of those social psychological accounts of identity, wherein 'the self' is considered to be constructed through social interaction and social interaction is understood as exclusively operating according to such adaptation oriented cognitive principles as assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium.

One of the less problematic identity models to emerge out of this marriage of cognitive and social psychology is Buss and Enright's (1987) 'social cognitive developmental identity formation model.' This model emphasizes the adolescent's formal operational abilities and social perspective-taking skills as the most essential aspects of identity development-- the former being relevant to enabling the adolescent to become aware of a fuller range of interpersonal possibilities, the latter designating the related ability to understand oneself and the world from others' viewpoints. Buss and Enright pick up on Erikson's (1968) observation that formal operational abilities can both enhance identity formation as well contribute to identity confusion insofar as the adolescent may be overwhelmed by the broadening range of possible relations and identities he is increasingly able to imagine. They present social perspective-taking as a cognitive strategy helpful in minimizing the identity confusion that may follow from the emergence of formal operations, emphasizing the importance of the adolescent considering both similarities and differences in comparison with others. Although they mistakenly limit the realm of possibility to a function of the ego's cognitive strategies, Buss and Enright correctly recognize the danger of the adolescent focusing solely on the similarities between self and others-- they note how this "... would lead to rigid conformity, not identity..." (p.157).

More problematic in regard to adopting an adaptive viewpoint is Breakwell's (1986a) cognitive conceptualization of identity processes. She situates these processes in a social framework in which she collapses the distinction between personal and social identity by considering personal identity to be "... the relatively permanent residue of each assimilation to and accommodation of a social identity" (p.17). Breakwell posits what she considers to be a "... continual and truly dialectical relationship between personal and social identity" (p.18), with cognitive processes being portrayed as the primary mode of mediation and adaptation in this relationship.

Breakwell is thus quite vulnerable to Golding's (1982) psychoanalytic critique of any effort to reduce the relationship between the individual and society to an adaptive dia-

lectic that emphasizes affirmation while downplaying the place of such unconscious processes as introjection, identification, and repression in the complex tension that characterizes the individual's subordination to the social order. Breakwell's description of cognitive processes as mediating the relation between personal and social identity does not exempt her from Golding's critique of the tendency to treat this relationship as epiphenomenal and unmediated. As summarized above in regard to the work of Blasi (1983, 1988), the experiencing and constituting subject is excluded by the objectification inherent in contemporary conceptions of cognition.

Davidson (1989) speaks to the theoretical pitfalls of portraying adaptation as characterizing the relation between human subjectivity and the social order. Drawing upon Husserl's (1982) transcendental phenomenology, Davidson declares that so long as the world is understood "... as constantly in the process of being constituted, and thus constantly changing, our psychology has no objective world at its disposal to which it might attempt to adapt or adjust its patients" (p.596). Davidson's position by no means denies the significance of social factors for human subjectivity. Rather, he is critical of how the relation between the social and the subjective is most frequently conceived in terms of an adaptive dialectic. As an alternative, Davidson contends that sociocultural influences are aspects of the sedimented layers of pregiven meaning that provide the context for the subject's current constitution of meaning.

As already alluded to at the conclusion of Chapter 3, Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity is also vulnerable to this type of critique. For example, Slugoski and Ginsburg (1988) have noted how Erikson's definition of the ‘psychosocial moratorium'

> ... neglects the objective conditions of a large segment of humankind for whom the envisaging of alternative possible futures would be a futile, self-delusory exercise (p. 37).... the prerogative of achieving an identity-- of ‘self-realization and mutual recognition'-- may be a privilege extended only to Western males living in a surplus economy (p. 38).

These authors attempt to salvage Erikson's theory by reconstruing what is meant by the ‘crisis' and ‘commitment' criteria of identity formation. Instead of understanding these criteria as referring to an accomplishment of the ego's intrapsychic work, Slugoski and Ginsburg (1988) redefine them as "... culturally sanctioned ways of talking about oneself and others (p. 51).... by which individuals imbue their actions with rationality and warrantibility" (p. 37). These authors focus on a mode of discourse called ‘explanatory speech', in which the subject as agent attempts to portray his actions as intelligible and justifiable in light of his society's presently prevailing values and ideals.

Slugoski and Ginsburg (1988) follow Foucault's deconstructive directive "... in treating discourse as relatively autonomous with respect to both conscious and unconscious processes" (p. 44), concluding that there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between an individual's ‘justificatory identity talk' and his more ex-

perience based ‘sense of identity'. This possibility is raised by these authors in relation to the Identity Status research (see chapter 1), which has depended upon a face-to-face interviews to generate results. Slogoski and Ginsburg (1988) note that ".... there is some evidence that ‘crisis' and ‘commitment', as ascertained by the Identity Status Interview, bear little relation to the subjects' ‘actual' conscious or preconscious experiences" (p. 46). The setting and timing of the interview itself is seen to create a justificatory context that requires the subject to produce a particular account of his ‘identity status', with the ‘discourse of identity achievement' being the valued commodity (Slugoski & Ginsburg, 1988).

Slugoski and Ginsburg (1988) conclude by deeming the competence for explanatory/justificatory speech, formed through social interactions, to be the most genuinely social dimension of Erikson's identity theory. Thus once again, discourse and narrativity are proposed as pivotal to a conception of identity not reducible to the ego. It is in this light that Slugoski and Ginsburg (1988) assert that

> the sense of continuity, of unity over time, is not to be explained by such intrapsychic concepts as ego identity.... One's sense of personal continuity is grounded in the self-narratives one generates, reinforced by the stability of one's social network and one's society and its institutions (p. 51).

Unfortunately, the authors do not distinguish which members of one's ‘social network' are the most significant co-authors of "... the self-narratives one generates..." I believe it is safe to assume that these authors would agree that at least until adolescence, and in large part through adolescence, the individual's family system is the most significant social psychological component of identity formation. With this in mind, I will next review select contributions of family theory to the understanding of identity development.

The family and adolescent identity formation: The concept of projective identification as a point of convergence between psychoanalytic, cognitive, and social psychological perspectives

A body of empirical research on psychoanalytically oriented family therapy (Scharff, J.S., 1989) has helped articulate an eclectic conceptual vocabulary with much relevance for understanding identity formation and deformation, particularly as exemplified by adolescent development and the phenomenon of identity confusion (which I will review at the conclusion of this section). A noteworthy integration of family-systems theory and object relational concepts has been sought in the work of R.L. Shapiro (1988, 1989b), who has drawn on Bion's (1961) small-group theory in focusing on the family's ‘unconscious assumptions' regarding the meaning of its members' respective developmental tasks.

In families with an adolescent member, a common complex of problematic unconscious assumptions or fantasies revolve around the equation of separation-

individuation-autonomy with loss and abandonment (Shapiro, R.L., 1988). In a family with this unconscious assumption, particularly on the part of one or both parents, there is an investment in constructing and maintaining an image of the adolescent that counters his strivings for autonomy. R.L. Shapiro (1989a) describes how such images are communicated to the adolescent through ‘delineations', which he defines as "... the view or image one person has of the other person as it is revealed explicitly or implicitly in the behavior [and statements] of the one person with the other person" (p. 46-47). Parental delineations of the adolescent's identity are an essential aspect of even normal development, and are coupled with the adolescent's internalization of parental images through identification processes (Shapiro & Zinner, 1989).

In pathological development, parental delineations tend to serve a defensive function insofar as they are motivated by a desire to induce the adolescent to enact a role inconsistent with his autonomous strivings. Adolescent behaviors indicative of increased individuation evoke anxiety in the vulnerable family and mobilize what Shapiro (1989b) calls ‘defensive delineations', which are characterized by distorted perceptions of and reactions to the adolescent. Defensive delineations have a coercive dimension in that the adolescent is called upon to comply and collude with them in order to mitigate parental anxiety, which itself threatens the adolescent with object loss. As Shapiro and Zinner (1989) note, the adolescent's

> ... internalization of the parent's defensive delineations of him moves the developing... adolescent into a role that is complementary to parental defensive requirements (p. 84).... certain characteristics that have been learned by the adolescent in identifications are also actively imposed and dynamically reinforced in defensive delineations (p. 108).

Defensive delineation is understood by Shapiro and Zinner (1989) to be facilitated by the process of ‘projective identification', a phenomenon originally described by Melanie Klein (1946) and subsequently developed by numerous thinkers in both psychoanalytic and family systems theory. Projective identification has been defined by Zinner (1989) as

> an activity of the ego that modifies perception of the object and, in a reciprocal fashion, alters the image of the self. It occurs as a defense to rid the self of an unwanted or dangerously overvalued part that can then be attacked or glorified when it is located in the object (p. 156)

In the case of defensive delineation, the ‘projective' dimension often entails the parent's enacting with the adolescent "... highly conflicted elements of an object relationship with the parents' own families of origin" (Zinner & Shapiro, 1989, p. 116). The ‘projective' aspect of defensive delineation becomes a ‘projective identification' if the adolescent is successfully induced to comply with and embody or introject the projection-- which can

include specific actions, affects, and thoughts.

From a family-systems perspective, projective identification is of interest due to the way in which it accounts for 1) role allocation in the family, and 2) the transgenerational transmission of unresolved loss issues from past relationships, particularly early attachment traumas in the present parents' families of origin. As Richman (1986) has noted, problematic projective identifications "... serve the purpose of maintaining the continuity of generations, in order to prevent and deny loss and separation" (p. 29). The adolescent attempt to individuate challenges the family's assumption that separation is synonymous with loss, and often evokes a familial regression in which projective identification becomes the vehicle for such lower level defenses as splitting. In splitting, due to difficulties tolerating ambivalence, there is dichotomous demarcation between the "bad" and "good" aspects of self and object representations. R.L. Shapiro (1988) summarizes these points in noting how

> family regression militates against further differentiation of the adolescent from the family. Instead, through projective identification, boundaries between family members become even more blurred, with parents and siblings projecting into the adolescent who is attempting to individuate those feelings of devaluation denied within themselves (p. 9-10).

This account of family regression recalls Fast's (1984) previously reviewed account of the infant's ‘event-centered' cognition, which is characterized by minimal self-object differentiation and the predominance of splitting as a defensive mode. Shapiro and Zinner (1989) make the important point that regressive "... family experience does not integrate with the maturing cognitive capacities of the adolescent's ego..." (p. 107), instead compromising the increased ego autonomy afforded by the development of formal operational thinking. It is in this connection that the process of projective identification influences the cognitive psychology of identity formation, such as when there is a parental defensive delineation of the adolescent as helplessly dependent and incapable of the advanced cognitive modes which may promote autonomy (Shapiro & Zinner, 1989).

During periods of family regression, when the defensive use of projective identification prevails, the cognitive capacities of family members can be compromised to the point where "... there is a rapid reduction in usual ego discriminations.... with increasing confusion over the ownership of personal characteristics that are easily attributed to other family members" (Shapiro, 1988, p. 6). When defensive projective identifications are focused on an adolescent, there is a dedifferentiation between adolescent self and familial others, with a blurring of boundaries that undermines the adolescent's effort to develop a sense of ego identity and autonomy. It is in such a family milieu that the adolescent is vulnerable to the experience of ‘identity confusion', which Erikson had originally defined in psychosocial terms that surprisingly did not include the explicit or sustained familial focus that I have summarized in this section.

At the beginning of Chapter 7, I review Erikson's use of the term ‘identity confusion'. For the time being, I will conclude the present chapter by proposing adolescent suicidality to be a particularly appropriate experiential sphere in which to research the phenomenon of identity confusion and address the range of identity issues reviewed thus far.

The family, identity, and suicidality: The affective significance of conflicts regarding symbiosis and separation

The preceding discussion of projective identification provides an ideal conceptual context for introducing the relation between identity issues and adolescent suicidality. For this purpose I will initially focus on the work of Richman (1986, 1990), who has understood suicidality as a multi-generational, familial phenomenon. Analogous to the conceptual cross-fertilization illustrated by the above reviewed work of Shapiro (1988, 1989) and Zinner (1989), Richman (1986, 1990) combines the contributions of object relational/psychoanalytic theory and family systems theory in a way that promises to productively address the difficulties encountered in the identity literature thus far reviewed.

Richman's ideas draw upon 20 years of researching and treating families with at least one suicidal member, whose ages have ranged from adolescent to geriatric. Richman contends that suicide-prone families are exceptionally sensitive to separation anxiety, which is evoked when particular family members are perceived as assuming roles and engaging in relationships that rupture the already established symbiotic ties with at least one other family member. Richman (1986) observes that the parents of many suicidal individuals have childhood histories characterized by traumatic loss, abandonment, and oral deprivation in relation to their primary attachments. Having inadequately mourned the loss associated with these problematic early attachments, one or both parents will often establish a symbiotic relationship with the spouse and/or a particular child in order to preserve some aspect of the past lost relationship so as to deny it's loss. Such post-mortem preservation is largely accomplished through projective identification, in which internalized aspects of the first attachments are imputed to children and spouses, "... who proceed to introject, re-enact, and in a sense become these first attachments" (Richman, 1986, p. 29).

Given this state of affairs, any steps taken by the symbiotic partner toward autonomy threaten the corresponding family member with experiencing the symbolic repetition of the loss of past primary attachments. Therefore, prohibitions against separation and individuation are conveyed to the symbiotic partner, whose attempts at autonomy will often be demeaned as a betrayal of family loyalties. Richman (1986) has summarized how in symbiotic families "... divergence within the family and a sense of personal identity is denied and forbidden, because a sense of personal identity is viewed as a threat to the whole family system" (p. 19).

Inevitably, though, prohibitions against separation come to conflict with the diversified role requirements of developmental advances-- with adolescence being paradigmatic in this regard, insofar as peer relationships assume priority over parental and sibling bonds. Caught in the conflict between the symbiotic family's prohibition against separation and peer norms supporting individuation, the adolescent may attempt suicide in a desperate effort to resolve what seems likes an impossible impasse. Conversely, should the adolescent take a step towards autonomy for which the corresponding family member is not prepared, a suicide attempt may be precipitated in the latter.

Richman's (1986) core contention is that "the recipient of the separation anxiety of others is the person most likely to become suicidal" (p. 11). Since the symbiotic family is convinced that separation is synonymous with abandonment or even death, the potentially suicidal adolescent is assigned the function of ensuring the family's survival by failing to fully individuate. When attempting to individuate, the adolescent placed in this position will often become the recipient of hostile accusations and rejecting reactions on the part of those family members experiencing separation anxiety-- to the point that the adolescent may feel exclusively responsible for the family's misery and believe that his death is required to restore family harmony. In attempting and possibly completing suicide, the adolescent therefore confronts the symbiotic family with what it is least able to tolerate-- loss and death.

I have reviewed Richman's (1986, 1990) work for the purpose of introducing adolescent suicidality as an ideal experiential domain in which to explicate the range of issues relevant to a fuller understanding of identity formation and deformation. This has been a necessary step in building a bridge to the second half of my dissertation, which will culminate in an empirical study of the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. The justification for my choice of this topic should become increasingly clear in Chapters 6 and 7, in which I move through a series of literature reviews that document the relation between identity and suicidality, refining the themes developed in Chapters 1-5 and concluding with a return to the familial perspective introduced in the previous two sections.

CHAPTER 6
THE RELATION BETWEEN IDENTITY AND SUICIDALITY: EXISTENTIAL AND PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES

The death dimension of identity formation: The homology between the death drive and Being-towards-death

I have until now deferred discussion of perhaps the most significant area of convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological conceptions of human identity-- the death dimension. We can orient ourselves to the relation between death and identity by recalling Chapter 3's section on transitional phenomena as exemplified by the Fort-Da game played by Freud's grandson. The relevant point to repeat is that the differential linguistic play of presence and absence which permeates the Fort-Da game is interpreted by Lacan as primarily reflective of the child's coming to terms with his own absence relative to the desire of the mother rather than simply her absence relative to his desire. What was not accentuated in this previous discussion is the way in which absence comes to be synonymous with death in the experience of the child, with the imagined death of the absent mother confronting the child with the possibility of his own death. Bronfen (1989) has noted how "... the maternal body is the site of death because of the way her disappearance brings notions of our own mortality into play, so that renouncing the unity with the maternal body means acknowledging our lack of wholeness and continuity" (p. 986).

Bronfen's description recalls Chapter 2's discussion of how the imaginary unity of the ego, constructed within the confines of the mother-child symbiosis, is deconstructed through 1) the insistence of those dimensions of bodily existence [the Lacanian 'real'] that have been excluded by the ego's imaginary unity, and through 2) the subject's insertion into the symbolic order, which entails the differentiating function of linguistic signification tearing the unified fabric of the imaginary ego. Boothby (1991) has explicated how for Lacan the deconstruction of the ego is commensurate with Freud's (1920) controversial concept of the 'death drive'. Boothby (1991) argues that

> the death drive may be said to involve the emergence of the real in the disintegration of the imaginary-- a disintegration that is effected by the agency of the symbolic.... From a Lacanian perspective, the Freudian death drive, as a drive toward difference over unity, fragmentation over wholeness, heterogeneity over any principle of sameness, is identifiable with a drive toward signification (p. 136).

Boothby goes on to explicate the affinity between Lacan's conception of the death drive and Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death. We can recall from Chapter 4 the homology between Lacan's account of the alienated ego and Heidegger's explication of

Dasein's inauthentic absorption in falleness and everydayness. Boothby elaborates this homology by noting that just as the truth of the subject is excluded by the imaginary ego for Lacan, Dasein's inauthenticity is understood by Heidegger to limit the openness to Being. Heidegger (1927/1962) speaks to this point in noting that "... in Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which, as potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual'" (p.279). Boothby (1991) picks up on this point and accentuates how

> this 'something still outstanding', like the desire of the Lacanian subject alienated by the imaginary, is retrievable only by a certain encounter with death. For Heidegger, as for Lacan, this transformative 'death' is not to be taken as simply the end-point of life, the physical demise of the organism. The death at issue concerns a structural transformation of the subject's existence (p. 210).

Boothby (1991) further refines this point in noting that "... it would not be wholly inappropriate to speak of the death drive in some more neutral and moderate terms as a self-mutative or self-transformative drive" (p. 219).

The affinity between the issues of identity and death has been recognized and emphasized by numerous psychoanalytically oriented thinkers. Ammon (1975) has written about the relation between disturbed identity development and death anxiety, while Harto-collis (1983) has reflected on the inseparability of time, death, and identity. Lifton (1976, 1979) has made the symbolization of death, immortality, and continuity the core issues in his 'formative paradigm'-- a paradigm which informs his approach to conceptualizing a range of psychological phenomena.

For the most part, though, the significance of death for issues of identity has been passed over by contemporary theorists-- particularly by those not informed by the convergence of existential-phenomenological and psychoanalytic perspectives. Becker's (1973) thesis regarding the denial of death therefore appears to be no less pervasive in the theoretical sphere as in the so called life-world. Given the intrinsic interrelation between death and identity suggested by Heidegger, Lacan, and others, the topic of suicidality promises the opportunity for a further elucidation of this interrelationship.

The relation between identity and suicidality as reflected in philosophically oriented literature

The significance of suicidality for understanding human identity has been consistently affirmed in the philosophical literature-- especially in the existential tradition. Marcel (1961) highlights how "... the fact that suicide is always possible is the essential starting point of any genuine metaphysical thought" (p.26), with him describing suicide as "... an impious and demonic affirmation of the self which amounts to a radical rejection of being" (1960, p.194). Koestenbaum (1971) asserts that "the despair of suicide is not a

terminal condition but a prelude to genuine philosophical self-understanding" (p.46), with him describing suicide as a response to the identity discrepancy experienced when the unattainability of idealized roles is recognized.

Camus (1955) declares "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" (p.3). He goes on to contend that although ‘revolt' is the most suitable identity defining response to the absurdity of human existence constituted by the inevitability of death, suicide is not a logical outcome of revolt insofar as it represents a complete consent to the limitations imposed by human finitude (Kockelmans, 1967). Camus concludes that revolt in the face of ‘the absurd' "... escapes suicide to the extent that it is simultaneously awareness and rejection of death.... The contrary of suicide, in fact, is man condemned to death" (p.40).

Commenting on Ellen West's suicide, Binswanger (1958) states that in her "... resolve [to kill herself], Ellen West did not ‘grow beyond herself', but rather, only in her decision for death did she find herself and choose herself" (p.298). Bakan (1967) speculates that "... persons who are led to commit suicide are persons who experience their very beings as acutely ‘in question"' (p.21). Farber (1961, 1976) concludes that suicide is "... a despairing attempt to affirm the self in a form in which the self has never been and can never be" (1976, p.83). Alvarez (1972) describes suicide as "... simply the most extreme and brutal way of making sure you will not be readily forgotten... [where one hopes to leave] a purified, idealized image of himself... " (p.94). Maris (1982) similarly characterizes suicide as "...an impoverished self-transformation (p.4).... a protest against having to be human (p.13)." Affirming the significance of Heidegger's reflections on death, Hillman (1976) describes suicide as "... the urge for hasty transformation" (p.73) dictated by the person's failure to experience the transformative and individuating power of symbolic death in everyday life (Kirsch, 1969).

Hoeller (1973) also seizes upon the relevance of Heidegger for understanding suicidality. Hoeller initially focuses upon the experience of dread that Heidegger (1927/1962) identified as accompanying the confrontation with death-- with death being existentially defined as "... the possibility of no more possibilities..." (Hoeller, 1973, p.207). In experiencing dread, there is a dissolution of Dasein's absorption in ‘the They' and a renewed openness to those possibilities excluded by the alienating constrictedness of ‘the They'-- in Hoeller's (1973) words, "dread is that which contains the possibility of making one's existence one's own" (p.207).

Hoeller further notes that the person considering suicide is close to, if not in the midst of, an experience of dread through an encounter with death. However, in attempting or completing suicide, this person is viewed by Hoeller as fleeing from dread and from death in its existential sense. In this light Hoeller (1973) claims that

> alone with the horrors of dread, alone with little courage left, the act of suicide is a response to dread, a response that *flees from it*.... suicide, proximally and for the most part, is the fear of death. It is ‘*dread of dread*'... (p. 205).

Hoeller's (1973) position thus frames suicide as a literalization of dread's requirement that the subject "... die from the world of *das Man* ['the they'] in order to live in a world that is truly one's own (p. 206).... suicide... is simply the reality that a person's way of living, his world, is killing him... (p. 207)." Consistent with Hillman's (1976) analysis, for Hoeller suicide reflects the attempt to destructively transform that which could not be productively transformed through a redemptive encounter with dread and symbolic death.

The strength of these more philosophically inclined explications of suicide is that they attempt to understand the phenomenon in terms of broader human issues-- an attempt that is lacking in the general psychological literature on suicide. Lifton (1987) remarks that the suicide literature "... is probably the most confused and confusing psychological literature that we have" (p.221). Lifton (1979) is particularly critical of the tendency to isolate the subject of suicide from general psychological theory. He attempts to counter this tendency by discussing suicide within the context of his ideas on the symbolization of death, immortality, and continuity. Lifton (1979, 1987) describes suicide as a 'quest for a future', a search for a sense of continuity, and an attempt at self-completion. He notes how the impairment of these identity dimensions often revolves around a 'suicide construct' formed early in life, a construct which establishes "... the concrete possibility of killing oneself as an active ingredient of psychological experience" (1987, p. 226).

In line with Lifton's effort to consider suicidality in the context of 'general psychological theory', and in light of the identity issues raised in Chapters 1-5, the balance of this chapter and the entirety of Chapter 7 will be devoted to situating this topic within the more specific domains of identity confusion and adolescent development.

Suicidality as an exemplification of identity confusion: The intrasubjective and intersubjective aggressivity of ego formation in the mirror phase

In addition to the ego's fictional, alienating, and distorting role, Lacan also attributes its formation with the emergence of human aggressivity (Lacan, 1933/1988; 1948/1977). Lacan considered aggressivity to be a tendency correlative with the child's identification with the unified corporeal image. As I highlighted in Chapter 2, the formation of the ego for Lacan occurs at the price of alienating and excluding the heterogeneity of bodily experience and desire. This alienation effects not only a split but a fundamental conflict between the nascent subject and the ego, with aggressive fantasies and actions arising out of the subject's desire to dismantle the imaginary constraints imposed by the ego's ideal of bodily unity. Boothby (1991) explicates this point in noting how for Lacan

> The imaginary form of the ego tends to become the target of a destructive impulse to the extent that it excludes or alienates the subject from the unfolding of its own desire (p.147).... Aggressivity is a drive toward violation of the imaginary form of

> the body that models the ego. It is because aggressivity represents a will to rebellion against the imago that aggressivity is specifically linked in fantasy to violations of bodily integrity (p.39)....

By ‘violations of bodily integrity', Boothy is referring to what Lacan catalogued as the images of bodily fragmentation often found in dreams, fantasies, and paintings-- i.e. "... images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, [and] bursting open of the body..." (Lacan, 1948/1977, p. 11). These images of bodily fragmentation retroactively depict the chaotic bodily experience that preceded the infant's identification with the mirror image (Gallop, 1885). More significantly, these images of the body ‘in bits and pieces' express for Lacan a primordial self-destructiveness that is consonant with Freud's (1920) much misunderstood and maligned concept of the death drive-- which in Lacan's imaginary order strives to deconstruct the alienating form of the ego so that desire may be liberated.

Boothby's rendering of these Lacanian ideas is especially significant insofar as it claims to correct a characterization commonly offered by other authors. This alternative interpretation defines aggressivity as a defense against a threat to the ideal unity of the ego-- a defense intended to preserve this ideal unity through aggressive fantasies or actions, which are often directed toward the other who is deemed as embodying the threat (Muller, 1986, 1989; Ver Eecke, 1983). Muller (1989) describes how "... when experiencing an attack on its cohesion or preeminence, the ego mobilizes fantasies of the other's fragmented body in its counterattack" (p.368). This version of Lacan's position is consistent with Kohut's focus on the self's motivation to maintain cohesion and defend against fragmentation, with aggression being "... always motivated by an injury to the self" (Kohut, 1984, p.116) and expressed in the form of ‘narcissistic rage' (Kohut, 1972).

This more common Lacanian interpretation appears to build on the fact that the ego is itself formed to defend against the anxiety of bodily fragmentation (Bonner, 1991). This mode of egoic defense might be termed ‘secondary aggressivity', which is engendered as a defense against the anxiety that signifies an already existing element of ego disintegration-- that is, there is prior intrasubjective aggressivity at work (Weber, 1991). Boothy notes how to give priority to what I have termed ‘secondary aggressivity' runs contrary to Lacan on two counts: 1) it frames aggressivity as primarily a <u>defense</u> <u>of</u> rather than a <u>rebellion</u> <u>against</u> the ego's ideal unity, and 2) it portrays aggressivity as primarily directed toward an other rather than toward oneself. Having already highlighted the meaning of the first point, we can now focus on the second point with an eye toward explicating its relevance for the study of suicidality.

As I noted in Chapter 2, the alienation inaugurated by the mirror phase does not initially pertain to the relationship between ego and other, but rather between the inchoate subject and its newly formed ego. With self-other differentiation being minimal, the ego's relation to the other is one in which there is parity if not confusion between the two terms. From Lacan's perspective, the identification with the mirror image sets up an equivalence

between the ego and any other "... who incarnates the ideal of the mirror-image with which the child previously identified himself" (Jalbert, 1983, p.280). To use De Waelhen's (1978) phrase, an ‘imaginary couple' is constituted wherein there can be confusion and reversibility between the members of the couple. Lacan (1988a) cleverly refers to this reversibility as reflecting ‘the see-saw of desire', thus implying that ‘identity confusion' is a phenomenon founded in the mirror phase insofar as the ego and the other are initially indistinguishable in light of the infant's identification with the mirror image. This early form of identity confusion is illustrated by the phenomenon of transitivism among children up through age 2 1/2. Transitivistic behavior is exemplified by how "the child who strikes another says he has been struck; the child who sees another fall cries" (Lacan, 1948/1977, p. 19). This behavior, Lacan maintains, points to a fundamental ambivalence and ambiguity wherein there is a confusion and reversibility between such roles as aggressor and victim, actor and spectator, etc.

The transitivistic parity that characterizes the imaginary relation between ego and other is one of Lacan's reference points for explicating Freud's (1930) contention that all aggressiveness directed toward others is an expression of a primarily self-destructive impulse-- what he elsewhere referred to as ‘primary masochism' (Freud, 1924). Boothby (1991) captures this dynamic in highlighting how

> The thrust of Freud's idea [of the death drive] was to conceive of a force of *self*-destructiveness, a primordial aggressivity *toward oneself*, from which aggressivity toward others is ultimately derived (p. 11).... For the infant of the mirror stage whose identity is bound up in a transitivistic parity, the fantasized dismemberment of another individual provides the unconscious equivalent of self-mutilation.... Along the axis of reflection in the imaginary double, murder and suicide amount to the same thing (p.41).

The essential point for the purposes of this study is that Lacan portrays the aggressivity accompanying the mirror phase alienation as a constituent of an identity structure which may later express itself in the form of suicidality (Alapack, 1986; Lacan 1938/1988; Lemaire, 1977; Ragland-Sullivan, 1986). Lacan (1988a) alludes to this point when he states that "... the most fundamental structure of the human being on the imaginary plane [is] to destroy the person who is the site of alienation" (p.172). As we have seen, the original site of alienation for Lacan is at the juncture of the real and the imaginary orders-- i.e. between the ego's ideal unity and the forces of bodily being that it excludes. From this perspective, suicide would arise out of the subject's desire to destroy the ego structure within which he is imprisoned and which has impeded access to the fuller realization of his desire-- an imprisonment that will often be experienced as enforced by those others with whom the subject has identified and on whom the subject has depended for assistance in becoming liberated.

In a particularly dramatic way, suicidality epitomizes the aggressivity that Lacan

(1948/1977) articulated as an essential feature of the mirror phase structure. In relating the mirror phase structure to suicidality, Lacan cites the work of Otto Rank (1925/1971) on 'the double'. Lacan (1953b) takes the imaginary *couple* to be a structure exemplifying what in literature and mythology is commonly called *the double*-- with him emphasizing how the double is an omen for death (Muller and Richardson, 1982). Lacan (1953b) refers to Rank (1925/1971) as concretely illustrating the relation of the mirror double and death to suicide. Rank makes a series of literary references which illustrate how the narcissistic infatuation with the mirror image often alternates with a sense of self-hatred and a fear of death or bodily fragmentation. He further notes how the subject's self-hatred can be disowned and experienced as truly other-- a 'phantom double'-- when there is sufficient threat to the subject's narcissism. In this view, any threat that evokes the ego's anxiety regarding death and bodily fragmentation may summon the experience of a 'phantom double' who conspires in the destruction of the ego through suicide. The 'phantom double' may also take the form of an actual other who embodies the executioner from whom the subject must escape.

The phenomenon of the 'phantom double', portrayed by Rank as intrinsic to suicide, is taken by Lacan (1953b) to exemplify how transitivism, distortion, and aggressivity can destructively determine the ego's relation to its mirror image and others who are cast in this image. For example, in imagining an analysand encountering in his analyst "... an exact replica of himself..." (Lacan, 1948/1977, p.15), Lacan speculates that intolerable aggressive tension and anxiety would be evoked. Boothby (1991, p.39) cites this scene has exemplifying the fact that "... aggressivity... is provoked not by a threat to the unity of the ego but by the alienating structure of the ego itself..." Presumably, if it was more the case that aggressivity is a defense against a threat to the ego's ideal unity, then a merely visual encounter with one's exact replica would not evoke an aggressive response insofar as its appearance would seem to support or bolster the ideal unity.

Borch-Jacobsen (1991) also describes these dynamics in noting how in 'the double' "what had been one's own living identity (or identification) becomes, once represented, an expropriated, deadly resemblance-- a frozen mirror, a cold statue" (p. 45). In Boothby and Lacan's rendition, the encounter with one's exact replica evokes the desire to destroy the deadly, alienating unity represented by the double. This scene appears to depict Lacan's (1948/1977, p.22) description of ego formation as structuring "... the subject as a rival with himself..." M'Uzan (1978) touches upon the converse of this impasse when he cites the saying 'He who meets his double must die' in articulating the interrelation of the mirror image, death, and the problem of identity.

Supplementary psychoanalytic perspectives on suicidality:
The revision of Freud's formulations in the context of Lacan

Other psychoanalytic thinkers, without awareness of Lacan's work, have made similar points regarding the relation between identity disturbances and suicidality. Asch's (1980) description of 'the hidden executioner' in suicide expresses a similar dynamic as that of Rank's 'phantom double', with Adams (1990) summarizing how for Asch there is a specific fantasy in which "... the suicidal individual responds to object loss by trying to enlist the significant other to act as an actual or imagined persecutor to whom he can succumb as a passive victim" (p. 79). Maltsberger & Bluie (1980) point to how the suicidal person sometimes experiences "... himself to be under constant contemptuous scrutiny of an alien yet inner presence..." (p.63)-- which Maltsberger (1986) later describes as a "... subjective sense of inner splitting in the experience of self-contempt" (p.82). Similarly, Meissner (1978, 1986) has noted the parallel between the suicidal and paranoid processes, wherein the person experiences a 'persecutory presence' as threatening harm. Not surprisingly, Lacan (1949/1977; 1988b) often wrote of the paranoic structure of the ego.

The relation between identity confusion and suicidality has also been addressed in terms of such object-relations developmental concepts as symbiosis and separation-individuation (Mahler, 1967; Litman & Tabachnick, 1968; Esman 1980). The fusion/confusion of self and other that constitutes symbiosis seems to be another way to describe narcissistic identification and the relation to the mirror image. Each member of a symbiotic relationship experiences the other as indispensable for its survival and vice-versa. This fact facilitates suicidality insofar as separations from the symbiotic partner are experienced as a loss and indeed death of all or part of oneself (Richman, 1978, 1986).

However, Smith and Eyman (1988) question the close relationship posited between symbiosis and suicidality, concluding that

> ... the level of self-object differentiation [apparently] has no bearing on whether a person is likely to make a serious attempt at suicide.... what seems most important... are the quality of self-other representations and the coping and defensive style with which that person handles aggressive ideas. Demanding too much of oneself and expecting unreasonable sensitivity and nurturance from others leaves a person prone to disillusionment regarding identity and the potential for nurturance from the environment.... (p. 190-91).

This finding is at odds with much of the literature on the issue of self-object differentiation, and may be a function of being based primarily on the results of projective tests, particularly the Rorschach. Maltsberger (1986) affirms the alternative position in stating that "observation of suicidal patients repeatedly has shown that gross disturbances in the capacity to discern where the self leaves off and other people begin (self-object differentiation) are commonplace" (p. 34). Nonetheless, Smith and Eyman's (1988)

perspective does affirm the role that exalted identity ideals play in setting the stage for the types of traumatic disillusionments that can precipitate suicide attempts.

What relation does any of this bear, though, to Freud's highly influential formulations regarding the psychodynamics of suicide? Freud (1917, 1921, 1923) conceptualized suicide as an aspect of the ego's narcissistic identification with lost or abandoning objects wherein the ego is judged as if it were the lost object. Consonant with Lacan, Freud (1914) emphasized how in narcissistic identification the object is chosen on the basis of its similarity to the ego, with both love and hatred being experienced depending upon the extent to which the object conforms to the ego. When the object is lost or abandons the ego, the ego is set up as the object of the hateful feelings harbored toward the lost or abandoning object (Bonner, 1987a). In this way, the lost object is not fully surrendered or mourned. In light of these considerations, Freud (1917) declares that "... the ego can kill itself only if... it is able to direct against itself the hostility ... which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world" (p.252).

The relation of separation and loss to suicidality, initially articulated by Freud (1917), has been supported by a plethora of research (e.g. Adams, 1990; Bowlby, 1973; Margolin & Teicher, 1968; Richman, 1986). Consistent with Freud's speculations, formal research has revealed the most significant aspect of this relation to be the suicidal person's failure to mourn the loss of unobtainable objects, relationships, and ideals (Dorpat, 1973; Meisner, 1986; Richman, 1986). While the normal mourning process allows the person to relinquish the lost object and experience further individuation (Freud, 1917: Sandler & Jaffe, 1965), the suicidal person often seeks a reunion with the lost object through death (Litman, 1964; Dorpat, 1973). Adams (1990) qualifies these findings when he notes that "... while parental loss is significantly associated with suicidal behavior, it is at best a crude indicator of more general and pervasive inadequacies and discontinuities in the childhood environment" (p. 69).

Winnicott's (1960) concept of the ‘false self' is another contribution of the object relations perspective to understanding suicidality in the context of identity issues. When the false self has reached a state of extreme compliance with the demands of the world, and can no longer create conditions for the safe expression of the ‘true self', Winnicott (1960, 1971) views it as orchestrating suicide as a defense against the further exploitation and eventual annihilation of the ‘true self' (Harwood, 1987). Meissner (1986) adds that in suicidal people the false self has been formed around a central victim introject which motivates suicide with the hope that "the death of the false self carries with it... a rebirth of what is more authentic and creative in the subject's own existence" (p.325).

Drawing on the perspective of self psychology, Reiser (1986) challenges the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of suicide as the product of ambivalent identifications with lost objects accompanied by remorse and guilt. Reiser claims that although some suicides can accurately be viewed from this perspective, many others are due to "... rapid fragmentation or sudden disintegration [of an impaired nuclear self] in the face of disrupted narcissistic homeostasis" (p.229), with shame and mortification as the

accompanying affects. Reiser proceeds to distinguish five types of ‘nuclear selves' along a continuum of self-selfobject relationships moving from earlier to later developmental arrests-- with each type of ‘nuclear self' being susceptible to differing modes of suicidal disintegration.

The preceding variations on Freud's original formulations regarding suicidality do not explicitly critique the truth of his declaration that "... the ego can kill itself only if... it is able to direct against itself the hostility ... which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world" (Freud, 1917, p.252). It would appear, however, that this statement requires some qualification in light of Lacan's emphasis on the primary masochism that characterizes the subject's relation to the ego. That is, we would be required to assume that the ego's ‘original reaction' of hostility toward objects is an expression of the more fundamental hostility that the ego harbors toward itself owing to its alienating effects. The common understanding that the suicidal act represents ‘anger turned inward' would be therefore be restated as ‘anger returned inward'. Boothby (1991) again helps keep this important distinction in focus:

> If the imaginary formation of the ego somehow generates a primordial frustration, it is not owing to any obstacle or inhibition the ego experiences from outside objects or persons. It is the ego itself that is frustrating.... narcissistic aggressivity is first of all a response not to a social but to an *internal* conflict. Lacan conceives of aggressivity, as Freud did, in terms of an original aggressivity toward oneself (p.45).

The Lacanian position is further clarified by including the role of the superego in suicidal psychodynamics. This is consistent with Freud (1923), who maintained his basic position by describing suicide as a function of the relationship between a sadistic superego and a masochistic ego (Litman, 1967; Meisner, 1986). As we can recall from Chapter 2, the superego's formation during the Oedipal complex functions to challenge and modify the ego's defensive posture relative to the surplus of desire animating the infantile body but excluded by the ego's ideal unity. Contrary to the common psycho-analytic understanding, the superego is seen by Lacan as functioning in the service of desire while the ego is portrayed as antagonistic to desire. From this perspective, the often observed hostility of the superego is directed at the ego rather than the id, with the superego's hostility increasing in proportion to the ego's renunciation of desire. Boothby (1991) summarizes these points in noting that

> Lacan finds the motive for the genesis of the superego in the force of the real excluded by the imaginary organization of identity.... The task performed by the superego is that of a measured disintegration of the narcissistic ego, the purpose of which is to open up the ego's basic structure toward a more complex and sophisticated configuration capable of sustaining a wider range of instinctual

expression (p.171).

To appreciate the relevance of this discussion for suicidality, we must include the distinction Boothby (1991) makes between the superego's activity and the aggressivity of the imaginary, which both endeavor to deconstruct the ego's unity in its alienating manifestations and are understood as reflective of the death drive's operation. Boothby articulates the distinction as follows:

> Narcissistic aggressivity is enacted on the level of literal violation of the body's imaginary integrity.... what emerges on the level of the imaginary as literal violence is accomplished in the function of the superego by means of a symbolically mediated transformation of identity. The graduation of the subject from the imaginary plane to that of the symbolic might thus be called a sublimation of the death drive. (p.176-77).

Given Boothby's distinction, it appears apparent that from a Lacanian perspective a suicide attempt reflects 1) the subject's effort to destroy if not transform a constricted imaginary ego identity, and 2) that this effort is enacted in a literalized fashion insofar as the actual body becomes targeted for destruction. The suicide attempt would then be considered as symptomatic of a failure to sufficiently accede to the level of the symbolic order and achieve a sublimation that would permit a less literalized deconstruction of the ego. However, even such a sublimation by no means represents an either/or, once and for all state of affairs-- as Boothby (1991) cautions in noting that

> the installation of the symbolic function enables the transcendence of narcissistic aggressivity but is also liable to various degrees of impairment.... [which] are ever-present possibilities for the subject insofar as the narcissistic formation retains a function in the psychic process if only as the pole of regressions (p.177).

Of the psychoanalytic perspectives I have reviewed regarding the relation of identity and suicidality, Lacan's appears as the most compatible with an existential-phenomenological perspective due to his emphasis on the significance of temporality, death, and desire. Shifting from the intrasubjective dynamics described in this section to the intersubjective perspective developed in Chapters 2-3, Schneiderman (1983) makes some intriguing remarks regarding Lacan's conception of suicide as it is informed by the relation Lacan (1988b) posits between death and desire. Whereas Lacan's conception of the imaginary speaks to the death of desire through the alienation engendered by the mirror image (Thompson, 1985), his conception of the symbolic speaks to the desire for death engendered by the appropriation of language (Schneiderman, 1983). Schneiderman (1983) illustrates how desire is desire for death by describing how, in the desire for food and sex,

> what is important about desire in either case is how to... protract it in time... in order, strangely enough, to make the satisfaction satisfying. The experience of satisfaction is equivalent... to dying (p.74).... If, as Lacan put it, one ought to sustain desire and not seek an object that will gratify it and thereby erase it, the desire to die is best enacted when death is kept at a distance (p.23).

Given this understanding of desire as the desire for death, Schneiderman (1983) asserts on behalf of Lacan that "... the desire to die does not translate into suicide.... [and that] suicide does not represent a desire for death, but rather a love of death" (p.24-25). For Lacan, love is situated at the level of demand rather than desire, and hence is far more impatient. Following this line of thought, Schneiderman goes on to make a remarkably cogent statement regarding the interrelation of suicide, death, desire, and love, with implications regarding adolescent identity:

> People who commit suicide are lovers of death, and suicide is an act of love. There are many reasons behind suicide, but one of the most common is the failure of love, its betrayal. Not so much the fact that the one person who was beloved has been lost, but the idea that love itself may have gone also. That there is no more love in the world-- this leads to suicide as a last, desperate act of love, an act that may succeed where love has failed between people. He or she may not requite my love, but there is still hope that death loves me, that death will receive my sacrifice of myself. **These acts are often committed by the young, by adolescents, by people for whom love has a far greater meaning than for those who have experienced more of life. And these acts represent a radical refusal to set forth on the path of desire, an inability to tolerate frustration and loss, an inability to defer the encounter with death** (my emphasis, p.24; see endnote # 23 for further reflections by Schneiderman on this issue).

Schneiderman's reference to adolescent suicide at the conclusion of this quote bears directly on my dissertation project. As he indicates, adolescent suicidality presents an extremely fertile area of inquiry in which to understand the interrelation of identity and love, desire and death. He reminds us that, contrary to the traditional interpretation of Freud's position, the suicidal individual is most distressed by his status as a lost subject rather than with the lost object per se. For the adolescent in the midst of separation struggles, the experience of oneself as absent to the other's desire evokes the personified figure of death as that for whom one may be permanently lovable.

I will now further explicate the richness of adolescent experience in understanding the phenomenon of identity confusion, with an eye toward specifying adolescent suicidality as a particularly evocative experiential sphere in which to research this phenomenon. To accomplish this goal, the next chapter will open by reviewing Erikson's

and others' use of the term ‘identity confusion', with Erikson's definition emerging as the most relevant for orienting the study of adolescent suicidality.

CHAPTER 7

THE RELATION BETWEEN ADOLESCENT IDENTITY AND SUICIDALITY: TOWARD A STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF IDENTITY CONFUSION

Identity crisis vs. identity confusion/diffusion: Toward a clarification of terminology and phenomenology

Erikson (1968) presents the identity crisis as a normative aspect of adolescent development, one constituted in part by the tension of 'identity vs. identity confusion'. While much has been made of the 'identity' dimension of this tension, the more problematic pole of 'identity confusion' has become somewhat obscured. Erikson's descriptively rich discussions of identity confusion center around those young people (age 16-24) who "... can neither make use of the institutionalized moratorium provided by their society, nor create and maintain for themselves a unique moratorium all of their own" (Erikson, 1959/1980, p.131). Such young people are described by Erikson as suffering from 'acute identity confusion', wherein there is an inability to struggle with making those commitments formative for adult identity-- a struggle which is constitutive of the identity crisis and psychosocial moratorium (as reviewed in Chapter 1).

Insofar as the 'identity confused' cannot take advantage of this moratorium, they are not yet experiencing what Erikson understands as the 'identity crisis.' Although this distinction between 'identity confusion' and 'identity crisis' is implicit in Erikson's work, many interpreters (e.g Rubins, 1968; Paranjpe, 1975) have obscured it by taking 'identity crisis' to describe a more severe form or instance of 'identity confusion'. Arnstein's (1979) effort to clarify the misleading usage of the term 'identity crisis' similarly fails to distinguish its meaning from that of 'identity confusion.' As I noted in Chapters 1-5, identity confusion has been increasingly conceptualized as a phenomenon that is pre-Oedipal in origin and therefore antedates the more general and normative adolescent developmental phase captured by the rubric 'identity crisis' (Akhtar, 1984; Kernberg, 1980).

Erikson's preference for the phrase 'identity confusion' has also been overlooked by numerous interpreters, who continue to employ Erikson's earlier phrase 'identity diffusion'. Erikson (1959/1980, 1968) abandoned the phrase 'identity diffusion' due to its inadequately conveying the experiential aspects of the phenomenon-- particularly in regard to there being "... a split of self-images... a loss of centrality, a sense of dispersion and confusion, and a fear of dissolution" (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 183). In rejecting the phrase 'identity diffusion' and replacing it with 'identity confusion', Erikson (1968) notes how "... the commonest meaning of the term diffusion is a strictly spatial one: a centrifugal dispersion of elements from a center of origin.... In this use of the term, nothing disorderly or confused is implied" (p. 212), with the 'center' itself not necessarily being displaced. This rationale reflects Erikson's preference for phrases that are more expressive of what

phenomenologists have referred to as ‘lived experience'. Erikson concludes that "... confusion is obviously the better word for both the subjective and the objective aspects of the state to be described..." (Erikson, 1968, p. 212), and he proposes a continuum of intensity from ‘mild' confusion to what he has variously termed ‘aggravated', ‘malignant', ‘severe', and ‘acute' identity confusion.

Despite Erikson's dissatisfaction with the term ‘diffusion', what was the ‘phenomenon of identity confusion' is now predominantly called the ‘syndrome of identity diffusion' (Akhtar, 1988, 1992; Kernberg, 1980). The ‘identity status approach' has likewise opted for the term ‘identity diffusion' to designate the most problematic of its four statuses (Marcia, 1980; see endnote #2). With this terminological shift the emphasis has moved from Erikson's descriptive orientation to a more diagnostically preoccupied approach in which the presence of this ‘pathology of identity' is most valued in terms of its relation to the borderline, narcissistic, and schizoid personality disorders (Akhtar, 1992; Kernberg, 1980)-- with the borderline personality structure believed by many to be most consistently correlated with identity diffusion in adolescents and adults. However, based on her longitudinal research, Josselson (1987b) concludes that "identity diffusion... cannot [exclusively] be considered a preborderline syndrome, although such people are at some risk" (p. 257).

In keeping with the predominant usage in identity literature, I will use the phrase ‘identity diffusion' in referring to the work of those who prefer this expression-- despite the fact that the phrase ‘identity confusion' is more descriptively faithful in referring to this phenomenon. As I have already done throughout the dissertation, I will use the phrase ‘identity confusion' when discussing Erikson's work and those who do not specify a preferred usage Although for the purpose of semantic consistency the two phrases can be considered interchangeable, it is clear that they entail significantly different presuppositions and implications.

Akhtar (1984, 1992) acknowledges that the descriptive dimension of identity diffusion is underdeveloped in the literature compared to the developmental, dynamic, and diagnostic dimensions. Working within an object relations perspective, Akhtar attempts to address this deficit by describing seven ‘clinical features' of identity diffusion: 1) contradictory character traits, 2) temporal discontinuity in the self, 3) subtle body image disturbance, 4) lack of authenticity, 5) feelings of emptiness, 6) gender dysphoria, and 7) inordinate ethnic and moral relativism. Also object relational in approach, Grinberg and Grinberg (1974) describe three ‘integration links' as constituting identity formation and deformation: the spatial (bodily), temporal, and social-- with these authors attempting to articulate the structural interrelation of these three integration links. Finally, Josselson (1987b) notes how for the identity diffuse individual, there has been an inadequate "... internalization of objects... inner experiences do not fit together with other inner experiences, and self-representations can fluctuate wildly" (p. 253).

Despite these recent efforts to describe the constituents of identity confusion, Erikson's account remains the most phenomenologically refined. He is not content to

‘merely describe' (the phenomenal/experiential level), but also attempts to explicate the interrelation of the experiential constituents he describes (the phenomenological/structural level), while contextualizing his description within a developmental framework. Erikson's nascent phenomenology of identity confusion is also valuable in that it cuts across diagnostic categories and suggests adolescent suicidality as a concrete experiential domain in which to research identity confusion without being restricted by diagnostic concerns.

Identity confusion, negative identity, and the issue of recognition:
The relevance of Erikson's theory for understanding adolescent suicidality

Erikson emphasizes that although those adolescents suffering from acute identity confusion may be seen as diagnostically diverse, he prefers to focus on those features which are shared by the group. It is in reviewing some common constituents of identity confusion that I will shift to relating Erikson's reflections on adolescent identity issues to suicidality. As I initially noted in my Introduction, Erikson (1959/1980) summarizes the experiential constituents of acute identity confusion when he observes how it consists of

> ... a painfully heightened sense of isolation; a disintegration of the sense of inner continuity and sameness; a sense of over-all ashamedness; an inability to derive a sense of accomplishment from any kind of activity; a feeling that life is happening to the individual rather than being lived by his initiative; a radically shortened time perspective; and finally, a basic mistrust, which leaves it to the world, to society, and indeed to psychiatry to prove that the patient does exist in a psychosocial sense, i.e., can count on an invitation to become himself (p.135-36).

This is obviously a long list of significant themes. In keeping with my emphasis thus far, I will focus in this section on the temporal and interpersonal aspects that Erikson takes to characterize the experience of the identity confused.

In regard to temporality, Erikson (1968) describes how there is a ‘temporal confusion' in the identity confused individual. He notes how this temporal confusion can engender a wish for death, although he goes onto note that this death wish is usually not a suicidal one. In fact, he comments on how the belief that one's life could be ended at the conclusion of adolescence can help define a psychosocial moratorium upon which hope for a new beginning can be based. However, Erikson (1965b) warns that if the temporally confused adolescent

> ... gradually stops extending experimental feelers toward the future... his moratorium of illness becomes an end in itself and thus ceases to be a moratorium.... It is for this reason that death and suicide can at this time be a spurious preoccupation... for death would conclude the life history before it would join others

> in inexorable commitment (p.18).

It is thus Erikson's (1968) position that the identity confused individual's "... ‘wish to die' is a really suicidal wish only in those rare cases where ‘to be a suicide' becomes an inescapable identity choice in itself" (p.170). More recently, Erikson (1989) has affirmed this position by stating that "suicidal thoughts happen all the more easily in adolescence when the psychosocial identity is not yet firm.... (p. xiii)", with him referring to suicide as an ‘identity decision'-- "... even if it is an identity of one who brought about his own death" (p. xii). Similarly, Diekstra (1987a) presents a case study in which he describes the allure for a disturbed adolescent of "... taking on a ‘suicide-identity'..." (p. 49).

These points bring us again to the intersection of identity issues and suicidality, where the ego's reaching a dead end in the quest for identity necessitates suicide-- or, at least its attempt-- as an avenue to at last, and definitively, ‘being recognized' as ‘being somebody.' Suicidologist Erwin Shneidman (1985) is thinking along Eriksonian lines when he states how

> suicide is an effort to do *something*, to do something effective, impactful, noteworthy, special. A suicide would not be a suicide if it were unknown as a suicide. Being known as a suicide is an integral part of the act (p.237).

Here Shneidman addresses the desperate demand for <u>recognition</u> that informs the ‘inescapable identity choice' that Erikson articulates as constitutive of being a suicide.

In regard to the issue of recognition and its relation to identity confusion, it is of interest that Erikson includes suicide in the category of what he calls ‘negative identity'. For the most part, this category consists of those young people who express a sense of identity confusion by establishing "... an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous, and yet also as most real" (Erikson, 1959/1980, p.141). In speaking of ‘negative identity choices', Erikson has in mind such roles as being a juvenile delinquency or a drug addict.

The similarity of suicide as a negative identity choice to other such choices it is a <u>total</u> choice that provides relief from identity confusion. Erikson observes how the <u>total</u> identification with the least desirable roles is easier than the struggle to partly attain more limited or limiting roles and identities. It is in this light that he makes perhaps his most compelling statement regarding the status of suicide as a ‘negative identity choice'. Erikson (1968a) asserts that "... many a sick or desperate late adolescent, if faced with continuing conflict [and identity confusion], **would rather be nobody or somebody totally bad or, indeed, dead-- and this by free choice-- than be not-quite-somebody**" (p.176, my emphasis).

Numerous other authors have commented on the relation between identity confusion, negative identity, and adolescent suicidality. Rosenkrantz (1978) relates Erikson's

concept of negative identity to Sabbath's (1969) idea of the suicidal adolescent as the ‘expendable child', wherein parents have conveyed the attitude that their child is a burden and should not have been born (Curran, 1987). Meissner (1986) adds that the suicidal adolescent's negative identity can be understood as organized around a central victim-introject which informs his sense of self and motivates suicidality. Farberow (1970) defines negative identity as involving the person embracing

> ... the opposite of the ego-ideals urged upon him by superiors and supporters.... [due to feeling] the positive ideals are denied him.... When the individual despairs of his ability to contain the negative elements, he surrenders completely and the negative identity becomes the dominant one (p.53).

Somewhat in contrast to Erikson's position, Farberow deems to development of a negative identity to be an alternative to suicide rather than defining suicide as an extreme example of a ‘negative identity choice'. Indeed, describing several cases of suicide attempts, Farberow (1970) emphasizes how the problematic pole in each of Erikson's first six psychosocial stages names experiences which cumulatively can contribute to the development of a ‘self-destructive identity'-- with the experiences of basic mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and isolation presumed to be most at play in adolescent identity confusion as exemplified by suicide attempts (Lester, 1991).

Numerous other authors have highlighted the relevance of Erikson’s' work for understanding suicidality not only in adolescence but across the life-span. Maris (1991) criticizes suicide research for continuing to generate predominantly static profiles of self-destructive behaviors without seeking to understand these behaviors in the context of dynamic developmental models. Agreeing with Maris, Lester (1991) proposes Erikson's developmental theory as preferable for understanding suicidality, noting that Erikson is particularly sensitive to the psychological and existential issues often obscured by a focus on external stressors and superficial motives. Byers (1991) employs Erikson's framework in describing suicide attempts as efforts to abort the respective psychosocial stages due to a fundamental failure to negotiate the required role transitions. Studying the suicide notes of young adults, and drawing upon Erikson, Leenars (1991) notes the presence of identity confusion insofar as there is a failure to distinguish between the ‘personal self' and the ‘social self'-- along with "... a sense of shame.... [and] a lack of certainty about who one is... many of these people have never developed a personal self" (p.129).

Informed by Erikson's work, Bar-Joseph and Tzuriel (1991) have conducted empirical research to assess the relationship between adolescent identity formation and suicidal tendencies. Their research confirmed that successful adolescent ego identity formation serves as "... a ‘buffering' force which can provide an inner strength against suicidal ideation and suicide attempts" (Bar-Joseph & Tzuriel, 1991, p. 217).This ‘buffer' against suicidality was constituted by the ego identity components of meaningfulness, genuineness, social recognition, and feelings of continuity and solidity.

Further psychoanalytic contributions to explicating the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality: The affective significance of symbiosis/loss/separation

Other writers have noted the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality independent of Erikson's reflections, with the loss of symbiotic relationships being a crucial theme-- as it was in Chapter 6's discussion. For example, Tabachnick (1981) has delineated 'the interlocking psychologies of suicide and adolescence', proposing "... that in certain ways suicidal psychology is an essential part of adolescent psychology" (p.399). Tabachnick describes object loss, loneliness/alienation, helplessness, and hopelessness as features shared by the psychology of suicide and the psychology of adolescence, concluding that these features become particularly intertwined with identity issues in the suicidal adolescent.

Kahn (1990) highlights the significance of envy and rivalry as 'narcissistic affects' that play a predominant role in adolescent suicidality. He notes how "envy arises out of abandonment and has within it the wish to be someone other than who one is, to enhance worth by affiliation and attachment, if not by outright fusion with someone else" (Kahn, 1990, p.447). Conversely, Kahn (1990) notes how "rivalry, like envy, seeks to define the self, but by oppositional rather than affiliative means" (p. 448), with jealousy being constituted by the blending of envy and rivalry. Kahn (1990) goes onto describe how during adolescence "... the issues of envy, competition, jealousy, and rivalry are inflamed... with all their associated confusion about identity, engagement, and withdrawal" (p. 458). When rivalrous and jealous interpersonal bonds are ruptured, rage and hatred ensue, with suicidality becoming a risk insofar as adolescents "... would just as soon destroy themselves along with others than submit to what is felt to be intolerable humiliation" (Kahn, 1990, p. 452).

Hendin (1987) maintains that although Freud's formulations regarding the relation of abandonment and loss to suicide continue to be relevant for understanding adolescent suicidality, "the nature of the relationship prior to any separation or loss... is the critical factor" (Hendin, 1985, p.21). Based on his study of 50 suicidal college students, Hendin (1975) concludes that the history of relationships between these students and their parents are characterized by a 'death knot' in which "... the parents seem to want the child's presence, but without emotional involvement. They want him or her to be there and not be there at the same time..." (Hendin, 1977, p.158). This death knot leaves these children feeling that their parents do not regard them as sources of pleasure and require them to be emotionally dead. Hendin (1975) observes that suicidal longings become problematic when these children are confronted with the separation/identity issues of adolescence and the possibility of experiencing freedom from the death knot that has been the basic bond between them and their parents. He concisely concludes that "... in their attempts at suicide these young people were moving toward becoming finally and forever what they felt they were meant to be" (Hendin, 1975, p.258).

Based on her 5 year psychoanalytic treatment of a 16 year old girl who once stated that "My ambition is to be dead", Hurray (1977) notes how "suicide had also represented for her a way of becoming what otherwise she had felt she never could be-- phallic, competent, and successful" (p.81). Further reflecting on the significance of identity issues in this girl's suicide attempt, Hurray (1978) highlights how it simultaneously expressed a fantasy of fusion with her mother and an effort to achieve separation. Boyer (1976) documents a suicide attempt of an adolescent male in which the fantasy of fusion was present not only in relation to his mother but to an identical twin brother-- his literal mirror image. Novick (1984), reporting on the psychoanalytic treatment of seven adolescent suicide attempters, declares that "... attempted suicide in adolescence is not an impulsive act but the end point in a pathological regression.... [wherein] the regression started, in each case, with the experience of failure in the attempt to separate from mother" (p.115).

Haim (1974) points to such identity related aspects of the adolescent developmental process as the tendency to resort to action, the preoccupation with the idea of death, and experience of multiple object/narcissistic losses as accentuated by the adolescent suicidal process. However, Haim also emphasizes that "... the suicidal process is not to be confused with the process of adolescence.... since it contains not only elements that belong to adolescence but also elements that are opposed to it" (p.259). Haim notes that those elements antithetical to the work of adolescence and favoring suicidality are pre-Oedipal in origin and include: an archaic/megalomaniacal ego-ideal, an inadequate integration of temporality, and an inability to relinquish and mourn lost objects.

Mack (1986) agrees that an exalted ego-ideal is one of the most problematic aspects of the suicidal adolescent's personality structure, particularly insofar as it engenders the transformation of death into an idealized object fantasized to impart completion and perfection. Like Haim, Mack emphasizes the pre-Oedipal genesis of suicidal dynamics, citing the conceptualizations of both object relations theory and self psychology. These contemporary conceptualizations include 1) object-relations theorists' understanding of adolescent psychopathology in terms of a regression to the rapprochement sub-phase (Esman, 1980), and 2) self psychologists' focus on the adolescent's search for new selfobjects to sustain the sense of cohesion that is threatened by the discontinuities introduced by this developmental epoch (Wolf, 1982). Since self psychology has much to say about the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality, a more sustained focus on the contributions of this perspective is warranted.

The self-psychological understanding of adolescent suicidality: Deficient selfobject relationships, exalted ego ideals, and the idealization of death

The perspective of self psychology is proving to be particularly influential in shaping contemporary American theories of adolescent development and psychopathology. Indeed, Kohut's contributions provide the predominant theoretical inspiration for two

recent books on adolescence (Schave & Schave, 1989; Wexler, 1991). As I originally summarized in Chapter 1, the pivotal theoretical concept for Kohut is the ‘selfobject', which he defined as the "... inner experience of those relationships that evoke and maintain the feeling of selfhood [i.e. cohesiveness]..." (Wolf, 1987, p.263-64). The cohesive self comes into being essentially through two basic types of empathetic selfobject functions provided by familial caregivers-- mirroring responses and idealizing responses.

However, Kohut also posited a third and intermediate mode of selfobject relationship-- that of the ‘alter ego' or ‘twinship', in which there is "... the experience of being in relationship to others who are ‘just like me' and who are therefore perceived as similar to the individual..." (Schreve & Kunkel, 1991, p.306). The twinship selfobject relationship first becomes predominant with the onset of puberty and through early adulthood, as adolescents turn to their peers to compensate for the loss of parental selfobjects (Schave & Schave, 1989). A central function of this intermediate mode of selfobject relationship is to promote the adolescent's talents and abilities, in this way converging with the traditional psychoanalytic concept of the ego ideal.

Adolescent suicidality has been related to the failure and/or loss of any of the three selfobject relationships, usually at least two in combination. Schreve and Kumkel (1991) have focused on the relation between adolescent suicidality and the shame that ensues from the fragmentation that accompanies selfobject failures. These authors propose that "adolescent suicidal thoughts and behavior are best construed as efforts to cope with shame and frequently to communicate an intolerable sense of loss and lack of self-cohesion" (Schreve & Kumkel, 1991, p. 309). Kay (1989) focuses on the failure of idealizing selfobject relationships as particularly prone to promote suicidality, especially in response to what he terms ‘traumatic deidealization'. Kay (1989) defines traumatic deidealization as

> an experience of a rapid, painfully intense disappointment in the context of an idealizing selfobject relationship. Such an event frequently leaves a person with feelings of emptiness, confusion, lack of direction, and, at times, fragmentation (p. 177-178).

Kay (1989) speculates that "traumatic idealization may be an especially helpful concept in understanding some, but not all, adolescent suicidal behaviors" (p. 178).

Indeed, as already alluded to in the previous section's summary of Haim (1974) and Mack (1986), deficiencies in idealizing selfobject functions are inevitably accompanied in adolescence by the burden of exalted ego ideals. The pervasive relation between suicidality and exalted ego ideals is summarized by Richman and Eyman (1990), whose detailed description is quite consistent with the self psychology perspective summarized thus far:

> ... the identity of the suicidally vulnerable patient is fragmented; a solid, cohesive sense of self is lacking.... Two narrow and specific self and other ideals-- conflicted high self-expectations and an ambivalent yearning to have others totally nurture and gratify-- are typically found in suicide prone people. They desperately cling to these ideals to provide a sense, albeit false, of self-definition, cohesion and continuity.... Suicide becomes an attempt to prevent further insult to their hopes for themselves and their expectations of the world, and to avoid self-disintegration by preserving the self-defining and integrating function of these ideals (p. 140).

From the self psychology perspective, failed idealizing selfobject relationships are more likely to engender suicidality when there has been an idealization of death-- wherein death itself becomes a fantasized selfobject promising a perfected identity, often through a union or reunion with a lost object (Kay, 1989). This point recalls Schneiderman's (1983) previously cited description of the suicidal adolescent as exemplifying a love of death in which it is hoped that death will reciprocate one's otherwise unrequited love. Litman (1989) has noted how the dreams of highly suicidal individuals often depict "... the destruction and elimination of the painful and unworthy self, and the preservation of the ideal self by merging with death as peace and healing power" (p.152). Death is also often personified as a woman (Diekstra, 1987b) embodying an archaic, idealized mother-image (Stork, 1988) who will help preserve a disintegrating identity (Richman & Eyman, 1990). Indeed, Stork (1988) focuses on the sexualization of death fantasies in suicidal adolescents, attributing an incestuous meaning to the desire to commit suicide-- which he describes as "... the phantasmic realization of an incestuous wish" (p. 261).

This point provides a bridge to another significant perspective on the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality-- that provided by a focus in the significance of sexual identity formation and deformation. It should be noted that, in contrast to traditional psychoanalytic theory, self psychology has minimized the intrapsychic significance of the body's sexualization for adolescent identity formation (Schave & Schave, 1989; Wexler, 1991). Sexuality is a concern for self psychology only in the context of selfobject relationships-- e.g. Schave & Schave (1989) acknowledge the importance of the early adolescents' emerging sexuality being affirmed by the opposite sex-parent, with sexual acting out being "... primarily viewed as a product of the breakdown in selfobject functioning early in life" (p. 82).

Self psychology is more impressed by the cognitive rather than the sexual transformations that inaugurate adolescence. The waning of concrete operational in favor of formal operational thinking (Piaget, 1975), which creates a profound cognitive disequilibrium, is attributed with fostering "... a softening of the psychic structure of early adolescence" (Schave & Schave, 1989, p. 20)-- which in turn results in difficulties containing, modulating, and tolerating the intensified affective experience facilitated by the leap into formal operational thinking. For example, formal operational thinking contributes to the intense self-consciousness of the early adolescents, and "... fosters an intense fear

of being exposed and shamed in front of parents, adults and especially peers" (Schave & Schave, 1989, p.3). It is partly for this reason that shame is viewed as "... the main disruptive affect of early adolescence..." (Schave & Schave, 1989, p.4). Of course, shameful self-consciousness is most apt to be focused upon the sexualized body, a fact that has been built upon in contemporary psychoanalytic adolescent theory. In contrast to the cognitive concerns of self psychology, a corporeal core resides at the heart of the theorists I will next review.

Adolescent sexual identity conflicts and suicidality: The prepubertal idealized body image and the attempt to transform gender identity

M. Laufer & M.E. Laufer (1984, 1989) have contributed perhaps the most impressive contemporary conceptualization of the traditional psychoanalytic theory of adolescence. These authors have worked at a British clinic that has for many years treated disturbed, often suicidal, adolescents in long-term, 5 days a week psychoanalysis. Their central theoretical perspective has been articulated by M. Laufer (1989), one of the founders of this psychoanalytic clinic, who has stated that

> Having a sexually mature body forces every adolescent, to make unconscious choices that will result in an irreversible sexual identity by the end of adolescence (p.11).... During adolescence the image of the body has to alter or be altered to include the functioning genitals of the opposite sex. This means that during adolescence one must finally differentiate oneself as male or female (p.13)....

From this emphasis on the significance of body image follows a view of adolescent suicide attempts as "... a sign of an acute breakdown in the process toward the establishment of a stable sexual identity" (Laufer & Laufer, 1984, p.113). This perspective focuses on how suicidal adolescents often experience anxiety, shame, and hatred toward their sexually maturing bodies, with their suicide attempts including the experience of their bodies as disowned objects which harbor unwanted sexual and aggressive desires. Suicidal adolescents fantasize that their purified consciousness will survive the destruction of their polluted bodies (Novick, 1984). Adolescent suicide attempts are often at first accompanied by a state of depersonalization in which the body is calmly experienced as separate from the person by virtue of its intended death, while consciousness is believed to be liberated from the noxious significations previously associated with the sexualized body (Kernberg, P.F., 1974; Laufer, M., 1974; Laufer & Laufer, 1984).

This account of the adolescent's experience of attempting suicide appears to be particularly true of attempts involving pills, where at first there is no noticeable physical effect. Laufer & Laufer (1984) note that it is once adolescents who had attempted suicide began to "... experience the physical effects of the pills that they became anxious and sought help" (p.116). This scenario is analogous to Lacan's description of the mirror

phase structure wherein the perception of the body in terms of an external form/image is experienced as an inoculation against future experiences of bodily fragmentation and anxiety. The depersonalization that the Laufers describe as intrinsic to intensified forms of adolescent suicidality is likewise akin to the phenomenon of the ‘phantom double' alluded to by Lacan and described by Rank, wherein ego identifications are split off and personified as persecutory agencies calling for harm to one's body (Bonner, 1990).

Lacan's conception of the mirror phase offers a further point of dialogue with the Laufers' work on the relation between sexual identity and adolescent suicidality. M. Laufer (1989) emphasizes how prior to puberty, disturbed adolescents "... could maintain the belief that they did not have to be male or female, that they could be omnipotent without being sexual (p.20).... [but] the postpubertal world of sexual male/sexual female... shattered their prepubertal illusions" (p.21). In Lacanian terms, the image with which the infant identifies in the mirror phase, while including the anticipated mastery of the prematurely born body, for the most part remains until puberty a sexually immature, nonincestuous image. The sexually maturing body of adolescence clearly undermines the omnipotence with which, under pathological pressures, this immature body image may have become invested (Kennedy, 1989).

Consistent with the perspectives previously reviewed in this chapter, the Laufers' view the relation between adolescent identity and suicidality to revolve around the effort to maintain an impossible ideal. However, in contrast to these other perspectives, the Laufers situate the problematic ideal exclusively within the domain of bodiliness. In speaking of the troubled adolescent's effort to maintain the ‘prepubertal idealized body image', M.E. Laufer (1991) notes that this term does not refer to "... a specific fantasized body image-- the term idealized is intended to denote the function this body image fulfills -- i.e. a body that can be felt to be perfect and thus unrelated to anxiety" (p. 62n). This definition reiterates the affinity between the Laufers' perspective and Lacan's conception of the ego in the imaginary order, formed through an identification with an idealized image of the mother's body and functioning to defend against anxiety. In accord with Lacan, the Laufers also point to a failure in the Oedipalization of the subject as at play in the persistence of the prepubertal idealized body image through adolescence. As M.E. Laufer (1991) has noted, "... the prepubertal idealized body image is needed by these adolescents because it still contains the early *infantile* omnipotence of the mother infant couple, as though it had never been relinquished and modified at the oedipal phase" (p. 64).

A self-psychological analogue in the Laufers' work is evident in their description of the self-destructive adolescent's impaired ability to behave in a caring way toward his body. They note how the capacity to care for one's body "... arises developmentally from the identification and internalization of the protective aspects of parental caring... insofar as the child feels himself worthy of being cared for, it enables him to act in a caring and protective manner toward himself" (Laufer & Laufer, 1984, p. 73). This statement is similar to the self psychological conception of the infant's internalizing the soothing

qualities of the maternal selfobject. However, insofar as it focuses on the infant's body, the Laufers' theory has more in common with Winnicott than Kohut.

The Laufers' work, though, remains rather unique among contemporary adolescent theorists in asserting that issues regarding sexual identity supersede all other concerns in understanding adolescent psychopathology in general and adolescent suicidality in particular. Cohen (1991) is the only other author I have encountered who proposes that sexual identity conflicts play a significant role in many adolescent suicide attempts. Cohen's concern is not limited to the adolescent's sexual identity questions, but focuses on gender identity questions as more encompassing. Cohen (1991) defines the distinction between sexual identity and gender identity questions as follows:

> In the realm of the psychological, the questions [for adolescents] are not just "Am I a man?" or "Am I a woman?" and "To what sexual object do I relate?" The central question is, "What kind of man am I?" or "What kind of woman am I?"... (p. 22).

Cohen focuses on the fact that these complex questions are evoked not only by the adolescent's sexual maturation, but by the normative tendency to regress to previous developmental phases in which gender identity issues were first negotiated. Recurrent albeit temporary periods of regression are a commonly observed aspect of adolescent experience. Blos (1979) has emphasized that "the task of restructuring by regression represents the most formidable psychic work of adolescence" (p. 152). For the adolescent for whom gender identity issues prove to be particularly oppressive, there is the danger of regressing to experiential modes characteristic of the developmental period in which gender distinctions were not as relevant.

Cohen (1991) elaborates these points by drawing upon Fast's (1984) distinction between event-centered and category-centered modes of experience, which I originally reviewed in Chapter 5 (p. 82-84). The important point for Cohen's argument is that in event-centered experience, gender distinctions can more readily be denied insofar as these distinctions depend upon category-centered experience. Cohen (1991) is concerned with how, in vulnerable adolescents, there may be a "... severe pathological regression in which the event-centered experience stands by itself without being juxtaposed with category centered-experience" (p. 24). In such a case, "... gender is expressed or not expressed according to a specific [and isolated] event, be it physiological, social, mental, or emotional" (Cohen, 1991, p. 24). Cohen further notes how since the event-centered identity mode is in conflict with the category-centeredness of the adolescent's social milieu, there is the tendency for the adolescent to withdraw and be socially isolative.

It is at this point of social isolation that Cohen conceives event-centered experience to be suicidogenic, insofar as the adolescent is now more prone to regress to the infantile illusions of omnipotence and primary creativity, without the corrective function of category-centeredness. Cohen describes how the troubled adolescent's social isolation

results in conflicts with ambivalent figures being more totally internalized, therefore increasing the danger that these conflicts will be resolved in a struggle with internalized objects rather than with the actual externalized others. Cohen (1991) summarizes how

> within this internal struggle, and under the influence of the event-centered axis, suicide is a possibility. The adolescent is again subject totally to the illusions of omnipotence and primary creativity and thus willing to.... destroy the ‘bad' internal objects-- internal rivals of a sort-- without realizing they are a categorically integral part of his/her whole self.... Internal rivals may consist of all those elements which thwart the desired gender identity.... the adolescent will try to eliminate the internal object by killing it; in an event-centered consciousness this has nothing to do with eliminating the self.... (p.28) Striking out at the body in this way is not perceived categorically. i.e. within its contextual relationship to other parts of the body, to life in general, or to death (p. 27).... the event-centered mode assures the adolescent that after getting rid of the ‘bad' and hated internal parts he/she will lead a better life (p. 28)

Cohen here alludes to several points which I have previously reviewed. Her mention of ‘internal rivals' recalls Lacan's (1951) citation of Rank's work on the ‘phantom double' as an example of ‘imaginary rivalry.' As I already noted in Chapter 5's summary of Fast's perspective, her distinction between event-centeredness and category-centeredness corresponds approximately to Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic orders. The illusory and omnipotent dimension of the imaginary relation, in which an idealized body image is insisted upon, is accentuated in Cohen's account of the event-centeredness of the adolescent suicide attempt.

Finally, Cohen's discussion delineates the dangers of the event-centered adolescent's identity being characterized by temporal discontinuity-- wherein the adolescent may one day speak convincingly of plans for the future, and the next day attempt suicide as if the previously day's speech had never occurred or bore no relation to the adolescent's current state of mind. As Cohen (1991) puts it, "plans for the future, preoccupation in the present, the possibility of committing suicide-- all these act and are acted upon in total isolation from each other" (P. 29).

Cohen's focus on the role of social isolation, internalized objects, and temporal discontinuity nonetheless tends to minimize the contribution of the family milieu in engendering adolescent suicidality. In fact, the family perspective has been alluded to throughout this chapter. Picking up on the ideas reviewed at the conclusion of Chapter 5, I will close this chapter by summarizing select contributions of the family therapy literature to explicating the relation between identity confusion and adolescent suicide attempts.

The family, identity, and adolescent suicidality: Separation anxiety, adolescent sexuality, and the impaired capacity for self-preservation

The literature in this area generally agrees that the common dynamic for most families in which a child becomes suicidal is a pervasive pattern of 'symbiosis without empathy' (Richman, 1986), wherein the individuation of desire on the part of any family member is experienced as a profound threat to and betrayal of what is usually an illusory sense of family unity and harmony. As I summarized at the conclusion of Chapter 5, Richman (1986, 1990) considers suicide-prone families to be exceptionally sensitive to separation anxiety, which is evoked when particular family members are perceived as assuming roles and engaging in relationships that rupture the already established symbiotic ties with at least one other family member. Such symbiotic families, enmeshed in the imaginary, have been described as maintaining "... a massive generalized identity, with little distinction among members" (Orbach, 1988, p.145). These suicidogenic families have even been found to have idiosyncratic speech styles in which most statements are made in the second person 'you' rather than the first person 'I' (Orbach, 1988).

Numerous other authors in both the family and suicide literature have affirmed the significance of parental separation anxiety for the genesis of adolescent suicidality (Bond & Steinberg, 1988; Farberow, 1987; Landau-Stanton & Stanton, 1985; Lester, 1988; Orbach, 1988; Pfeiffer, 1986). As I also noted in the concluding section of Chapter 5, the potentially suicidal adolescent's attempts at autonomy will often elicit hostile accusations and rejecting reactions on the part of those family members experiencing separation anxiety. This dynamic exemplifies the way in which the adolescent's suicide attempt can be interpreted as enacting the death wishes of <u>others</u> toward the adolescent-- a position Richman (1986) advances as a corrective to Freud's exclusive focus on the suicidal individual's death wishes toward others. Richman's contribution has been to understand the death wishes of others toward the suicidal individual as engendered by separation anxiety.

In light of the suicidogenic family's history of unresolved losses, Richman and others have imputed a specific purpose to the adolescent's suicide attempt. For example, Landau-Stanton and Stanton (1985) attribute 'noble intentions' to the suicide attempt of a 19 year old female, identifying and emphasizing

> ... the benevolent, sacrificial side of the self-destructive behavior.... She was performing the services of a loving martyr, allowing all grieving to be focused on her so that the other losses could be shelved, thus permitting the other family members to carry on with their normal routines (p. 316).

Lester (1988) maintains a similar position, although he allows that the adolescent suicide attempt may also afford the family an opportunity to re-experience and work through previously unresolved losses. However, Lester (1988) warns how "the ineffectiveness of

the family in working through such losses adequately may result in the adolescent making repeated suicide attempts..." (p. 119). Lester notes how this dynamic could be considered as reflecting the suicidogenic family's ‘repetition compulsion', a phrase which recalls Freud's (1920) discussion of the death drive. Richman (1986) is thinking along similar lines when he notes how in the suicidogenic family "separation is constantly feared yet constantly threatened, as though there were a compulsion to precipitate the unbearable" (p. 10).

> In suicidogenic families, the psychosexual maturation of members at puberty tends to intensify these conflicts regarding separation. Richman (1986) has highlighted how the sexual drive is one of the major forces that moves people outside the original family.... Nothing infuriates the parents of a potentially suicidal teenager more than his or her becoming sexually interested in friends outside the home (p. 20).

The physical maturation of the body during adolescence also increases dependency upon parental figures to set limits and provide nurturing responses, insofar as the adolescent requires assistance in managing the expanding sphere of possibly dangerous behaviors. Integrating the previously reviewed work of Laufer and Laufer (1984) into a family perspective, Shapiro and Freedman (1987) have described how the quality of parental care for the developing child's body will influence "... the child's capacity to take over the function of self-preservation and self-care.... the capacity for self-preservation requires an internalization of parental communications that the child is someone of value worth protecting" (p. 193). These authors note how the vulnerable adolescent's increased requirements for bodily care may precipitate a ‘shared family regression' in which these requirements are neglected, often evoking intolerable feelings of either rage or abandonment that may be acted upon through a suicide attempt-- the ultimate expression of an impaired capacity for self-preservation.

In concluding this chapter, and in keeping with previously developed themes, it is worth speculating on how the relation between bodiliness and self-destructiveness is informed by the way in which mirror phase issues are so strongly evoked in the adolescent. Phenomena associated with the mirror phase are in some ways even more dramatically lived out by the adolescent than by the infant, as the adolescent's incipient sexuality retroactively magnifies the meanings of the original mirror phase structure (Muller, 1986)-- particularly insofar as the sexualized body image exposes the subject much more to the scrutiny of others. Compared to the mirror phase infant, the sexual maturation of the adolescent body intensifies the possibilities of experiencing the gaze of the other as alienating, shaming, and a source of fragmentation. The adolescent preoccupation with physical appearance and bodily integrity, accompanied by lengthy primping sessions in front of the mirror, is perhaps the most literal manifestation of this aspect of the mirror phase's renewed influence.

Originally, the infant's physical prematurity had been the occasion for its jubilant identification with the mirror image promising bodily mastery. In contrast, it is adolescents' emotional immaturity relative to their rapidly maturing bodies that motivate the search for identifications that promise the emotional mastery and unity that may have seemed insured during latency, but are suddenly experienced as lacking with the onset of puberty. Adolescents develop asynchronously (Berman & Jobes, 1991) insofar as the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of their growth do not progress at proportionate paces. Further, within each of these areas, adolescents develop asymmetrically (Cohen, 1991) insofar as they differ significantly from one another in the pace of growth (physical development being the most obvious example). The asyhchronicity and asymmetry of adolescents' development thus contribute to the discontinuities that characterize their experience. In Lacanian terms, the discontinuous quality of adolescent experience widens the gap between the subject and ideal ego images, motivating further the longing for unity, mastery, and continuity through the potentially alienating processes of identification and negation.

Young children's ‘no-saying', so essential for claiming ownership of their bodies and desires, is clearly rejuvenated in adolescents' rebelliousness and negativism in response to their growing awareness of continued if not intensified dependency on their parents. The extent to which parents can affirm and protect adolescents, both in their ‘no-saying' and nascent sexuality, seems in part to dictate the degree to which other more destructive expressions of aggression will be called upon. Here again we glimpse the relevance of adolescent suicidality for understanding the myriad of meanings intimated by the phenomenon of identity confusion, particularly insofar as the quest for continuity becomes identified with death and death becomes personified as that which will enable one to be master rather than subject.

In shifting now to the empirical portion of my project, we are poised to explore the extent to which my literature reviews have prepared us to adequately explicate the subtleties of lived experience and identity dynamics as described by adolescent suicide attempters.

CHAPTER 8

THE LIMITATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON IDENTITY AND SUICIDALITY: THE CALL FOR A QUALITATIVE APPROACH AND METHODOLOGICAL MODIFICATION

The limitations of contemporary identity research and the call for a qualitative approach

As I have summarized in Chapters 1 and 5, Erikson's conceptualizations and Marcia's identity status paradigm remain the dominant influence on research in this area, and have been rather naively adopted by the contemporary cognitive and social psychological perspectives. This research tradition has yet to systematically address the type of psychoanalytic/existential-phenomenological critique I have thus far developed. Yet, even within the identity status literature, there are indications of a desire to significantly revise current conceptual and methodological trends. The attempt to incorporate the object-relational and self-psychological perspectives reflects this desire for conceptual revision. Having already reviewed this effort, I will now focus on the call for methodological reform within the contemporary identity literature.

In Waterman's (1985) judgment, "... the research on Erikson's concept of identity has yet to fulfill its potential as an integrating construct extending our understanding of its interrelationships with other aspects of adolescent development" (p.1). The most salient aspects of identity formation have been overlooked by researchers in the ego identity status approach due to their stress on operational definitions and quantitative methodology as prerequisites to understanding human phenomena (Blasi, 1988). Only a handful of studies have employed a descriptive or qualitative approach to understanding the structure of the identity statuses. It is by no means a coincidence that Josselson's highly evocative work (1973, 1987) is one of the few studies to employ a qualitative methodology in researching identity.

Josselson (1987) maintains that although the identity status paradigm perhaps "... preserves the nuance and subtlety of Erikson's work" (p.xiv), fuller preservation of such subtlety entails a qualitative methodology to complement the descriptive component of the identity status approach. Bourne (1978) acknowledges this necessity when he suggests there be "... an alternative to the usual strategy of measuring a specific dependent variable and looking for systematic differences in its level among the identity statuses ..." (1978, p.384). He proposes getting ‘free descriptive statements' from subjects and analyzing them in terms of ‘content themes', which then would be tallied in terms of frequency counts and compared among the identity statuses. Although Bourne's proposal is not completely congruent with a phenomenological conception of qualitative research (Giorgi, 1985), particularly insofar as it remains at the prereflective level of

articulation and moves quickly to quantification, it does at least indicate a desire for a descriptive and qualitative direction in ego identity research.

A move to descriptive and qualitative research methods is also evident in contemporary identity studies from perspectives other than the ego identity status paradigm. Holland's (1986) emphasis on ‘thematic analysis of identity' calls for a use of description which is commensurate with the methodological tenets of phenomenological psychology. Nearly half the articles collected by Honess and Yardley (1987b) emphasize the significance of first person descriptions and meaning rather than measurement in studying various facets of human identity. This collection includes a chapter (Honess & Edwards, 1987) advocating qualitative methodology for the study of adolescent identity, with such methods being affirmed as indispensable for articulating the dynamic relation between ‘individual and culture'.

Despite the innovative intentions of contemporary theorists, pitfalls remain. Breakwell's (1983, 1986a) work on ‘coping with threatened identities' endeavors to avoid ‘methodological myopia', with her attempting to ground her research in such concrete everyday experiences as being unemployed. Thus she claims that "instead of starting with a set of formal propositions which circumscribe the structure and processes of threats to identity... [my] intention is to work towards them by first looking at a variety of identity threatening experiences" (p.1). However, Breakwell betrays her cognitive bias in reviewing the results of her study (1986b) on the identity processes of socially and economically disadvantaged young women who took part in a government sponsored program to train them as unskilled engineering operators.

A clear asset of Breakwell's work, though, is her attempt to situate the study of identity issues within the context of a concrete human event. Others who have made similar efforts are Rosen (1987) on women's first pregnancy and first year of child rearing, Haimes (1987) on adoption, and Rosenberg (1987) on experiences of depersonalization. However, none of these efforts appear to address the full range of issues raised in my review of the identity literature. The influence of the mirror phase on body-image formation, the role of the ego, the place of the social, the inescapability of temporality, the significance of action and narration, and the mediation of recognition, desire and death are all themes which seem essential to any substantial study of the vicissitudes of human identity. It is in light of these themes that I have chosen the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified in adolescent suicide attempts to be a particularly appropriate topic for an existential-phenomenological study employing a qualitative methodology.

The primacy of meaning and the irreducible value of first person description in the study of adolescent suicide attempts

Even given the significant convergence I have demonstrated between the identity and suicide literature, the relation of adolescent suicidality to the phenomenon of identity confusion has yet to be systematically explicated. This relation is most commonly and

concretely acknowledged in the relatively few case studies of suicidal adolescents who have been treated in psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy. Several of these sources have already been cited (Boyer, 1976; Hendin, 1975; Hurray 1977, 1978; P.F. Kernberg, 1974; Laufer & Laufer, 1984; Novick, 1984). One exceptional reference not yet noted is a book (Mack & Hickler, 1981) documenting the journal entries, letters, compositions, and poetry written by an adolescent girl who completed suicide at age 14. This work demonstrates the irreducible value of first-person description in gaining detailed descriptive access to the experiential subtleties of the suicidal adolescent-- passage after passage presents material ripe for dialogue with the identity literature thus far reviewed.

Taylor (1978) has also emphasized the value of explicating through first person accounts the ‘situated meanings' of suicidal actions. He notes the paucity of such studies in the literature, observing that "the meaning the individual gives to his own action, if it is considered at all, becomes subordinate to ... some preconceived set of objective criteria" (p.97). Hillman (1976) maintains a comparable position. Similarly, Berman (1991) contends that "ultimately, the true understanding of suicidal behavior must rely on more idiographic methods, through intensive study of unique and individual suicidal cases..." (p.115). In his comprehensive review of the adolescent suicide literature, Curran (1987) notes that the majority of studies fail to situate suicidal acts within a developmental and experiential context that would allow their fuller meaning to emerge. Instead, most adolescent suicide research has concentrated on correlating a host of independent variables with suicidal behavior while minimally focusing on the dynamic meanings that mediate the relation of these variables to suicidality.

Leenaars' (1988) extensive study of suicide notes is somewhat of an exception to this problematic trend in suicide research. As a personal document, the suicide note is often the only first person description available in the case of completed suicide. Citing the limitations of previous studies of suicide notes, which have primarily utilized the methodologies of classification analysis and content analysis, Leenaars employs a theoretical-conceptual analysis in which suicide notes are explicated in terms of their correspondence with 10 theorists' formulations regarding suicidality (with each theorist's formulation having been summarized in the form of 10 ‘protocol sentences'). Although yielding valuable findings, Leenaars' methodology is quite at variance with the central tenets of a phenomenologically oriented qualitative analysis. In a sense, the meanings of the suicide notes he analyzed have been determined or at least delimited in advance by directing a panel of judges to interpret them only in terms of the ‘protocol sentences' gleaned from already formulated theoretical positions. This is virtually a reversal of a phenomenological methodology wherein the subjects' descriptions are first individually interrogated in terms of their constituent meanings, next collectively translated into a statement of general psychological structure, and lastly dialogued with relevant pre-existing theoretical formulations (Giorgi, 1985).

I have yet to address, however, the more practical issue of how I researched identity confusion in the context of adolescent suicidality. During the course of my

literature review I have not, for the most part, distinguished between attempted and completed suicide. For the purposes of phenomenological research, where first person description is the most desirable starting point, it is clear that studying completed suicide poses profound problems. The most obvious, of course, is the fact that the subject of interest is no longer living. This obstacle might be overcome by interviewing friends and family members of the deceased adolescent. Although this approach may be adequate for researching other aspects of suicide, it does not appear to be the most appropriate means to understanding how suicidality exemplifies identity confusion. The use of suicide notes is also limited since these are unsolicited productions which only address circumscribed issues and cannot be followed up by interviews with the suicidal person (Mack & Hickler, 1981).

Given this, I decided that it was preferable to solicit protocols from adolescents who have made suicide attempts, with the seriousness of the attempt not necessarily being an essential consideration in the selection of subjects. I say this in line with Taylor's (1978) contention that "suicide attempts may be usefully classified not only in terms of 'seriousness', but also in terms of the meanings people give to their actions" (p.95). The seriousness of an attempt is usually assessed in terms of the extent of the intent to die and the lethality of the method employed in the attempt (Leenaars, 1988). However, Taylor notes how although several individuals' suicide attempts may differ with regard to lethality, they often share significant experiential meanings.

In terms of pilot populations, I decided upon an age range that combined theoretical and practical considerations-- adolescents ages 15-19. I originally considered the age range 15-24 to be the most theoretically justifiable group insofar as 1) this is the United States demographic bracket which has been statistically considered to have had the greatest increase in suicide rates in the last 25 years (Hendin, 1985) and 2) this is also very close to the age bracket (16-24) that Erikson (1968) designated in describing the phenomenon of identity confusion. The 15-24 age range also acknowledges the prolonged adolescence that has come to characterize American culture (Brockman, 1984; Knowles, 1986).

Psychoanalytic clinicians such as Laufer (1989), however, have determined the age range 15-19 to be the period in which adolescent psychopathology is most clearly expressed and most amenable to psychotherapeutic intervention. In addition to this theoretical rationale, however, the more practical issue of accessibility to subjects convinced me to focus on adolescents ages 15-19. For the past three years, I have been an outpatient therapist at Services for Teens at Risk (S.T.A.R.), a program at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (W.P.I.C.) that provides treatment for adolescents who have either experienced suicidal ideation or made suicide attempts. My affiliation with this clinic therefore facilitated access to subjects in the 15-19 age range, with additional bureaucratic and ethical obstacles having been entailed in soliciting subjects ages 20-24.

The issue of when to solicit adolescents' participation relative to the dates of their suicide attempts was also one I resolved based on both practical and theoretical

considerations. Brent (1989) has determined that for interviews with adolescent suicide attempters "there is no simple or consistent relationship between timing of the interview and the quality and quantity of data obtained.... [with] the median interval between suicidal episode and interview = 21 days" (p.47) and the range of elapsed time being 0-56 days. Based on this finding, I attempted to interview adolescents within 2 months of their suicide attempts. This proved possible for 3 of my 4 subjects.

However, when a suitable adolescent subject was available over 2 months after attempting suicide, I did not exclude him from participation. In accord with the findings of Novick (1984), I did not deem the length of time elapsed since the suicide attempt to be a highly significant research factor insofar as essential aspects of the attempt's meaning are often least accessible soon after the attempt. Based on his three year psychoanalysis of a female whose serious suicide attempt at age 18 precipitated her treatment, Novick gives a detailed account of the multiple meanings of her suicidal act. He emphasizes how several essential meanings of this young woman's suicide attempt did not emerge until her third year of analysis. Novick therefore raises considerable doubts about "... those studies that rely solely on interview data [immediately] subsequent to the suicide attempt" (p.135).

Often an adolescent is hospitalized at W.P.I.C. for several weeks following a suicide attempt and is then referred to S.T.A.R. for outpatient therapy. I interviewed adolescents only after they were being followed on an outpatient basis due to the following disadvantages of the inpatient setting: 1) There are many demands and limits placed on the adolescent's time, 2) There is usually a shortage of quiet interview rooms free from frequent interruptions, and 3) Once adolescents are discharged they may not be accessible for follow-up interviews due to living outside the Pittsburgh area. All four of my subjects had impatient psychiatric hospitalizations following their suicide attempts and were engaged in outpatient individual psychotherapy at the time of their research interviews.

In agreement with the methodological standards of numerous recent Duquesne dissertations, I enlisted the participation of 4 subjects. I interviewed 2 males and 2 females so as to obtain data on the possible relation of gender identity issues to adolescent suicidality.

The dialogal protocol and the distinct status of speech as an object for qualitative research

Consistent with Lacan's (1988a) emphasis on the primacy of speech in the revelation of meaning, I solicited spoken rather than written descriptions. That is, I encouraged my subjects to give their descriptions in the context of an initial interview. I had originally considered the possibility of instructing my subjects to be in a room separate from me and tape record their spoken recollections of attempting suicide-- an approach that has been described in terms of a ‘soliloquy technique' (Melges & Weisz, 1971) and ‘speak-aloud

protocols' (von Eckartsberg, 1986). However, the probable awkwardness for adolescents of generating a spoken description in isolation convinced me that this would not be the best way to enlist subjects' participation. I also realized that the dialogal solicitation of a spoken protocol would create an intersubjective context that would encourage my subjects to speak with a fullness less likely than when facing the anonymity of a tape recorder. I use the phrase ‘dialogal protocol' to designate the text which resulted from the subjects' interview generated description of their experience.

In seeking spoken instead of written descriptions, I presupposed the superiority of spoken over written discourse for expressing nuances of meaning and intention that are exceedingly implicit in the subject's experience if not unknown to the subject. This position is consistent with Lacan's (1988a) phenomenology of speech, wherein truth often emerges from the homophones, errors, slips, misrecognitions, negations, repetitions, gaps, and pauses that characterize spoken discourse. Further, such grammatical properties as the agentless passive and pronominal ambiguity, among others, have been documented as features of speech which elusively express latent meanings (Dahl et. al., 1978; Kruger, 1983). These potentially truth revelatory aspects of speech are those that are more readily obscured in the research subject's production of written protocols.

Within the tradition of Duquesne psychology dissertations, Johnson's (1986) work on preschooler's beliefs about gender identity distinguishes itself by including a linguistic emphasis in its approach to data analysis. Johnson recognized that children often used words in idiosyncratic ways compared to adults, "... signaling uniquely child-like modes of intention" (p.28). However, this point by no means excludes the speech of adolescents, not to mention adults, from being ambiguous and idiosyncratic in ways just as revealing as the speech of children. To assert otherwise would be to embrace Western thought's bias toward a conception of a unitary rational (adult) subject.

This bias is precisely that critiqued by Hollway (1989) in her efforts to develop a psychological methodology that acknowledges how the relation between meaning and subjectivity is mediated by linguistic laws that subordinate any individual's attempt to give a unitary, rational account of his or her experience. In this connection, Hollway implements what she calls an ‘interpretive discourse analysis', an approach which takes as its object the transcribed speech of subjects discussing a topic of interest to the researcher. To substantiate her linguistic methodology, Hollway draws heavily on Lacan's conception of how two basic processes of signification-- metaphor and metonymy-- mediate the relation 1) between signifier and signified (metaphor), and 2) among signifiers (metonymy). These Lacanian emphases were likewise an implicit aspect of the qualitative methodology I employed.

Notwithstanding the promising work of Johnson (1986) and Hollway (1989), for the most part minimal attention has been given to the distinct status of speech as a focus for qualitative research. Aanstoos' (1983b) arguments for employing the ‘think aloud' method of data collection concentrate mainly on distinguishing it from the introspectionism of early psychologists, and does not explore the intersection of the phenomenology of speech

with the process of 'thinking aloud'. Wertz (1986) and Kvale (1986) further approach my position in explicating the convergences between the methodological procedures in phenomenological research and the psychoanalytic situation-- however, both fall short of reflecting on the fact that spoken discourse is the focal object in the psychoanalytic situation whereas written discourse continues to be the paradigmatic interpretive starting point for qualitative research in phenomenological psychology. Kruger (1986) is more direct in asserting the centrality of language for both the psychotherapeutic and qualitative research enterprises, but he too fails to focus on the distinctions between spoken and written discourse relevant to enriching qualitative data collection and analysis.

The dialogal aspect of the psychotherapeutic situation was likewise preserved in my approach to data collection. However, in contrast to the role of the psychotherapist, I refrained from making any interpretive statements in my interaction with each subject. My participation was limited to encouraging subjects to elaborate upon statements they spontaneously made in response to the three areas of questioning I summarize below. This procedure was therefore identical to that employed in most Duquesne psychology dissertations with the exception that they have used written descriptions as the basis for follow-up interviews in which elaborations are sought. I believe my approach is more methodologically justified since it seeks elaborations of subject statements in the same mode of discourse in which they are made-- i.e. speech. In contrast, the traditional Duquesne dissertation begins with the subject's written description only to seek a spoken elaboration at a later point.

The utilization of dialogal protocols for my project entailed several modifications in the qualitative research methodology developed by Giorgi (1985) and employed in the majority of Duquesne psychology dissertations. That Giorgi (1986) too has blurred the differences between spoken and written discourse is clear from the syntax of his assertion that "... it is the act of speech (writing) that expresses meaning and the act of hearing (reading) that detects it" (p.39). In contrast, my appropriation of Giorgi's methodology sought to separate the act of hearing speech from the reading of transcribed speech as distinct steps in the analysis phase of the research process. My intent was to preserve the particularities of my subjects' dialogal protocols and follow-up interviews by transcribing them with as much fidelity as possible to the specific texture of their speech. These written versions of the dialogal protocol and the follow-up interview could then benefit in a fuller way from what Ricoeur (1976, 1981) has described as the 'semantic autonomy' of the written text with respect to the intended meanings of the speaking subject. Bonner (1985b), Kruger (1986), Titleman (1979) and von Eckartsberg (1986) have accentuated the relevance of Ricoeur's hermeneutics for conceptualizing the transcribed/written protocol as a text to be interpreted. Further, Kruger (1983) has emphasized how the increased accessibility of linguistic structures on transcripts, as opposed to tape recordings, enhances the hermeneutic dimension of phenomenological methodology.

Particularly given my literature review's sustained theoretical thrust, I made every effort during the course of data collection to refrain from introducing or imposing

meanings that were alien to the subjects' descriptions. This was at first a concern in preparing questions for the follow-up interviews, and continued to be an issue throughout data analysis. Fortunately, all four study subjects spontaneously presented experiential material that transformed rather than simply confirmed my understanding of the literature. In fact, the empirical findings influenced the final form taken by the literature review-- i.e. some revisions and elaborations of the literature review were made once the data analysis was complete. This evolving relationship between the literature review and the research findings enhanced the hermeneutic character of this study.

Steps in the collection and qualitative-linguistic analysis of dialogal protocols

I conducted two interviews with each of my 4 subjects. The first interview was devoted to soliciting subjects' descriptions of their suicide attempts. The results of this first interview were what constituted the ‘dialogal protocol' that I defined above. During my initial interview, I sought to cover three areas of requests for experiential description. These three areas and their accompanying questions were:

> 1. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the circumstances that preceded and motivated your suicide attempt. What had happened/been happening before your attempt that you considered as contributing to your action? Were there any people who you considered as playing an important part in your decision to attempt suicide?
>
> 2. In as much detail as possible, please describe your experience of attempting suicide. What did you do and what do you remember about the thoughts, feelings, and other experiences you had before, during, and after you did what you did?
>
> 3. Finally, describe in as much detail as possible what you wanted to accomplish in making your attempt. What did you want to happen as a result of you doing what you did? Has any of this happened yet?

This progression of questions was intended to elicit a description that situated each adolescent's suicide attempt in a temporal-intersubjective context that included reference to the past, the present, the future and the significant others in each of these time frames.

My main concern in wording these questions was whether I should use the phrase ‘suicide attempt' or a more innocuous phrase such as ‘attempting to harm yourself'. Based on my knowledge of the tendency of adolescents to deny that their acts were ‘suicide attempts' and to minimize their significance, I thought that the use of the phrase ‘suicide attempt' in my request might impose a meaning that would more elicit a disavowal than a description. However, insofar as adolescents' defensive distortions and denials may be intrinsic to the experience of ‘attempting suicide', I concluded that it would be

more valuable to retain the phrase ‘suicide attempt' in my request if it would in fact further evoke the very disclaimers that constitute the phenomenon in the first place. How- ever, among the 4 subjects I interviewed, such disclaimers did not prove to be an issue.

Once each subject responded as fully and spontaneously as possible to each area of questioning, I asked several follow-up questions as they occurred to me in the course of the initial interview. However, I kept these questions to a minimum, since it was the principal point of my second interview to ask follow-up questions based on the descriptions elicited during the initial interviews. The main questions for each follow-up interview were written as I reviewed the tape recording of the initial interview. Both the content and speech style of each subject's description suggested themes and ambiguities that became the basis for further questioning.

For the follow-up interview, I focused on preparing questions for each subject based on my preliminary sense of those themes which were potentially related to the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by the subject's suicide attempt. This more directive use of questioning in qualitative research has been advocated by Moss (1985), who argues that such questioning assists subjects in achieving the depth of articulation required for phenomenological explication. These more directive questions were phrased in as non-leading a manner as possible, and I again was careful not to be interpretive in my interaction with the subject.

After I conducted two interviews for each subject, the respective tape recordings were transcribed. I transcribed the interviews for subjects #2 and #3, and a professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe the interviews for the subjects #1 and #4. This second set of transcripts was reviewed by me for accuracy and amended in order to ensure consistency with the manner in which I had transcribed the other interviews. In transforming the dialogal protocol and follow-up interview into written texts, I followed some of Dahl's (1979) guidelines for verbatim transcription. These guidelines include typing a double hyphen to indicate false starts or stammers (e.g. st--- for a stammer on the word ‘start'). For pauses, I placed a period mark for every second of silence (e.g. 5 seconds of silence is signified by .....).

After the detailed transcription of each interview, I listened to the tape a second time to become attuned to nuances of expression that characterized particular moments in the subject's speech. I then wrote parenthetical notes describing such moments immediately following their occurrence in the typed transcript. That is, my impressions were inserted within parentheses. These parenthetical notes included comments on such aspects of speech as intonation, cadence, accentuation of particular words or phrases, and audible behaviors (e.g. crying, clearing throat, raising voice, etc.). As Shapiro (1989) has cogently argued in reference to the psychotherapy situation, how speech is spoken is often as significant as what is spoken-- with Shapiro emphasizing the way in which speech can serve as "... a distortion, not a communication of consciousness" (p.65).

The inclusion of parenthetical notes describing the subject's speech was also intended as a form of ‘process commentary' summarizing aspects of the subject's

participation in the interviews themselves-- such as the subject's relationship to the researcher as well as to his or her own experiential description. These two levels of relationship were valuable in providing either a concrete instantiation of the subject's descriptive claims or offering an alternative understanding that countered these claims. Foehl (1990) has noted how the interview process dimension of qualitative research has been neglected-- particularly in regard to research subjects' attitude toward their descriptions, which is revealed most of all by the manner in which they do their describing. Consonant with Shapiro (1989), Foehl accentuates the significance of characterizing what the subject is doing in saying what he has said in the way that he has said it. Regarding the qualitative research interview, Foehl (1990) highlights how this focus

> ... brings to the fore not only explicit and implicit meaning, but the event of meaning as well.... Through his telling... [the research subject] shows us something about his relationship to that described.... [The researcher's] noting the doing in the telling entails more than simply a further elaboration of the meanings in the situation described... It entails that the researcher attend to the relationship as it unfolds in the interview (p.6).

It is precisely this neglected dimension of qualitative research interviews that I sought to document through the inclusion of parenthetical notes in the transcription of my 8 interviews.

Once I had a typed text documenting each pair of interviews and my impressions in listening to them, I was then be in a better position to move to the first reading phase of analysis. I initially read through the two interviews, demarcating passages that appeared thematically related-- both within each interview and between the two interviews. I next combined the thematically related passages both within and between the two interviews. The respective syntheses of these passages were termed ‘thematic excerpts', which are analogous to what have traditionally been referred to as ‘meaning units' by Giorgi (1985). The resulting text, composed of numerically labeled thematic excerpts from both interviews, represented the initial draft of what has been termed the Edited Synthesis (Fischer, 1982).

The thematic excerpts that came to comprise each Edited Synthesis at times included my questions, the subject's responses, and my parenthetical notes when such context appeared helpful in clarifying the meaning of the subject's description. At other points my questions and parenthetical notes were deleted if subject's speech could stand on its own, which became possible once it was interwoven with several thematically related passages. Nonetheless, the Edited Synthesis remained a primarily dialogal text that was subject to numerous revisions. Through repeated readings of the evolving Edited Synthesis, I rearranged the sequence in which passages appeared within each thematic excerpt so that they would read as a coherent dialogue. I also rearranged the order in

which the respective thematic excerpts appeared so that each built on the one before it to begin conveying the interrelationships among the many aspects of the subject's experience.

Once I had a coherent Edited Synthesis of each subject's two interviews, I then re-read each thematic excerpt in order to begin transforming the subject's description into a more psychologically refined language that explicated meanings that were relevant to the phenomenon of identity confusion. That is, I sought to translate the ordinary language of the subject into a psychologically expressive language that was hermeneutically informed by the multiple perspectives on identity confusion summarized in my literature reviews. The work of transforming the thematic excerpts of each Edited Synthesis was aided by the parenthetical notes I had already written describing significant aspects of the subject's speech. The use of these notes to inform the translation of the thematic excerpts helped insure that the nuances of the subject's experiences were not lost in the translation to a more psychological language.

I considered the text that resulted from the analysis of the Edited Synthesis to be akin to what has been designated as the Situated Description in previous qualitative research, particularly as developed by Giorgi (1985). For my purposes, the Situated Description represented the virtually point by point translation of the thematic excerpts as they appeared in the Edited Synthesis. I retained the numbers for each transformed thematic excerpt so that they could readily be compared with their source in the Edited Synthesis. I also wrote a phrase or sentence as titles for each thematic excerpt to summarize their content in a way that helped divide the text into more manageable pieces-- at least at the visual level as well as at the semantic level.

The process of moving from the Edited Synthesis to the Situated Description involved making sense of the former in a way that allowed the latter to tell an intelligible story in a more psychologically refined language. In making this translation, further revisions became apparent for the sequence of passages within each thematic excerpt as well as for the sequence of the thematic excerpts themselves. Therefore, the final version of each Edited Synthesis was determined by the process of transforming the thematic excerpts into a Situated Description.

The Situated Description, although accomplishing the task of faithfully translating the Edited Synthesis into a more psychologically refined language, nonetheless represented too general a level of analysis insofar as many superfluous details were included and potentially significant themes were repeated throughout the text but not sufficiently distinguished from less relevant material. To aid in further refining and filtering the surplus of meaning present in the Situated Description, this text was subjected to a separate analysis in which I sought to identify the themes present across the transformed thematic excerpts. Having identified these themes, I worked to rearrange, rewrite, and edit their corresponding passages into a more succinct description of how the phenomenon of identity confusion was exemplified by the subject's suicide attempt.

The text resulting from this analysis of the Situated Description, in accord with

Giorgi (1985), was termed the Situated Structure. Each Situated Structure opens with an introductory synopsis which summarizes the way in which the subject's suicide attempt exemplified identity confusion. This introductory synopsis is followed by descriptive elaborations of the Situated Structure's most significant constituents. In its elaborated form, the Situated Structure seeks to articulate and explicate the interrelationships among the multitude of meanings implicit in the subject's original description, achieving a level of specificity lacking at the Situated Description stage of analysis.

Once Situated Structures were written for all four subjects, they were next collectively analyzed to explicate the general themes and meanings shared by all subjects with regard to the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. A general structural description of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts was then written to express the essential constituents of the phenomenon in their interrelation (Fischer, 1982). In the General Structure, the essential constituents of the phenomenon are described without reference to the specifics of the subjects' respective experiences. Such specification is accomplished in the Elaboration of the General Structure, in which each of the General Structure's constituents is first reiterated and then followed by a summary of how each subject's experience exemplified the theme.

Both the General Structure and the Elaboration of the General Structure are presented in Chapter 9. The Edited Syntheses, Situated Descriptions, and Situated Structures for all four subjects are presented in Appendices B-E. Appendix A presents an illustrative excerpt from each of the four subjects' descriptions to substantiate each of the General Structure's constituents.

To summarize, the steps of my qualitative-linguistic methodology were:

Collection of the Data

1. Through an initial interview, a dialogal protocol is solicited describing the subject's experience of attempting suicide within a temporal-intersubjective context sensitive to identity issues.

2. The tape-recording of the initial interview is reviewed with the intent of formulating questions that focus upon themes relevant to the phenomenon of identity confusion.

3. A follow-up interview is conducted to elicit the subject's elaborations upon ambiguous themes and meanings from the initial interview.

4. The tape-recordings of both the initial and follow-up interviews are transcribed with particular attention to preserving the nuances of the subject's actual speech.

5. The tape-recordings of the initial and follow-up interviews are reviewed a second time to generate parenthetical notes characterizing specific aspects of the subject's speech. These parenthetical notes appear immediately following the point in the text to which they refer.

Analysis of the Data

6. The initial and follow-up interview texts are reviewed, with thematically related passages being demarcated both within each interview and between the two interviews.

7. To draft an Edited Synthesis of the initial and follow-up interviews, the thematically related passages both within and between each interview are combined into 'thematic excerpts'. These thematic excerpts include, when appropriate, both the researcher's questions and the subject's responses.

8. Through repeated readings of the evolving Edited Synthesis, the sequence in which passages appear within each thematic excerpt are rearranged so that they read as a coherent dialogue. The order in which the respective thematic excerpts appear are also rearranged so that each builds on the one before it to begin conveying the interrelationships among the many aspects of the subject's experience.

9. Aided by the parenthetical notes describing significant aspects of the subject's speech, each thematic excerpt in the Edited Synthesis is re-read in order to begin transforming the subject's description into a more psychologically refined language relevant to the phenomenon of identity confusion

10. The transformation of the Edited Synthesis produces a Situated Description, which represents the virtually point by point translation of the thematic excerpts as they appear in the Edited Synthesis.

10a) In making this translation, further revisions become apparent for the sequence of passages within each thematic excerpt as well as for the sequence of the thematic excerpts themselves, so that the final version of each Edited Synthesis is determined by the process of transforming the thematic excerpts into a Situated Description.

11. To further refine and filter the surplus of meaning present in the Situated Description, this text is subjected to an additional analysis in which the themes present across the transformed thematic excerpts are identified. The passages

corresponding to these themes are then rearranged, rewritten, and edited into a more succinct description of how the phenomenon of identity confusion is exemplified by the subject's suicide attempt. The resulting text is the Situated Structure.

12. Steps 1-11 were repeated for each of the four subjects.

13. The Situated Structures for the four subjects are collectively analyzed to explicate the general themes and meanings shared by all subjects with regard to the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts.

14. A general structural description of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts is written to express the essential constituents of the phenomenon in their interrelation.

Following the synopsis and elaboration of the general structural description of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts, I will conclude the dissertation by discussing the relationship of my findings to the literature I have thus far reviewed, in addition to incorporating other relevant references. I believe that my reviews of the identity and suicide literature have established the theoretical and practical viability of researching the phenomenon of identity confusion in the context of adolescent suicidality. It is my conviction that the experiential and existential issues implied by the problems of human identity and suicidality collide quite convincingly and concretely in the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts.

CHAPTER 9

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF IDENTITY CONFUSION AS EXEMPLIFIED BY ADOLESCENT SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

General Structure

S.s came to attempt suicide in the emotional aftermath of events and interpersonal encounters that recapitulated in an intensified form the most demoralizing aspects of their past relationships-- particularly with regard to the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations. On the one hand, each S.'s identity ideal was constituted by their aspirations regarding how they hoped to define themselves and be affirmed by others within specific experiential spheres-- particularly with regard to the familial, peer, and bodily dimensions of their existence. On the other hand, each S.'s identity ideal was co-constituted by the role others were depended upon to play in advocating or embodying a more accomplished version of each S.'s aspirations. All S.s cited parental figures who had failed to value and/or exemplify identity ideals that could have encouraged S.s to further fulfill their respective aspirations. During the months and days preceding their suicide attempts, S.s also came to experience other relatives, adults, and peers as failing to affirm and/or embody basic aspects of their identity ideals.

During the extended history preceding their suicide attempts, S.s experienced their identities and identity ideals to have been misunderstood, misrecognized, and maligned by family members and peers. Subjected to the unempathic and at times degrading discourse of these significant others, S.s became increasingly convinced that their identities were deficient in a possibly irreparable way. Focusing on both the distant and recent past, all S.s quoted others' as having articulated disparaging delineations that came to have a decisive influence in constituting the more demeaning dimensions of S.s' self-perceptions. S.s also indicated that their self-perceptions were informed by the verbal reassurances that they desired but did not receive from those others whose affirmation they most valued-- i.e. what was not said by these others was at times as significant as what was said.

S.s' experiences prior to their suicide attempts were characterized by confusion and/or doubt regarding their identity status relative to others, with S.s often experiencing parents and peers as preferring to cast them in roles that were at odds with their desired identities. By the time they attempted suicide, however, all S.s' identity confusion and doubt had come to be eclipsed by a sense of conviction regarding the irreversibility and permanence of the deficient identities within which they felt progressively imprisoned both

by others and by their own impaired sense of agency.

S.s often experienced their bodies and/or physical appearance to be a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities, with both male S.s experiencing themselves as emasculated by others-- with the extent of their masculine identity being implicitly impeached. Although the two female S.s also experienced their bodies as degraded and objectified by others, their sense of female identity was not correspondingly called into question.

At the time they attempted suicide, S.s experienced shame regarding their failure to embody their and others' identity ideals. S.s' sense of shame followed from their feeling exposed to the demeaning scrutiny of those others' whose positive regard they most valued. S.s also to varying degrees ashamedly and guiltily assumed responsibility for the unhappiness of others as well as for their own unhappiness, experiencing themselves as predominantly blameworthy while being limited in their ability to productively express, and resolve, anger and blame toward others.

S.s made repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to elicit responses from others that affirmed their identity ideals and/or repaired their already wounded sense of self. However, these efforts were compromised by S.s' limited ability to directly express their distress and address their grievances with others. S.s became progressively more withdrawn in their relationships, in this way even further limiting their accessibility to others' concern. A sense of loneliness and isolation eventually prevailed for S.s, as they no longer trusted in others' ability to sufficiently empathize with their distress.

Concomitant with their withdrawal from others as possible sources of support, S.s came to experience helplessness in lacking the knowledge and resources that would empower them to transform their relationships and identities in the desired direction. S.s were plagued by a sense of themselves as passive and victimized. All S.s' experience prior to their suicide attempts was characterized by depressed modes of being in which they lacked the energy, motivation, and confidence required to continue combating the ways in which they had been demoralized and their identity ideals disparaged. S.s experienced an affective implosion in which they were inundated by the distress that could not be communicated and ameliorated through dialogue with others.

In describing their sense of helplessness, both male S.s emphasized their inhibitions regarding the expression of anger as a means of defending themselves against others' demeaning delineations of their identities; although both female Ss were somewhat less inhibited in their expression of anger toward others, they nonetheless both experienced mistrust and doubt about others' ability to empathically tolerate their anger

and productively resolve their conflicts.

By the time they decided to attempt suicide, a sense of hopelessness pervaded S.s' experience. Preoccupied by regretful recollections and pessimistic anticipations, S.s were convinced that the continuity of their currently deficient identities would never be transcended by more desirable identities, with their appearing to be no possibility of future redemption and transformation. S.s had formed definitive judgments regarding the permanence of their perceived deficiencies, with these judgments rigidifying whatever affective flexibility may have previously characterized S.s' self-perceptions. All S.s' sense of hopelessness included as an essential constituent pessimism regarding the possibility of reconciliations with those others on whom they had depended for affirmation, by whom they had felt misunderstood, from whom they had become estranged, and with whom there was a mistrust regarding their future ability to sufficiently empathize with S.s' distress. Indeed, the mistrust of others, self, and future conspired to engender S.s' sense of hopelessness-- an affective amalgam constituted by the confusion, doubt, shame, guilt, loneliness, and helplessness that had been fostered by the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations.

Both before and during their suicide attempts, S.s were to varying degrees estranged from their everyday sense of bodiliness. Their attitudes toward attempting suicide ranged from ambivalence to determination regarding the prospect of death. In attempting suicide, S.s sought to transform if not annihilate their identity deficiencies--whether through self-transformation, the transformation of others, or irreversible self-destruction. Specifically, S.s sought to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose or destiny. While S2 experienced himself as fulfilling a fate to die prematurely, the other three S.s experienced their suicide attempts as opportunities to redefine their identities and destinies while resurrecting the will from which they had come to feel so alienated. However, all S.s survived their suicide attempts without the hoped for identity transformations being immediately manifest, and they instead came to draw upon alternative resources to initiate the changes they desired.

Elaboration of the General Structure

The recapitulation of past demoralization regarding subjects' identity ideals

S.s came to attempt suicide in the emotional aftermath of events and interpersonal encounters that recapitulated in an intensified form the most demoralizing aspects of their past relationships-- particularly with regard to the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations. On the one hand, each S.'s identity ideal was constituted by their aspirations regarding how they hoped to define themselves and be affirmed by others within specific experiential spheres-- particularly with regard to the familial, peer, and bodily dimensions of their existence. On the other hand, each S.'s identity ideal was co-constituted by the role others were depended upon to play in advocating or embodying a more accomplished version of each S.'s aspirations. All S.s cited parental figures who had failed to value and/or exemplify identity ideals that could have encouraged S.s to further fulfill their respective aspirations. During the months and days preceding their suicide attempts, S.s also came to experience other relatives, adults, and peers as failing to affirm and/or embody basic aspects of their identity ideals.

S2 and S4 explicitly described somewhat exalted ideals regarding who they hoped others would affirm them to be-- with S2 being preoccupied with proving himself to be athletically and socially competent, while S4 was determined to demonstrate how autonomous and adult-like she was in her behavior. S2 cited his parents' failure to encourage his athletic ambitions when younger as a significant deterrent to the realization of his identity ideal. S4 bemoaned her parents' irresponsible behavior as she grew up, and her fathers' continued adolescent-like demeanor, as undermining her efforts to become an autonomous adult. S1 and S3's identity ideals were less exalted than those of S2 and S4, having been focused on establishing or maintaining normative peer relationships. S1 expressed particular frustration about her mother's devaluation of her peer relationships. S3 cited his mother's limited empathy for his difficulty establishing peer friendships, and his father's absence as a role model for male relationships, as compromising his identity ideal. Further aspects of the four S.s problematic identity ideals will be described in the subsequent sections of the elaborated General Structure.

Subjects experience themselves as misrecognized and maligned by others' unempathic and at times degrading discourse

During the extended history preceding their suicide attempts, S.s experienced their identities and identity ideals to have been misunderstood, misrecognized, and maligned by family members and peers. Subjected to the unempathic and at times degrading

discourse of these significant others, S.s became increasingly convinced that their identities were deficient in a possibly irreparable way. Focusing on both the distant and recent past, all S.s quoted others' as having articulated disparaging delineations that came to have a decisive influence in constituting the more demeaning dimensions of S.s' self-perceptions. S.s also indicated that their self-perceptions were informed by the verbal reassurances that they desired but did not receive from those others whose affirmation they most valued-- i.e. what was <u>not</u> said by these others was at times as significant as what <u>was</u> said.

For instance, S1 focused on her mother's characterizations of her day-to-day behavior as having been concentrated exclusively on what was "bad" rather than what was "good" about S1's behavior, with S1 concluding that her identity was likewise irredeemably "bad." S2 cited his mother's past prohibitions against his athletic ambitions, and his cousins' ridiculing commentary regarding his athletic performance, as having most contributed to his identity as athletically if not socially inept. S3 described a history of being subjected to the condemning discourse of his parents and peers, with him coming to assume the identity of an undesirable son and unworthy friend. Finally, S4 was preoccupied with the failure of her parents as well as her peers to sufficiently affirm the more mature aspects of her self-presentation, with her being convinced that they instead valued what she considered to be superficial if not feigned features of her identity.

<u>Subjects' confusion and/or doubt regarding their identity comes to be eclipsed by a sense of conviction concerning the permanence of their assumed deficiencies</u>

S.s' experiences prior to their suicide attempts were characterized by confusion and/or doubt about their identity status relative to others, with S.s often experiencing their parents and peers as preferring to cast them in roles that were at odds with their desired identities. By the time they attempted suicide, however, all S.s' identity confusion and doubt had come to be eclipsed by a sense of conviction regarding the permanence of the deficient identities within which they felt progressively imprisoned both by others and by their own impaired sense of agency.

The experience of confusion was most evident for the two female S.s (S1 and S4). S1 believed that her mother preferred her as a baby and as a younger child than as an adolescent. This conclusion followed from her mother's disapproval of S1's adolescent peer alliances, as well as from S1's speculation that her mother was more tolerant of her doing "bad things" when she was younger than as an adolescent. S1 was also confused by the conflicting ways in which she was identified through the discourse of her mother versus the discourse of adults whom she experienced as more supportive of her adolescent identity and forgiving of her assumed transgressions. This aspect of S1's

identity confusion included her vacillation between the poles of "being bad" and "being good", with each pole bolstered by the respective speech of significant others.

The other female subject, S4, described experiences of role confusion in relation to both her parents-- who earlier in her life had partially abdicated their roles as responsible adults, with S4 having concluded that she should assume this role on her own behalf. However, S4 became confused in recently finding her parents responding to her more as if she were a child than a young adult. Her confusion centered on the question of "Who do my parents want me to be for them?", with S4 struggling with different sets of answers for each parent and coming to the distressing conclusion that who she desires to be is often inconsistent with who her parents desire her to be-- a conclusion she had also reached in many peer relationships.

The two male subjects differed somewhat from their female counterparts regarding the prominence of role confusion in their relationships. S2 and S3 appear to have resigned themselves at a much earlier point in their lives to being burdened with a sense of deficiency and inferiority, with their respective roles in family and peer relationships having remained relatively constant compared to the female subjects (S1 & S4)-- whose confusion was in part constituted by the failure of others' to adequately adapt to the more advanced roles being enacted by them. For S2 and S3, anxious self-consciousness and doubt about their identity status relative to others were more characteristic than the role confusion that was articulated by the female subjects.

Subjects experience their bodies and/or physical appearance to be a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities

S.s often experienced their bodies and/or physical appearance to be a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities, with both male S.s experiencing themselves as emasculated by others-- with the extent of their masculine identity being implicitly impeached. Although the two female S.s experienced their bodies as degraded and objectified by others, their sense of female identity was not correspondingly called into question.

The past prohibitions and anxiety of S2's mother regarding his athletic ambitions informed S2's experience of his body as especially fragile and vulnerable to injury. S2 further focused upon how, as a male, he did not want to be deemed a "bad athlete"-- which was precisely the way in which he felt identified by his cousins, with S2 believing that his smaller physical stature prejudiced them to see him as inferior. Finally, S2 noted how his father has jokingly made remarks that questioned S2's masculinity for playing a sport less aggressive than others.

S3 was most consistently subjected to the condemning discourse of his peers, who maligned the most basic aspects of his identity and presence-- e.g. his face, his voice, the way he walked. His peers' verbal harassment included frequent accusations that S3 was homosexual, which he implicitly experienced as calling into question his the extent of his masculine identity. In comparing his experience with his father to those of his male peers, S3 has felt excluded and alienated from the sphere of father-son relationships-- intimating that he has been at a disadvantage in developing a fuller sense of masculine identity insofar as he has lacked a male role model with whom to identify.

S1's sense of bodiliness had been compromised by her history of having been sexually molested by her step-father, which she initially experienced as a punishment for some unknown transgression on her part. In addition to the bodily degradation that accompanied her experience of being sexually molested, S1 was also convinced that her body as a whole was contaminated by "badness" due to her having experienced her identity as reduced by others to that of "being bad". S1 came to believe that she could attempt to cleanse herself of this "badness" by cutting herself and bleeding. At the time of her suicide attempt, she concentrated on her blood as the primary means through which she could expunge the badness with which her body had become infected through the judgments and actions of others.

S4 bemoaned her experience of her mother as not expecting or even believing that S4 aspired to be recognized by others for more than her pleasant appearance. S4 recalled how she has previously felt that all aspects of her appearance "had to be perfect" in order for her to be at ease around her mother. S4 still at times experiences her mother as treating her like a "showpiece" whose pretty appearance is be displayed and boasted about. She has also experienced herself as sexually objectified by past boyfriends as well as by her father, who has a history of making sexually offensive remarks in the presence of S4 and her peers.

Subjects' experience shame and guilt relative to their failed identity ideals

At the time they attempted suicide, S.s experienced shame regarding their failure to embody their and others' identity ideals. S.s' sense of shame followed from their feeling exposed to the demeaning scrutiny of those others' whose positive regard they most valued. S.s also to varying degrees ashamedly and guiltily assumed responsibility for the unhappiness of others as well as for their own unhappiness, experiencing themselves as predominantly blameworthy while being limited in their ability to productively express, and resolve, anger and blame toward others.

Experiences of shame and embarrassment were explicitly articulated by three of the four subjects. S2's experience of shame followed from his feeling yet again exposed

to the demeaning scrutiny of his extended family-- who had witnessed him yet again falter in the domains of both social and athletic competence. S3 was publicly humiliated and rejected by peers in both the school and work setting, dashing his hopes of being accepted as a member of his peer group. S4 was ashamed about having made a decision that would be judged by others as irrefutably mistaken and incompatible with her identity ideal of self-sufficiency and independence.

S1's sense of shame was more implicitly expressed in her repetitive description of being identified by others as a "bad person." S1's descriptions, though, did not significantly distinguish between experiences of shame and guilt. In S1's experience, "wrong actions" had come to be synonymous for her with "being a bad person"-- i.e. there was negligible differentiation for S1 between "right or wrong actions" and being a "good or bad person." S1 appears to have alternately experienced shame and guilt in her conviction that her mother believed she was a bad person who was at fault for having been molested by her step-father, had betrayed the family through her preference for peer relations, and was responsible for her mother's unhappiness. S1 concluded that her death would be required to restore her mother's life to its previous level of satisfaction.

The other three S.s also to varying degrees ashamedly and guiltily assumed responsibility for the unhappiness of others as well as for their own unhappiness. S2's identity as ‘inept' engendered a sense of guilt, if not shame, insofar as he assumed that his parents had "higher aspirations" for him and that he had disappointed his parents by not fulfilling these aspirations. S2's guilt regarding his failure to fulfill imagined parental aspirations intensified to the point where S2 believed he deserved to die as reparation for these failures. S2 claimed complete responsibility for the problems that culminated in his suicide attempt, and speculated that these problems would have been less distressing for him if he could have blamed others for some aspect of them. Yet, S2's inhibitions in expressing anger appear to have limited his capacity to more fully recognize the role of others in constituting his identity distress.

Like S1, S3 also guiltily if not ashamedly assumed that he was responsible for his mother's unhappiness and that his death would be required to enhance her life. S3 further believed that he was blameworthy in relation to his father, concluding that his father left the family due to dissatisfaction with S3's behavior and that S3 was at fault for his father never again having established a relation with him.

Finally, S4 indicated that she has struggled with a sense of guilt and responsibility for the antagonistic relationship she has had with her mother. S4 questioned whether there was any way she could have worked harder or done more to help her mother understand and see more of her identity beyond the "perfect daughter" image. She alternated between angrily blaming others and ashamedly blaming herself for her identity

distress. In particular, S4 experienced anger about feeling forced to maintain her ‘superficial self' facade in the face of situations that evoked a wider range of reactions. However, as was the case with the other three subjects, S4 was limited in her ability to productively express and resolve her anger toward those others whom she held responsible for her distress.

Subjects become progressively alienated and estranged from others, experiencing loneliness, isolation, and mistrust

S.s made repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to elicit responses from others that affirmed their identity ideals and/or repaired their already wounded sense of self. However, these efforts were compromised by S.s' limited ability to directly express their distress and address their grievances with others. S.s became progressively more withdrawn in their relationships, in this way even further limiting their accessibility to others' concern. A sense of loneliness and isolation eventually prevailed for S.s, as they no longer trusted in others' ability to sufficiently empathize with their distress.

Frustrated by her mother's condemnation of her peer relationships, S1 further withdrew from her family and pledged her loyalty to her peers. However, S1's frustration with her mother came to contaminate her peer relationships, and by the time she attempted suicide her previously supportive peer relationships had likewise deteriorated. More specifically, S1 felt betrayed by a specific peer and no longer trusted in her peers' availability as alternative sources of sustenance.

Lacking faith in her parents' ability to sufficiently empathize with her distress, S4 also turned to her peers for affirmation. However, she too found herself feeling fundamentally incompatible with her peers-- i.e. she experienced an irreconcilable discontinuity as having developed between who she believed herself to be and who she believed her peers expected her to be. With her sense of estrangement from her peers, and her inability to confide in them about her distress, S4 progressively withdrew from them and isolated herself. S4 recalled how "all the bad qualities" of her being-with-others emerged in the days preceding her suicide attempt-- in particular, she became suspicious about others' intentions towards her, assuming that they wanted to take advantage of her and that they could only be trusted to tolerate the superficial aspects of her self-presentation. Although S4 felt it unfair that her parents and peers were not emotionally available to her in the way she wanted, she also acknowledged that her own withdrawal from them limited her accessibility and contributed to her loneliness.

Despite his best efforts, S3 continued to find himself persecuted by his peers and disappointed by the adults on whom he depended for compensatory affirmation, bolstering his sense of feeling defeated by and isolated from others as he fought a battle

without allies. He refrained from expressing the extent of his distress to his mother, not trusting that her response would be supportive and empathic-- instead, he assumed his mother would either make denigrating remarks or be unrealistically optimistic about S3's situation improving. In not being able to trust in his mother's ability to empathically respond to him, S3 came to have doubts about the trustworthiness of others in general.

Finally, by the time he attempted suicide, S2 had surrendered himself to the conclusion that he could not depend upon others to help restore his faith in the future. In recalling the thoughts he had about what his death would have meant to his family, S2 expressed the belief that they would have forgotten about him within a relatively brief period. Although S2 claims to have known his parents cared about him, he seems convinced that his death would not have made much of a difference in their lives-- implying a belief that his being alive has likewise been a matter of indifference to them, while also expressing a sense of isolation and loneliness. Further contributing to his sense of estrangement from others, S2 felt ostracized by male members of his extended family. S2 also lacked a consistent sense of connection with his peers-- in relation to whom he usually deemed himself inferior.

Subjects experience helplessness in lacking the resources that would empower them to transform their relationships and identities in the desired direction

Concomitant with their withdrawal from others as possible sources of support, S.s came to experience helplessness in lacking the knowledge and resources that would empower them to transform their relationships and identities in the desired direction. S.s were plagued by a sense of themselves as passive and victimized. All S.s' experience prior to their suicide attempts was characterized by depressed modes of being in which they lacked the energy, motivation, and confidence required to continue combating the ways in which they had been demoralized and their identity ideals disparaged. S.s experienced an affective implosion in which they were inundated by the distress that could not be communicated and ameliorated through dialogue with others. In describing their sense of helplessness, both male S.s emphasized their inhibitions regarding the expression of anger as a means of defending themselves against others' demeaning delineations of their identities; although both female Ss were somewhat less inhibited in their expression of anger toward others, they nonetheless both experienced mistrust and doubt about others' ability to empathically tolerate their anger and productively resolve their conflicts.

S2 accentuated how he had felt repeatedly frustrated in the past by his cousins' failure to affirm the adequacy of his athletic abilities. Despite his numerous efforts, S2 was helplessly ineffective in earning this affirmation. By the time he attempted suicide, S2's

sense of helplessness was more immediately constituted by his inability to productively express and resolve the intense anger he experienced in the face of yet again being subjected to his cousins' humiliating commentary regarding his athletic ability. Despite the intensification of his anger during the course of his cousins' critical comments, S2 felt helpless to express it in any way for fear that doing so would have destructive consequences-- such as provoking a physical fight in which he would suffer bodily harm due to his smaller stature.

S3's vulnerability to his peers' verbal persecution likewise included his fear of retaliating against and reciprocating their aggressiveness. He therefore came to experience himself as helpless and impotent in the face of his peers' attacks. The futility of S3's repeated attempts to become a member of a specific peer group convinced him that his actions would continue to be completely ineffective in surmounting his alienation from peer relations. By the time he attempted suicide, S3 was emotionally exhausted and depleted from a week in which he had felt consistently rejected by peers both at work and at school, with the events of that day convincing him that he no longer had the resources or resilience to endure another week of similarly demoralizing experiences.

A sense of helplessness and impotence pervaded S1's experience at the time of her suicide attempt insofar as she felt herself to have exhausted all efforts to satisfy her mother's standards, with her being at a loss as to how she could continue in these efforts. She experienced helplessness in lacking the knowledge that would empower her to transform her identity into one that would be more acceptable to her mother. With a sense of sadness, S1 reluctantly concluded that she was not good enough for her mother and that attempting to become good enough may well be an impossible project. At the time of her suicide attempt, the thought of death appealed to S1 as a simultaneous surrender and protest in the face of the impossible identity demands to which she felt herself subjected by others, particularly her mother.

S4 experienced futility in her efforts to begin working toward her educational goals -- i.e. that no matter how hard she worked and no matter what she worked on, she believed that it was meaningless in relation to her identity ideal. S4 experienced a sense of urgency to restore the tarnished credibility of her identity ideal, and she became unreasonably ambitious in an effort to compensate for recently squandered opportunities. Yet, S4 judged herself incompetent in her ability to achieve such compensations, and she felt exhausted from her previous labors to improve her life. With this sense of helplessness, S4 wished that her situation could be immediately transformed by an external agency, and began thinking that God might play this role.

Prior to their suicide attempts, a sense of hopelessness pervades subjects' experience

By the time they decided to attempt suicide, a sense of hopelessness pervaded S.s' experience. Preoccupied by regretful recollections and pessimistic anticipations, S.s were convinced that the continuity of their currently deficient identities would never be transcended by more desirable identities, with there appearing to be no possibility of future redemption and transformation. S.s had formed definitive judgments regarding the permanence of their perceived deficiencies, with these judgments rigidifying whatever affective flexibility may have previously characterized S.s' self-perceptions. All S.s' sense of hopelessness included as an essential constituent pessimism regarding the possibility of reconciliations with those others on whom they had depended for affirmation, by whom they had felt misunderstood, from whom they had become estranged, and with whom there was a mistrust regarding their future ability to sufficiently empathize with S.s' distress. Indeed, the mistrust of others, self, and future conspired to engender S.s' sense of hopelessness-- an affective amalgam constituted by the confusion, doubt, shame, guilt, loneliness, and helplessness that had been fostered by the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations.

Of the four subjects, S3's sense of hopelessness most explicitly included his estrangement from satisfying relationships with his family and with peers. In feeling so lonely and isolated, S3 was convinced that the future did not promise any reconciliations in his relationships with others. He believed that he would indefinitely continue to feel lonely and isolated, no longer having any trust or faith that he would come to encounter others with whom he would experience acceptance. Instead, S3 experienced his relationships as deteriorating rather than improving, a state of affairs which further convinced him that his hoped for interpersonal improvements were impossible.

In describing the sense of hopelessness she experienced at the time of her suicide attempt, S1 notes how she came to experience her situation and relationships as deteriorating on a day to day basis. With this daily deterioration, S1 doubted the dependability of her more distant future-- i.e. since each day disappointed her hopes for improvement, S1 worried that subsequent years threatened to subject her to even more devastating disappointments. S1 concluded that she was imprisoned within an irreversible pattern that doomed her to a future of further frustration and disappointment. S1's hopelessness therefore did not express a sense of her having no future whatsoever, but rather was constituted by a belief that her future was predominantly undesirable.

At the time of his suicide attempt, S2 had given up all hope about ever being able to develop an identity that was not dominated by a sense of ‘ineptitude'. He could not

recall a time in his life when he did not experience himself as ‘inept', experiencing his past shortcomings as having accumulated into an insurmountable burden. S2's experience presented him with incontestable evidence that he would never transcend the obstacles that for most of his life had impeded his social and athletic aspirations. He expressed the sense that he had been permanently deprived of the opportunity to achieve a more athletically accomplished identity and to be affirmed by others for this accomplishment-- i.e. S2 was convinced that his time was up and that it was too late.

By the time she attempted suicide, S4 too was convinced that "the right time" had passed for the restoration of her identity ideal-- i.e. she believed herself to be ‘past due' and it to be ‘too late' regarding the possibility of becoming who she believed she must become. S4 was frustrated and discouraged about not having yet accomplished the tasks that she deemed necessary to restore hope in the viability of her identity ideal. S4 came to experience herself as paralyzed by the cumulative crises of her past, a paralysis that included the death of her faith that she had a future worth working toward. S4 experienced her identity options as depleted, with the future promising only the identity of a "nobody".

Both before and during their suicide attempts, subjects were to varying degrees estranged from their everyday sense of bodiliness

Both before and during their suicide attempts, S.s were to varying degrees estranged from their everyday sense of bodiliness. This aspect of their experience was most dramatically described by S1, who cut herself twice with a knife. S1 experienced a sense of relief rather than pain in cutting herself and bleeding, as she believed that through her blood her body was being cleansed of the "the badness" that she experienced as having contaminated her. S1 highlights how during each of the two occasions she cut her wrist, she stared out her bedroom window rather than watch the knife break her skin. While staring out the window, S1 became transfixed by a stream of thoughts, memories, and especially images of distressing experiences from the past, in this way creating a sense of irreality that she experienced as akin to being in a dream. S1's concern with her body was limited to being visually captivated by the flow of blood from her wrist rather than with any pain or injury she may be inflicting.

S2 noted how in the hours preceding his suicide attempt he felt physically tired and "emotionally numb"-- a mode of bodiliness in which he felt immune and indifferent to the events around him. S2 had in a sense deadened himself to prevent any further possible insults to his already wounded sense of competence. As S2 planned his suicide attempt, he continued to feel "emotionally numb" and denies having experienced any anxiety. In taking the actions required to complete suicide, S2's bodily comportment was characterized by deliberate and determined movements exclusively focused on executing

the actions required to insure his death.

The transformation of S3 and S4's everyday sense of bodiliness was less explicit than that described by S1 and S2. After sitting and contemplating her suicide attempt for 10-15 minutes, S4's thoughts became very focused and she experienced a sudden surge of energy which propelled her to walk with determination to the kitchen and indiscriminately ingest as many pills as she could bring herself to swallow.

Prior to deciding to act on his suicidal thoughts, S3 attempted to fall asleep but could not since he was so preoccupied with doubts and ruminations about whether he should take an overdose. S3's agitation in part motivated him to proceed with his suicide attempt in an effort resolve the indecisiveness that was embodied in his restlessness. S3 described himself as experiencing anxiety as he proceeded to take the overdose, uncertain about what bodily experiences would accompany his possible death.

Subjects' attitudes toward attempting suicide range from ambivalence to determination regarding the prospect of death

S.s' attitudes toward attempting suicide ranged from ambivalence to determination regarding the prospect of death. S2 expressed the least ambivalence about the purpose of his suicide attempt, in which he parked his car in an enclosed garage and intended to die through carbon monoxide poisoning. Once S2 arrived home and entered the garage, he took measures to guard against being able to escape should he have any doubts or ambivalence about ending his life. S2's actions in preparing to attempt suicide expressed an intense determination to die, and he survived only due to the presence of a vent in the garage (of which he was unaware).

S1 hesitated to immediately act on her thoughts about cutting herself. On the one hand, S1 believed that by cutting herself she might bleed away her "bad blood" and give herself the opportunity "to be good again." On the other hand, S1 was inclined to allow herself to bleed to death so as to completely eradicate the uncertainty of whether her actions would be construed by others as bad or good. Even after she did decide to cut herself, S1's ambivalence reappeared when she contemplated whether to prevent herself from continuing to bleed before she fell asleep.

S3's ambivalence about attempting suicide was expressed in his ruminations about whether this action would be right or wrong and whether it was truly what he wanted to do. He was particularly preoccupied with doubts about whether his death would accomplish what he wanted-- to hurt others-- or whether he would be the one predominantly hurt. That is to say, he was confused about who would be most victimized by his act.

S4 recalls that she was indifferent to whether she lived or died, and with this indifference she appears to have refrained from taking an overdose that would have guaranteed her death and assigned her exclusive responsibility for the outcome. Instead, S4 wanted to "leave it to chance" whether she lived or died. After she had swallowed what she considered to be enough pills, S4 decided to go to sleep with the thought that she would die if this is what an anonymous Other had decided is right for her. The cognitions that accompanied her suicide attempt expressed S4's effort to both reassure herself that her action was morally justified and to surrender herself to the will of an anonymous Other to determine her fate.

In attempting suicide, subjects seek to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose, or destiny

In attempting suicide, S.s sought to transform if not annihilate their identity deficiencies, whether through self-transformation, the transformation of others, or irreversible self-destruction. Specifically, S.s sought to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose or destiny. While S2 experienced himself as fulfilling a fate to die prematurely, the other S.s experienced their suicide attempts as opportunities to redefine their identities and destinies while resurrecting the will from which they had come to feel so alienated.

As noted above, S1's ambivalence about the purpose of cutting herself initially included a choice between the desire for transformation and the desire for annihilation. Even in her thoughts about dying, though, S1 expressed a desire for the transformation of bad into good insofar as she believed that without her available to be judged, and with no further awareness of others' judgments, good would have prevailed over bad and she would have transcended her past transgressions by permanently transforming her identity in the eyes of others. Initially confused about whether she was still "bad", S1 was eventually convinced that she had sufficiently cleansed herself of badness. S1 went to sleep with the hope that she would awaken the next day to an improved and transformed world in which her identity and actions would be deemed predominantly good rather than bad. S1's description therefore expressed her desire for her suicide attempt to transform others as much as herself.

In imagining the emotions his mother, father, and peers would experience following his possible suicide, S3 emphasized the feelings that he himself has experienced. In this way, S3 intended his suicide to revengefully engender in others the empathy for him that he believed to be previously lacking-- i.e. analogous to S1, in attempting suicide S3 sought to transform others as much as himself. Regarding his peers, S3's suicide attempt was a way for him to take the type of retaliatory action he had been unable to successfully

initiate-- i.e. in attempting suicide, S3 sought to transform his passivity and helplessness into a sense of agency and purpose. A further type of transformative meaning was experienced by S3 when, once he took his overdose, he found himself suddenly more open to alternative solutions-- specifically, he began to consider the possibility of talking to others as potentially helpful. S3's act thus also effected a temporary transformation of his experiential field, expanding the horizon of possibilities against which he had previously judged himself to be hopelessly condemned to loneliness and rejection.

S3 interpreted the fact that he had survived his suicide attempt as an indication that perhaps his fate was not as hopeless as it had seemed and that further transformation was possible. S3 seemed to have believed that the will of an anonymous Other had intervened to spare his life for a destiny that was not apparent to him. This belief was quite similar to that described by S4. In the hours preceding her suicide attempt, S4 experienced a sense of urgency and desperation about her predicament improving in some unspecified way. S4 wished that her situation could be immediately transformed by an external agency, and began thinking that God might play this role. In her anticipations about attempting suicide, S4 assumed a passive and dependent position in which "God's will" would decide whether she should live or die. If it was God's will for her to survive a suicide attempt, S4 hoped that the experience would provide her with a renewed sense of purpose and destiny regarding her identity ideals. S4 also hoped that she possessed a "higher power" within her-- an "inner self"-- who was strong, courageous, ambitious, and competent enough to battle on behalf of saving her life. In attempting suicide, S4 therefore situated herself on a battlefield between an internalized and an externalized agency, with each agency having a voice in determining S4's fate. She hoped her suicide attempt would evoke an inner "voice of conscience" to instruct, direct, and motivate her to act in ways which would help not only save her life but transform her identity over time from its present stagnation.

In contrast to the other three subjects, who hoped their suicide attempts would transform their identities and destinies in a way that permitted renewed life, S2 was convinced that it was his destiny to die by his own hand and that if he had not attempted suicide on the day he did he would have inevitably done so at a later date. Correlative with his determination to die and his minimal ambivalence relative to the other three subjects, S2 was motivated to annihilate rather than transform what he believed to be his irreparably deficient identity.

<u>All S.s survived their suicide attempts without the hoped for identity transformations being immediately manifest</u>

All S.s survived their suicide attempts without the hoped for identity transformations being immediately manifest, and they instead came to draw upon

alternative resources to initiate the changes they desired. In fact, all S.s eventually experienced psychiatric hospitalizations and subsequent outpatient psychotherapy as a result of their suicide attempts, and it was partly out of these experiences that their hoped for transformations were initiated.

In reflecting at the time of her research interview on what has happened since her suicide attempt, S1 states that the relationship between her and her mother has improved-- i.e. they are arguing less and communicating better, with S1 accentuating the fact that her mother now compliments her and does not degrade her peers. S1 therefore experiences her mother as affirming her identity as a "good person", in contrast to her previously believing that she was judged to be irredeemably bad. These improvements appear to have resulted in part from the intensified family therapy in which she and her mother participated during and following her hospitalization. S1 concedes that the improved communication between her and her mother has made more of a difference in transforming her sense of identity than did her having drained herself of "bad blood" when she attempted suicide.

In further reflecting on the transformations that have occurred since her suicide attempt, S1 notes how she reconciled with the peers from whom she had previously been estranged. In addition to restoring this peer group as a source of support, S1 has expanded her interpersonal resources to include mental health professionals and other adults in whom she can confide. S1 has thus been relieved of the loneliness and hopelessness that characterized her experience at the time of her suicide attempt. At times of distress she now first seeks someone with whom to speak as an alternative to contemplating self-harm.

In assessing his suicide attempt almost two months later, S2 expresses regret about his actions and is somewhat self-critical, judging what he did to have been "extremely asinine". He acknowledges that his current desire to live is very strong. S2 has become less harsh toward himself regarding the "many little things" he sees himself as having "done wrong" during his life. He is now able to believe that the things he has done wrong do not warrant a death penalty, particularly when compared to the actions of other people. A significant aspect of S2's post suicide attempt reassessment was his experience of being hospitalized for 30 days on an adolescent psychiatric unit. In meeting other hospitalized peers, and comparing himself to them, S2 came to the conclusion that he was less socially inept and academically brighter than he had previously believed. S2 claims that this was the first time in his life that he had socialized with peers who he was able to experience as substantially inferior to him in these two areas.

Upon awakening on the day following his suicide attempt, S3 acknowledges being disappointed that he did not succeed and that he would have to confront another day of

possible frustration. He did not inform anyone about what he had done and during the next several weeks in fact began formulating a plan to make a second, more potentially fatal suicide attempt. S3 was hospitalized when his plan for this second suicide attempt was discovered. S3 denies having any regrets about his first suicide attempt, deeming it to have been beneficial insofar as it eventually resulted in him being hospitalized and being offered help. He recalls experiencing relief once he was hospitalized and learned that there was help available for him. S3 previously was not aware of there being help for his problems. S3 deems the experiences that accompanied his hospitalization to have helped him begin improving his sense of self-worth. He cites improved communication and understanding with his parents as particularly important in this regard. S3 claims that since his suicide attempt and subsequent hospitalization, he has experienced increased self-regard and a decreased belief that he is inferior to others. S3 states that he is more immune to the others' judgments about him-- i.e. that he is not as dependent as before on the discourse of others regarding his identity and character.

S4 experienced her suicide attempt as a failure not only due to having survived but because she did not experience her identity as transformed in the way she had hoped. Having survived her suicide attempt without the hoped for identity transformation, S4 was left as confused as ever about how to improve her life. S4 was particularly disturbed by the repetitive pattern she discerned wherein she becomes immersed in relationships and activities that are in some way "wrong". Although at the time she attempted suicide S4 claimed to comprehend her motivation, in the ensuing weeks she guiltily questioned her action and experienced renewed confusion about her motives. In fact, S4's disappointment and anger at herself for having attempted suicide included the judgment that she had given up too easily and that this action was all too consistent with her past pattern of escaping frustrating situations. Following her suicide attempt, S4 thus continued to experience herself as falling short of her identity ideal of being self-sufficient and able to autonomously solve difficult problems rather than abandon them.

S4 also remains distressed by the mistrust she continues to experience toward people in general, particularly her peers. She remains withdrawn in her peer relations and is on guard against being exploited, degraded, or abandoned. S4 does claim, though, that she currently is in general becoming more comfortable being less attentive to all aspects of her appearance, with her realizing that regardless of variations in her appearance she's "still the same person"-- i.e. the continuity and cohesiveness of S4's identity is no longer so dramatically dependent on her physical appearance.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION: HELPLESSNESS, HOPELESSNESS, AND WHO-LESSNESS IN THE SHAMEFUL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE ADOLESCENT SUICIDE ATTEMPTER

As an introduction to the discussion that will follow, a sensible starting point is to recall Erikson's definition of ‘acute identity confusion' and to assess to what extent it corresponds with the general structural description presented in Chapter 9. As I noted in the Introduction and again in Chapter 7, Erikson (1959/1980) summarized the experiential constituents of acute identity confusion by describing how it consists of

> ... a painfully heightened sense of isolation; a disintegration of the sense of inner continuity and sameness; a sense of over-all ashamedness; an inability to derive a sense of accomplishment from any kind of activity; a feeling that life is happening to the individual rather than being lived by his initiative; a radically shortened time perspective; and finally, a basic mistrust, which leaves it to the world, to society, and indeed to psychiatry to prove that the patient does exist in a psychosocial sense, i.e., can count on an invitation to become himself (p.135-36).

From a research perspective, it is reassuring to see that nearly every constituent in Erikson's definition is present in the General Structure of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. In particular, the experiences of shame, isolation, helplessness, and hopelessness are all acknowledged in Erikson's definition. The parity between Erikson's definition and the General Structure is somewhat surprising given the extent to which other aspects of his theory were critiqued throughout the dissertation. However, it must be recalled that these critiques were primarily in regard to the socio-cultural and metapsychological dimensions of Erikson's theory. The study findings confirm that at the descriptive and phenomenological levels, Erikson's work remains remarkably rich and relevant.

The General Structure also supports the speculation of Farberow (1970) and Lester (1991) about how the problematic pole in each of Erikson's first six psychosocial stages names experiences which can cumulatively contribute to the development of a ‘self-destructive identity'-- with the experiences of basic mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and isolation appearing to be most at play in adolescent identity confusion as exemplified by attempted suicide. As we shall see in the course of this chapter, shame will surprisingly prove to be the most significant constituent in the phenomenology of the adolescent suicide attempter.

The pertinence of each constituent in Erikson's definition of identity confusion will be explored at the appropriate points throughout this chapter. I have for the most part organized the discussion by modeling it upon the sequence of thematic constituents

described in Chapter 9's Elaboration of the General Structure. Each section will be built around word-by-word reiterations of the theme as presented in the General Structure. Thus, a section is devoted to summarizing the relation of each thematic constituent to the previously reviewed literature. In addition, other relevant references will be incorporated to further explicate those thematic constituents that prove to be more significant than originally anticipated.

The recapitulation of past demoralization regarding subjects' identity ideals

S.s came to attempt suicide in the emotional aftermath of events and interpersonal encounters that recapitulated in an intensified form the most demoralizing aspects of their past relationships-- particularly with regard to the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations. This introductory statement contains three concepts which require further definition and discussion-- 1) the identity ideal, 2) recapitulation, and 3) demoralization. The ‘identity ideal' is by far the most significant of these three concepts, as it is at least implicitly implicated in every aspect of the General Structure. As Baumeister (1990) has noted, the psychological literature has repeatedly identified a relationship between suicidality and the subject's failure to fulfill or sustain specific standards, expectations, or ideals.

To the best of my knowledge, the phrase ‘identity ideal' has not been previously employed in the psychological literature. Of course, other similar phrases have been common in the psychoanalytic vocabulary, such as ‘ego ideal' (Freud, 1914), ‘ideal ego' (Lacan, 1988a), ‘ideal self' (Morrison, 1989), and ‘idealized self' (Broucek, 1991). I have introduced the phrase ‘identity ideal' because I believe it more faithfully reflects and captures the subtleties, as well as the ambiguities, of my subjects' experiences. In Kohutian terms, the phrase ‘identity ideal' appears to be more ‘experience-near' than the traditional alternatives. Indeed, the phrase ‘identity ideal' simultaneously connotes the two basic types of empathic selfobject functions that Kohut (1971) has deemed essential to the development of a ‘cohesive self'-- 1) mirroring responses and 2) idealizing responses.

On the one hand, each S.'s identity ideal was constituted by their aspirations regarding how they hoped to define themselves and be affirmed by others within specific experiential spheres-- particularly with regard to the familial, peer, and bodily dimensions of their existence. This aspect of the identity ideal appears to correspond with Kohut's mirroring selfobject function, which he originally defined as referring to those parental responses that affirmed the child's ‘innate grandiosity' by expressing recognition and appreciation of the child's inner experience, accomplishments, and aspirations. The adolescent subjects in my study also depended upon siblings, peers, and nonparental adults to mirror their identity ideals (Schave & Schave, 1989).

On the other hand, each S.'s identity ideal was co-constituted by the role others were depended upon to play in advocating or embodying a more accomplished version of

each S.'s aspirations. All S.s cited parental figures who had failed to value and/or exemplify identity ideals that could have encouraged S.s to further fulfill their respective aspirations. This aspect of the identity ideal appears to correspond with Kohut's idealizing selfobject function, which he originally defined as referring to those parental responses which present reassuring images of ‘calm omnipotence' with which the child may identify and be inspired to emulate. All S.s spoke of seeking but not finding sufficiently idealizable parental modes of response and behavior. During the months and days preceding their suicide attempts, S.s also came to experience other relatives, adults, and peers as failing to embody basic aspects of their identity ideals.

The ‘identity ideal' therefore has a twofold meaning insofar as it refers to both partners in a dyad. That is to say, on the one hand, the study subjects can be said to have identity ideals which are constituted by their aspirations regarding how they hope to define themselves and be affirmed by others. On the other hand, others can be said to be identity ideals for the study subjects insofar as they advocate or embody a more accomplished version of each S.'s aspirations. Two of the subjects (S2 & S4) described somewhat exalted identity ideals for themselves as a function of deficiencies in idealizing self-object relationships, which is consistent with the findings of several previously reviewed authors (Haim, 1974; Mack, 1986; Richman and Eyman, 1990). However, in contrast to Kay's (1989) claim that the failure of idealizing selfobject relationships is particularly prone to promote adolescent suicidality, for the study subjects the failure of mirroring selfobject relationships was equally if not more significant in this regard.

Having introduced and defined the phrase ‘identity ideal', we can now return to the other two key concepts expressed in the General Structure's opening statement-- recapitulation and demoralization. All S.s described repeatedly experiencing events and interpersonal encounters that had cumulatively convinced them that their identity ideals were doomed to futility. These repetitions condensed and epitomized-- i.e. recapitulated-- what had been most distressing for the S.s about these experiences. The temporal dimension of repetition has been described by de Schazer (1991), who has noted how

> minimally, each so-called repetition has all of the previous times as part of its historical context and meaning. Furthermore, each so-called repetition has all of its predicted recurrences as another significant part of its context and meaning (p. 103).

This definition of repetition captures the regretful relation to the past and the pessimistic relation to the future that can contaminate the subject when it is an undesirable experience that is repeated, as I will further explore below in my section on hopelessness.

Finally, the concept of demoralization summarizes the affective dimension of the subjects' repetitively frustrated and frustrating identity ideals. Frank (1974) has promoted demoralization as a term descriptive of most people seeking psychotherapy, and his definition of the term appears applicable to the affects experienced by all four study

subjects. In addition to confusion and temporal constriction, Frank (1974) notes how demoralized individuals "... are conscious of having failed to meet their own expectations or those of others... to various degrees the demoralized person feels isolated, hopeless, and helpless..." (p. 314). All of these affects characterized the experience of the study subjects, and each will be explored in more detail later in the discussion. For now, there is much more to be said about the subjects' relations with others.

Subjects experience themselves as misrecognized and maligned by the unempathic and at times degrading discourse of others

During the extended history preceding their suicide attempts, S.s experienced their identities and identity ideals to have been misunderstood, misrecognized, and maligned by family members and peers. Subjected to the unempathic and at times degrading discourse of these significant others, S.s became increasingly convinced that their identities were deficient in a possibly irreparable way. Focusing on both the distant and recent past, all S.s quoted others' as having articulated disparaging delineations that came to have a decisive influence in constituting the more demeaning dimensions of S.s' self-perceptions.

This theme clearly recalls the Lacanian claim that the discourse of those others on whom the subject depends can have a decisive influence on identity formation and deformation. "She speaks, therefore I am" might be one way to summarize this aspect of the findings, at least where the discourse of the subjects' mothers is concerned. Not to neglect the place of paternal discourse, a variation on this theme might be "He speaks, therefore I am not"-- which conveys the experience of feeling negated by the other's words.

R.L. Shapiro's (1989a, 1989b) concept of parental ‘defensive delineations' exemplifies this theme and likely accounts for at least some of the demeaning discourse experienced by all four subjects. As I reviewed in Chapter 5, R.L. Shapiro has noted that the parents of troubled adolescents-- motivated by their own separation anxiety-- tend to construct and maintain an image of the adolescent that contradicts his strivings for autonomy. Such images are communicated to the adolescent through ‘defensive delineations', which consist of behaviors and reactions-- especially speech-- that dismiss, disregard, or degrade aspects of the adolescent's identity that connote autonomy and competence. The concept of parental defensive delineation also makes sense of the subjects' experiencing themselves as chronically misunderstood and misrecognized by others. McArthur (1988) has termed this dynamic ‘depersonification', which she defines as parents perceiving, responding to, and communicating with their children as if they "... were something or somebody other than who they actually are" (p. ix).

S.s also indicated that their self-perceptions were informed by the verbal reassurances that they desired but did not receive from those others whose affirmation they most valued-- i.e. what was not said by these others was at times as significant as

what was said. This description is consistent with Mannoni's (1970) Lacanian perspective, which emphasizes the significance of "... that which in the parents' discourse will or will not allow the child to accede to words of his own..." (p. vii). Continuing the Cartesian variations I introduced above, this theme might be summarized by the assertion "She [or he] does not speak, therefore I am [or am not]." Although the study affirmed that parental discourse and delineations are a substantial influence on adolescent identity formation, it also supported the role played in this regard by peers, siblings, extended family members, and nonparental adults.

The present study is limited, though, in addressing the relevance of Lacan's contentions regarding the identity forming influence of parental discourse which precedes the child's birth. This limitation is also the case in reference to the family systems view that there is a transgenerational transmission of unresolved loss issues from early attachment traumas in the current parent's family of origin. Interviews with each subject's family would obviously be required to research this identity dimension. It is worth noting, though, that there was some relevant information in this regard for S2. S2's social history, as obtained during his psychiatric hospitalization, documented the fact that following the birth of his two older siblings his mother had two miscarriages before giving birth to S2 and a third miscarriage following his birth. Further, she herself was born with a twin who died at one day old and had a brother who completed suicide. It therefore appears that, at least in the eyes of his mother, the possibility of S2's premature death was present before his birth and came precariously close to being realized in his suicide attempt.

Subjects' confusion and/or doubt regarding their identity comes to be eclipsed by a sense of conviction concerning the permanence of their assumed deficiencies

S.s' experiences prior to their suicide attempts were characterized by confusion and/or doubt about their identity status relative to others, with S.s often experiencing their parents and peers as preferring to cast them in roles that were at odds with their desired identities. By the time they attempted suicide, however, all S.s' identity confusion and doubt had come to be eclipsed by a sense of conviction regarding the permanence of the deficient identities within which they felt progressively imprisoned both by others and by their own impaired sense of agency.

This area of findings further exemplifies R.L. Shapiro's (1989a, 1989b) above discussed concept of parental ‘defensive delineations', which are motivated by a desire to induce the adolescent to enact a role that is inconsistent with his autonomous strivings and "... complementary to parental defensive requirements" (Shapiro & Zinner, 1989, p. 84). Shapiro and Freedman (1987) have described how such parental defensive delineations are often communicated with ‘pathological certainty', wherein the parents insist that "... they ‘know' who their child is-- who he ‘must be'"(p. 196). Such parental ‘pathological certainty' may account for the way in which the subjects became

increasingly convinced that their identities were deficient in a possibly irreparable way. This conviction is consistent with Kahn's (1990) finding that in suicidal people there is often "the feeling that part of the self is lost or damaged, perhaps beyond retrieval or repair..." (p. 451).

As should be evident from the focus of the discussion thus far, others played a pervasive, persuasive, and problematic role in the identity dynamics that culminated in the study subjects' suicide attempts. The concept of the identity ideal summarizes the intersubjective structure within which all other aspects of the subjects' experience were subsumed. Each constituent in the General Structure is mediated by the intersubjectivity of the identity ideal. The study subjects were in a sense subjugated by those others on whom they so desperately depended for affirmation. They lacked adequate alternative reference points or commitments for orienting their experience beyond the limitations and impediments presented by others. From this intersubjective cul-de-sac flowed the poisonous progression of experiences that culminated in the subjects' suicide attempts. These toxic experiences will be systematically explicated through the balance of this chapter, with the shadow of the other being at least implicitly present at every step.

Subjects experience their bodies and/or physical appearance to be a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities

S.s often experienced their bodies and/or physical appearance to be a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities, with both male S.s experiencing themselves as emasculated by others-- with the extent of their masculine identity being implicitly impeached. Although the two female S.s also experienced their bodies as degraded and objectified by others, their sense of female identity was not correspondingly called into question.

The findings in this area most immediately recall Chapter 2's section on stranger anxiety and the intersubjective dimension of imaginary alienation, wherein there is a "... ‘confiscation' of the subject by the others who look at him" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.137). We saw how the stranger's gaze alerted the infant to the fact that his external appearance is accessible predominantly through the eyes of others, with the danger being sensed that he could be reduced by the other to his exteriority (Ver Eecke, 1989). This danger is alleviated as others reassuringly recognize and affirm the subject's inner experience and desires-- a process that appears to have insufficiently transpired in the lives of the study subjects.

Indeed, both male S.s explicitly experienced anxiety in the face of others' unfavorable appraisals of their bodily appearance and comportment, with their sense of masculine identity being tenuous in a way that recalls the Laufers' (1984, 1989) focus on the relation of body image disturbance to adolescent psychopathology. However, the legitimacy of the Laufers' perspective cannot be more fully assessed due to the inequity between the circumscribed scope of the research interviews and the extensive

experiential data generated through long-term, 5 days a week psychoanalysis-- which was the Laufers' main mode of coming to conceptualize the relation between adolescent suicidality and body image disturbance. Thus, more extensive interviews would be required with the study subjects to determine the relevance of the ‘prepubertal idealized body image' (M.E. Laufer, 1991) for adolescent psychopathology in general and adolescent suicidality in particular.

Subjects' experience shame and guilt relative to their failed identity ideals

At the time they attempted suicide, S.s experienced shame regarding their failure to embody their and others' identity ideals. S.s' sense of shame followed from their feeling exposed to the demeaning scrutiny of others' whose positive regard they most valued. I have already noted the "... sense of over-all ashamedness..." that Erikson (1959/1980, p. 135) considered to be a constituent of identity confusion, and we have glimpsed such ashamedness in the study subjects' description of how their bodiliness was a major medium for the misrecognition or degradation of their identities. In Erikson's system (1968), shame of course first becomes an issue once the child assumes the upright posture and is eventually subjected to the demands of toilet training. During the second psychosocial stage, that of autonomy vs. shame and doubt, Erikson (1963) notes how parental shaming exploits the child's "... increasing sense of being small, which can develop only as the child stands up and as his awareness permits him to note the relative measures of his size and power" (p. 253).

We have already noted how the study subjects were troubled by doubts about their identity status relative to others, with them all to some extent being anxiously self-conscious regarding their autonomy and competence. This finding is consistent with Erikson's definition of doubt as a companion of shame. Erikson (1968) noted how "shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at-- in a word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible..." (p. 110) Erikson (1968) linked the experience of shame to that of doubt insofar as the child is exposed to potentially untrustworthy caretakers, an exposure that engenders doubt in the child as to the security of his identity in their eyes. Consistent with the study findings, Erikson (1968) notes how in the adolescent manifestation of doubt,

> self-consciousness is a new edition of that original doubt that concerned the trustworthiness of the parents, and of the child himself-- only in adolescence, such self-conscious doubt concerns the reliability of the whole span of childhood which is now to be left behind and the trustworthiness of the whole social universe now envisaged.... shame now adheres to one's having a public personality exposed to age mates and to be judged by leaders (p. 183).

The pivotal and pervasive role of shame is one of the most significant and

unanticipated findings of the present study. This finding is consonant with a recent trend in the literature to claiming a significance for shame that has been denied by the traditional psychoanalytic emphasis on guilt. For example, Denzin (1984) and Goldberg (1991) have referred to shame as a ‘master emotion,' while Schave & Schave, (1989) have viewed shame as "... the main disruptive affect of early adolescence..." (p. 4). Indeed, shame has increasingly come to be conceptualized as the affect most intrinsically related to identity formation and deformation (Broucek, 1991; Goldberg, 1991; Kaufman, G., 1985, 1989; Morrison, 1989; Thrane, 1979). Regarding identity confusion, and along semantic lines, it is of more than passing interest that the verb ‘confuse' includes such dictionary definitions as "to embarrass... to cause to lose self-possession" (Webster's..., 1983, p. 383), while the definition of the noun ‘confusion' has included ‘embarrassment' among its secondary meanings. Embarrassment, of course, has been commonly described in the psychological literature as a shame variant (Vallelonga, 1986).

The centrality of shame in Erikson's system has been recognized by Kaufmann (1989), who notes how "the negative pole of each [psychosocial] crisis is actually an elaboration of shame, given a new or wider meaning" (p. 10). As we have seen and will see throughout this discussion, the negative pole for each psychosocial stage is represented in the General Structure of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts: basic mistrust, guilt, inferiority, isolation, stagnation, and despair. Kaufman (1989) contends that these identity poles all develop around a core of shame, a speculation that the present findings appear to support-- as I will substantiate throughout the discussion.

Consistent with the preceding discussion of the subjects' bodiliness, the subjects' sense of shame recalls Chapter 2's section on stranger anxiety and the intersubjective dimension of imaginary alienation, wherein there is a "... ‘confiscation' of the subject by the others who look at him" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.137; see also Sartre, 1953). Broucek (1991), Goldberg (1991), and Natanson (1987) have noted that there is an element of shame in the desire to hide that accompanies the infant's ‘stranger anxiety', which they deem to be as much a matter of ‘shame anxiety'-- i.e. anxiety regarding the danger of being shamefully reduced by the other to his exteriority. A significant implication of this position is that the identity forming influence of shame is present much earlier in development than acknowledged in Erikson's theory, although we have seen that for Erikson (1968) ‘basic mistrust' is a precursor of the doubt that he maintains is "... the brother of shame" (p.112).

Along these lines, Lynd (1958) has described how "basic trust in one's world and especially in the persons who are its interpreters is crucial to one's sense of identity. In shame there is a doubt, a questioning of trust [both in oneself and others]" (p. 207). As I shall further explore below in my section on hopelessness, the study subjects all came to experience a pervasive mistrust of others, self, and future. Lynd (1958) also notes how shame experiences are often initiated by the unexpected exposure to others as well as oneself, with a sense of confusion ensuing since "... what is exposed is incongruous with

or glaringly inappropriate to the situation or it violates our previous image of ourselves..." (p. 34). Here Lynd only hints at the role played by ‘ideal images' in the phenomenology of shame and identity confusion, a role that is supported by the study findings and more explicitly addressed in the contemporary literature (Broucek, 1991; Goldberg, 1991; Morrison, 1989; Schreve & Kumkel, 1991; Thrane, 1979).

For example, in recognizing the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's (1964) reflections on Lacan's (1949/1977) mirror phase for the developing child's vulnerability to shame, Broucek (1991) also highlights how "... the *image* [i.e. idea] of the self and the *ideal* of the self are both brought into being by objective self-awareness.... the individual is thus transformed from an effective, centered being to a being entranced by an imaginal self or an ideal self..." (p. 42). Where there is an excessively shameful sense of self, the identity ideal tends to develop in the service of repairing what is felt to be a fundamental fault both within oneself and in one's relationships. In this connection, Broucek (1991) has noted how

> to repair that fault then becomes the life project, and the formation of the ideal self and the ideal other are the products of that reparative effort (p. 45).... shame is the instigating force in the creation of the idealized self, and the construction of the idealized self always implies the existence of a devalued shame-ridden self, which is in dynamic interaction with the idealized self (p. 59).

Similarly, Morrison (1989) has conceptualized shame and narcissism as mutually informing each other through "... an ongoing, tension generating *dialectic*..." (p. 66). Influenced by Kohut's self psychology, and in general accord with the present findings, Morrison (1989) understands shame in relation to deficits in both the mirroring and idealizing selfobject functions on which the subject depends for psychological sustenance. It is worth recalling, though, that the study subjects primarily located their sense of shame in relation to their feeling exposed to the demeaning scrutiny of those others' whose positive regard they most valued-- i.e. where there was a failure of mirroring selfobjects. While acknowledging the existence of this experiential dynamic, Morrison (1989) maintains that "... the need for the idealized selfobject tends to dominate later in development than does the need for mirroring..." (p. 85), and therefore that shame is more commonly a function of the subject's failure to secure idealizable selfobject responses. Although the study subjects were indeed adversely affected by the failure of others to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with their aspirations, they did not explicitly locate their sense of shame in relation to these deficient idealized selfobject functions.

The relation of shame to the symbiotic component of identity confusion has been noted by S. Fischer (1985), who focuses on the difficulties of those individuals whose identities are predominantly ‘shame-based'. S. Fischer describes the shame-based identity as being an ‘identity of two' insofar as there is a boundary blurring bondage

between the ‘bad self' and the ‘idealized other' who is experienced as demeaning the subject's desire for separateness and autonomy. Speaking in developmental terms reminiscent of Lacan's imaginary order, S. Fischer (1985) contends that "shame disallows firm boundaries between mother and child because the image of the self cannot be detached from the image of the other" (p. 104). The study subjects especially shared in the atrophied autonomy associated with shame, a theme which will be developed further below in the section on helplessness.

As should be evident, the literature reviewed in Chapters 1-7 has only partially prepared us for the significance that shame has assumed in understanding the relation between identity and suicidality. In chapters 6 and 7, this relation was cited in the self psychological perspectives of Reiser (1986), Kay (1989), as well as Schreve and Kumkel (1991). Kohut (1977) acknowledges the possibility of suicide as a response to ".... the unbearable sense of mortification and nameless shame imposed by the ultimate recognition of a failure of all-encompassing magnitude" (p. 241). Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) also notes the relation between shameful mortification and suicidality, which she takes to exemplify ‘the malady of the ideal'. Kahn (1990) describes how ashamed adolescents "... would just as soon destroy themselves... than submit to what is felt to be intolerable humiliation" (p. 452). In addition to recognizing the previously discussed relation between shame and failed identity ideals, Thrane (1979) observes how the inclination to hide when ashamed is dramatically lived out in the suicide-- where there is the desire to disappear, to make oneself absent, to render oneself invisible (yet again recalling the behavior of the stranger anxious infant).

In agreement with Reiser (1986), Morrison (1989) contends that "... shame.... plays as important a part in suicide as the guilt delineated by Freud" (p. 188). Indeed, the differentiation of shame from guilt has become a major task for the literature in this area (Goldberg, 1991; Lynd, 1958), one with significant implications for explicating the present findings. In guilt there is generally a focus on a specific act of commission or omission which transgresses a moral code usually shared by one's community, and for which one feels responsible as well as vulnerable to punishment. In shame, by contrast, the focus is more exclusively on oneself as deficient in the face of failure to fulfill a more personalized code or standard than that entailed in guilt, with responsibility not being a precondition (Thrane, 1979) and abandonment rather than punishment being feared in relation to others (Goldberg, 1991). As Thrane (1979) has highlighted, "the guilty person focuses on the act; a man ashamed, on himself. ‘How could I have done ***that***?', says the former; but the latter will say ‘How could ***I*** have done that?'" (p. 326). Thus, in shame the totality of one's identity is painfully exposed as deficient or inferior, whereas in guilt such exposure is not necessitated since the focus is not oneself as ‘bad' but on one's action as ‘wrong'.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that in Erikson's definition of identity confusion, guilt is not named as a constituent of the phenomenon. Although the study subjects also described their experiences in terms of guilt, it appears that these experiences were in fact for the most part more indicative of shame. As stated in the General Structure, S.s to varying

degrees ashamedly and guiltily assumed responsibility for the unhappiness of others as well as for their own unhappiness, experiencing themselves as predominantly blameworthy while being limited in their ability to productively express-- and resolve-- anger and blame toward others. The implicit presence of shame, in contrast to the explicit claims of guilt, was suggested by the excessive degree to which the subjects assumed responsibility and considered themselves blameworthy with respect to outcomes that bore minimal relation to transgressing community moral codes or social custom. Consistent with this perspective, S. Fischer (1985) contends that "... when an offense is imagined, the problematic affectual state is actually not guilt, but shame-- i.e. the belief that one is capable of such an offense because one is inherently bad" (p. 102). The subjects' difficulty expressing anger, along with other experiential features, will be explicated throughout the balance of this chapter as a means of further establishing the predominance of shame over guilt in identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts.

Subjects become progressively alienated and estranged from others, experiencing loneliness, isolation, and mistrust

S.s made repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to elicit responses from others that affirmed their identity ideals and/or repaired their already wounded sense of self. However, these efforts were compromised by S.s' limited ability to directly express their distress and address their grievances with others. S.s became progressively more withdrawn in their relationships, in this way even further limiting their accessibility to others' concern. A sense of loneliness and isolation eventually prevailed for S.s, as they no longer trusted in others' ability to sufficiently empathize with their distress.

This finding clearly confirms the appropriateness of Erikson's (1959/1980) including "... a painfully heightened sense of isolation..." (p. 135) in his definition of ‘acute identity confusion'. Consistent with the sixth psychosocial stage of ‘intimacy vs. isolation', Erikson (1982) of course considers "a sense of isolation... [to be] the potential core pathology of early adulthood" (p. 71)-- a pathology for which a path has been cleared by a preponderance of experiences related to the problematic poles of the previous five psychosocial stages (i.e. mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority, and identity confusion). The preceding section on shame summarized the relevance of these experiences for the relation between identity confusion and adolescent suicidality.

It appears that the study subjects' limited ability to directly express their distress and address their grievances with others was itself related to their sense of shame, doubt, and mistrust. The way in which shame engenders withdrawal from others has been noted in numerous theoretical accounts, particularly in regard to the desire to hide and not be seen. For example, Thrane (1979) notes how in shame "I turn way from myself in disgust, and I expect others to do so as well" (p. 328), while Kaufman (1985) observes how the "... alienating, isolating effect of shame... prevents us from conversing directly about the

experience..." (p. 9).

The relation of social isolation to suicidality has been repeatedly documented in the research literature (Adam, 1990; Smith & Eyman, 1988; Trout, 1980) as well as in more existentially oriented works (Farber, 1976; Young, 1985). However, less widely appreciated is the role played by shame in the unfolding of experiences that culminate in the socially isolative position. Breed (1972) is one of the few theorists to recognize the relevance of the shame-isolation sequence for suicidality. Remarkably, Breed also acknowledges the significance of failed identity ideals for generating shame. Breed (1972) describes how such "failure clearly precedes shame. Isolation, finally, can follow as a response of surrender (p. 15-16).... Old contacts atrophy, and new ones are avoided (p. 8).... isolation represents the beginning of the climax of self-destruction...(p. 16)."

The suicidal potential of adolescent social isolation has been recognized by Brown (1985), who focuses on the impact of the adolescent being emotionally estranged from one or both parents. Brown (1985) observes how such emotional estrangement results in the adolescent experiencing "... doubt about one's existence in the parents' mind and propensity to experience a radical discontinuity in the sense of self at times of great anxiety or aloneness" (p. 75). In Chapter 7, a similar dynamic was reviewed with regard to Hendin's (1977) description of the ‘death knot' between suicidal college students and their parents, who "... seem to want the child's presence, but without emotional involvement. They want him or her to be there and not be there at the same time..." (p.158). These observations also recall Chapter 3's Lacanian account of the Fort-Da game, in which the child symbolizes through play his presence and absence relative to the desire of his mother. Brown's (1985) description depicts the pain for adolescents who, without adequate compensatory modes of symbolization, experience themselves as being absolutely absent and unconditionally negated in the mind of one or both parents. This pain is compounded by the adolescent's correlative inability to "... bear, envision, or conjure up a reassuring loving internalized parent" (Brown, 1985, p. 75), which further intensifies the despairing sense of loneliness.

It is noteworthy that the identity discontinuity described by Brown (1985) appears to differ from that emphasized by Erikson (1959/1980) in his definition of ‘acute identity confusion'-- in which he speaks of "... a disintegration of the sense of inner continuity and sameness..." (p. 135). The study subjects did not appear to experience the variety of discontinuity described by Erikson. At least by the time they attempted suicide, the study subjects had become convinced about the irreversibility and permanence of their deficient identities. That is, there was a confirmation rather than a disintegration of the subjects' sense of inner continuity and sameness-- i.e. they felt themselves to have been deficient in the past, they believed themselves to be presently deficient in a similar sense, and they anticipated the indefinite continuation of this identity deficiency in the future.

However, the study subjects do appear to have experienced the variety of discontinuity described by Brown (1985) insofar as they suffered from the rupture of relationships on which they were depending for the affirmation of an identity that would in

fact counter their sense of deficiency and inferiority. There is a probable relation between this variety of discontinuity and the study subjects' shame, a possibility suggested by Kaufman's (1985) contention that "... the process by which shame originates... always involves some kind of severing of the interpersonal bridge" (p. 15). This interpersonal severance leaves the adolescent in an emotional vacuum where a sense of helplessness and hopelessness are more conclusively cultivated, with suicidal possibilities in turn becoming more seriously considered.

Subjects experience helplessness in lacking the resources that would empower them to transform their relationships and identities in the desired direction

Concomitant with their withdrawal from others as possible sources of support, S.s came to experience helplessness in lacking the knowledge and resources that would empower them to transform their relationships and identities in the desired direction. S.s were plagued by a sense of themselves as passive and victimized. S.s experienced an affective implosion in which they were inundated by the distress that could not be communicated and ameliorated through dialogue with others.

Erikson's (1959/1980) definition of identity confusion anticipates this finding in its statement that there is ".... a feeling that life is happening to the individual rather than being lived by his initiative..." (p. 136). Insofar as the subjects' helplessness reflected a deficient sense of initiative, it could be said that they had not sufficiently mastered the Oedipal issues that Erikson described as accompanying his third psychosocial stage--that of initiative vs. guilt. Indeed, we have already seen that the study subjects were primarily paralyzed by a sense of shame rather than guilt. Therefore, in considering the relation of helplessness to the previously explicated constituents of identity confusion, it is apparent that the issue of autonomy vs. shame and doubt is once again undeniably significant. We can recall that for Erikson, as reinterpreted by Knowles (1986), the existential ‘virtue' at stake for this psychosocial stage is that of ‘willing'-- which Knowles (1986) distinguishes from will-power, willfulness, wishing, and will-lessness. It is evident that the study subjects' helplessness and impaired agency was a form of will-lessness, one which clearly compromised their ‘will to live'.

We can also recall from earlier in this chapter that, at the most general level, it was the subjects' strivings for autonomy and competence which were frustrated in the failure of others to sufficiently support their identity ideals. The subjects' sense of shame, already documented in detail, can now also be seen as a function of their autonomy and competence being unduly denigrated. Picking up on Erikson's cue, Thrane (1979) has noted how some degree of shame is intrinsic to the adolescent experience insofar as the autonomy ideal is always to some extent unrealizable. He notes how "as long as autonomy is not yet fully achieved, as long as identity is not fully defined, as long as ambition outstrips actual performance... a liability to shame is inevitable" (Thrane, 1979,

p. 338).

Of course, the study subjects emerged as especially vulnerable to the paralyzing potential of shame, and the helplessness they described appears at least in part to have been a function of their ashamedness. Along these lines, Kaufman (1985) has described shame as "... as impotence-making experience..." (p. 8), while Goldberg (1991) has described how "in the throes of debilitating shame, people feel that life is happening to them and that they are helpless in the wake of what is happening" (p. 5). Goldberg contrasts this aspect of shame to guilt, in that the guilty person is able to experience a perverse pride in the power implicit in having committed a wrongful act. The will-lessness accompanying shame is also recognized by Goldberg (1991), who observes how the ashamed person "... feels that he is nothing but a tool in the hands of a will infinitely greater than his own" (p. 109). Goldberg astutely relates this observation to Sartre's (1953) phenomenology of the look, in which the other's gaze seizes the subject's sense of autonomy.

Also relevant in this regard is D. Shapiro's (1981) contention that the development of autonomy is synonymous with the child's gradual differentiation of his will from the will of those authority figures with whom he has initially identified. For Shapiro, this differentiation is dependent on the prior development of the cognitive capacity to recognize the polarity between oneself and the world, including others as well as objects. In this connection, Shapiro (1981) affirms the significance of Piaget's (1954) work, particularly the distinction between concrete operational thought and abstract or symbolic thought-- with the latter cognitive mode permitting the subject to "... imagine things in other than their existing contexts and to imagine oneself in other than one's present circumstances" (p. 38).

The relation of Shapiro's description to both helplessness and hopelessness is evident. Concreteness and rigidity have been frequently cited as characterizing the cognitions of suicidal individuals (Baumeister, 1990). The study findings differ from the typical discussion of this cognitive proclivity by understanding it within the developmental domains of autonomy and identity. The identity of the individual with a ‘rigid will' remains bound to and confused with the will of both internalized and external authorities. Consistent with the study findings, Shapiro (1981) notes how experiences of shame and inferiority predominate for individuals who "... live under the sway of images of superior figures and figures of superior authority... " (p. 63). The study subjects' atrophied autonomy, rigidified in Shapiro's sense, clearly contributed to their experience of helplessness.

Concomitant with their sense of helplessness, all S.s' experience prior to their suicide attempts was characterized by depressed modes of being in which they lacked the energy, motivation, and confidence required to continue combating the ways in which they had been demoralized and their identity ideals disparaged. Given the affiliation between the study subjects' shame and helplessness, the findings also suggest a close relationship between their shame and the generally depressed modes of being they

described. Morrison (1989) in fact contends that depression often develops around a core of shame, with the sense of identity deficiency and helplessness being the most significant of the features shared by the two affects. He notes how "... the ‘searing' quality noted frequently in descriptions of the shame experience appears to reflect a sense of helplessness to alter the compromised state of the self" (Morrison, 1989, p. 113). This perspective on depression is taken by Morrison (1989) as having much in common with Bibring's (1953) influential revision of Freud's (1917) formulations. As reviewed in Chapter 6, Freud conceptualized suicide-- in addition to depression-- as a function of the ego's identification with a lost object wherein the ego angrily judges itself as if it were the lost object. Morrison (1989) subsumes this definition of depression under that informed by the identity dynamics of shame, noting that "even in those cases where depression clearly reflects loss of object or its love, or aggression turned against the internalized object, the intrapsychic meaning of this hostility is that the self is unworthy or inferior" (p. 113). That is to say, once again recalling Chapter 3's discussion of the Fort-Da game, suicidality appears primarily to be the experience of oneself as a lost and devalued subject rather than the experience of the valued other as a lost object.

The findings support this revision of Freud's formulations regarding depression and suicidality, a revision alluded to by suicide theorists such as Litman (1989). It is notable that none of the study subjects attributed their suicide attempts to retroflexed rage regarding the loss of a specific person or a failed symbiotic relationship. Although they did all struggle with intense anger, this affect appears to have been primarily a dialectical companion to their sense of helplessness. That is, the subjects' helplessness engendered the angry desire to take action and irradiate their sense of impotence, with the ineffectiveness of their angry appeals in turn further fortifying their helplessness.

Guidano (1987) has described this dialectic as a ‘recursive loop' in which there is an oscillation between helplessness and anger. The first movement of this dialectic is consistent with Thompson's (1985) contention that "... anger is the simplest and most straightforward expression of impotence there is, since it arises only when we are not being particularly effective or successful in having it our way, of being seen, heard, or recognized" (p. 69). Goldberg (1991) notes how such phrases as ‘helpless anger' and ‘impotent rage' have been employed to characterizing this affective conundrum (see also Denzin, 1984). In describing their sense of helplessness, both male S.s emphasized their inhibitions regarding the expression of anger as a means of defending themselves against others' demeaning delineations of their identities; although both female Ss were somewhat less inhibited in their expression of anger toward others, they nonetheless both experienced mistrust and doubt about others' ability to empathically tolerate their anger and productively resolve their conflicts.

Prior to their suicide attempts, a sense of hopelessness pervades subjects' experience

By the time they decided to attempt suicide, a sense of hopelessness pervaded S.s' experience. Preoccupied by regretful recollections and pessimistic anticipations, S.s were convinced that the continuity of their currently deficient identities would never be transcended by more desirable identities, with there appearing to be no possibility of future redemption and transformation. S.s had formed definitive judgments regarding the permanence of their perceived deficiencies, with these judgments rigidifying whatever affective flexibility may have previously characterized S.s' self-perceptions.

All S.s' sense of hopelessness included as an essential constituent pessimism regarding the possibility of reconciliations with those others on whom they had depended for affirmation, by whom they had felt misunderstood, from whom they had become estranged, and with whom there was a mistrust regarding their future ability to sufficiently empathize with S.s' distress. Indeed, the mistrust of others, self, and future conspired to engender S.s' sense of hopelessness-- an affective amalgam constituted by the confusion, doubt, shame, guilt, loneliness, and helplessness that had been fostered by the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which S.s aspired and to either advocate or exemplify identity ideals which were commensurate with S.s' aspirations.

As I alluded to at beginning of my discussion, the subjects' experience of hopelessness was in part a function of their repeatedly experiencing events and interpersonal encounters that had cumulatively convinced them that their identity ideals were doomed to futility. These repetitions condensed and epitomized-- i.e. recapitulated-- what had been most distressing for the S.s about these experiences. De Shazer's (1991) definition of repetition bears repeating, as it is relevant to the temporality of hopelessness:

> Minimally, each so-called repetition has all of the previous times as part of its historical context and meaning. Furthermore, each so-called repetition has all of its predicted recurrences as another significant part of its context and meaning (p. 103).

This definition of repetition captures the regretful relation to the past and the pessimistic relation to the future that can contaminate the subject when it is an undesirable experience that is repeated. In this connection, the temporality of hopelessness is one in which the past permeates the present and infects the future with the stagnant image of a deficient identity. Denzin's (1984) description of the ‘temporality of the emotionally divided self' approximates the study subjects' hopelessness. He notes how

> emotionally divided selves experience their past over and over again. They dwell in the past. Their dominant emotions are in the past. They are frozen in the

> present.... Because they are unable to move into the future, the past is the only resource they have.... The moods, feelings, and emotions they cling to are attached to the actions others have taken toward them in the past. Other people control their emotionality and their temporality (Denzin, 1984, p. 221).

In dialogue with Heidegger (1927/1962), Denzin accentuates the inauthenticity of this temporal mode insofar as time is static and the future foreclosed. Also in line with Heidegger, the pessimistic component of this temporal mode is regarded by Knowles (1986) as reflecting the factical dimension of existence insofar as there is a preoccupation with the limitations imposed by the past. The literary-psychoanalytic reflections of Bollas (1989) are also pertinent to this point, particularly his understanding of fate. Bollas (1989) describes how

> a person who is fated, who is fundamentally interred in an internal world of self and object representations that endlessly repeat the same scenarios, has very little sense of a future that is at all different from the internal environment they carry around with them. The sense of fate is a feeling of despair to influence the course of one's life (p. 41).

Bollas' description of fate is clearly akin to the study subjects' experience of helplessness and hopelessness. He connects this understanding of fate to Winnicott's (1960) concept of the ‘false self', as the fated person has the sense that "... [as] determined by a life history... his true self has not been met and facilitated into lived experience" (p. 33). As I reviewed in Chapters 1 and 6, the false self is formed as the child is forced into a position of compliantly mirroring his caretakers, alienating him from his own spontaneity and creativity (which represents the true self). When the false self has reached a state of extreme compliance with the demands of the world, and can no longer create conditions for the safe expression of the true self, Winnicott (1960, 1971) views it as orchestrating suicide as a defense against the further exploitation and eventual annihilation of the true self (Harwood, 1987). This position appears to be generally congruent with the study findings, especially when understood in conjunction with Bollas' description of fate as a form of helplessness and hopelessness.

The relevance of Erikson's theory for the findings is perhaps even more evident in regard to hopelessness than in reference to the previously described constituents of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. Returning for a final time to Erikson's (1959/1980) definition of ‘acute identity confusion', we see him alluding to the place of hopelessness when he writes of the adolescent as experiencing ".... a radically shortened time perspective; and finally, a basic mistrust, which leaves it to the world, to society, and indeed to psychiatry to prove that the patient does exist in a psychosocial sense, i.e., can count on an invitation to become himself" (p. 136).

Erikson here hints at the profound bond between trust and hope that he has

elsewhere established as the core of the first psychosocial stage and as the foundation for all future development (Friedman, 1992; Kast, 1991; Knowles, 1986; Lynd, 1958). From Chapter 4, we can recall Erikson's (1982) statement that "hope is... pure future..." (p. 79), to which he then adds that "... where mistrust prevails early, anticipation... wanes both cognitively and emotionally" (Erikson, 1982, p. 79). The life and death implications of hope, clearly borne out by the study subjects' suicide attempts, is acknowledged by Erikson (1964) when he highlights how "hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive.... if life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired" (p. 115).

As Knowles (1986) reminds us in reviewing this aspect of Erikson's work, hope in its existential sense is defined by remaining open to possibilities precisely at those times when one is confronted with one's vulnerability to the wounds of the world, which often enough come at the hands of trusted others. Further, Knowles (1986) cites the work of Marcel (1962b), who has claimed "... that there can strictly speaking be no hope except when the temptation to despair exists. Hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome" (p. 36). It is painfully evident that, in attempting suicide, the study subjects surrendered to the temptation to despair.

The identity and suicidal dimensions of despair are acknowledged by Marcel (1962b), who maintains that to despair "... is at bottom to renounce the idea of remaining oneself, it is to be fascinated with the idea of one's destruction to the point of anticipating this very destruction itself" (p. 37-38). A similar position is advanced by Farber (1976), who has written on relation among despair, suicide, and will-- a focus which returns us to the concerns of Erikson's second psychosocial stage. L. Farber (1976) notes how "while despair means literally the loss of hope, the movements of despair are frantically directed toward hope; but the hope born of despair may turn to the prescriptions of an isolated will" (p. 71). The isolated will, exemplified by the study subjects in their will-lessness and interpersonal estrangement, becomes convinced about the permanence of perceived deficiencies. Farber further notes that in suicidal despair, there is a prideful preoccupation with willfully following through on the conclusions one has reached regarding the certainty of being without a future.

In alluding to the pride of willfulness, Farber reminds us of the shame of will-lessness that was one of the most debilitating dimensions of identity confusion for the study subjects. Given the pervasive influence of shame in the subjects' experience, it is not surprising to see that their hopelessness was also in part constituted by their ‘overall ashamedness' (Kaufman, 1985). Goldberg (1991) has noted that "... pathological shame is the harbinger of hopelessness (p. xv)....", and goes on to describe the temporality of shame in terms quite similar to the temporality of hopelessness-- i.e. "Time seems large and endless.... [the shamed person] experiences no way to escape, because he senses no moment in the future when he expects to be beyond the present painful moment" (Goldberg, 1991, p. 18). Friedman (1992) also recognizes the relation between shame and hopelessness, noting how shame tests "... the limits of one's faith in the possibilities

of life and may even lead to the conviction that not only one's own life but that of other persons is empty, isolated, void of significance" (p. 195).

The relation between hopelessness and shame affirms through negation the life sustaining function of hope and will, which Erikson (1964) clearly accentuates when he states that "... no person can live, no ego remain intact without hope and will" (p. 118). Also relevant to hope are the existential dimensions of the other two psychosocial stages preceding adolescence-- the sense of *purpose* emerging from initiative vs. guilt, and the sense of *competence* emerging from industry vs. inferiority. Knowles (1986) proposes the term *imagination* as more appropriate than *purpose* for describing the existential dimension of Erikson's third psychosocial stage. Either way, it is evident that the study subjects' hopelessness included the inability to imagine the possibility of future redemption and transformation, stranding them in a present without purpose.

The subjects' deficient sense of competence, with its accompanying feelings of inferiority, has already been related to their experiences of shame and helplessness. M.L. Farber (1968) proposes that deficiencies in the sense of competence are significantly related to the hopelessness which characterizes most suicidal individuals. Farber employs White's (1959) concept of competence, which emphasizes the importance of children developing a sense of efficacy and effectiveness in responding to the physical challenges of their environment and the social challenges of their relationships (Adam, 1990). Farber (1968) notes how hopelessness often follows the disruption of one's sense of competence in cherished domains, particularly when the person feels threatened with the possibility of being unable "... to maintain a minimally acceptable existence" (1968, p. 15).

The meaning of hopelessness, as described by the study subjects and discussed in this section, in many ways exceeds what has typically been written in the adolescent suicide literature. The descriptive-phenomenological character of this research project has made it possible to articulate the interrelationship of hopelessness with the other experiential constituents of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempt. This is a task that is incompatible with the methodological design of most adolescent research, which more often than not begins with a set of discrete and predefined variables whose interrelationship will at best be defined statistically rather than structurally (due to the minimal role of first-person description in data collection)

This limitation in the research literature is quite problematic given the fact that, based on a multitude of mainly cognitive studies, hopelessness has been the most consistently confirmed distinguishing feature of suicidality (Adam, 1990; Hughes & Neimeyer, 1990). Hopelessness has even been more closely correlated than depression with suicidal risk (Beck et. al, 1975, 1985). As Harter and Marold (1989) have noted, "reports in the literature have primarily been directed toward the role of *general* hopelessness about the future" (p. 73). This more diffuse understanding, for example, does not permit explicating the relation of hopelessness to mistrust, shame, doubt, isolation, helplessness, and failed identity ideals-- as I have done above.

An exception to this limitation in the literature is found in Harter and Marold (1989), whose research was based on first-person description from suicidal adolescents. These authors report that, in contrast to the usually diffuse understanding of hopelessness, they found that a "... more specific level of hopelessness... was associated with each of the discrete domains of competence or adequacy, as well as with each of the potential sources of support from significant others" (Harter & Marold, 1989, p. 73). The relevance of my findings in this area is also supported by the research of Strang and Orlofsky (1990), who confirmed that hopelessness related to interpersonal attachments most clearly differentiated high from low severity suicidal ideators among young adults.

In attempting suicide, subjects seek to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose, or destiny

Both before and during their suicide attempts, subjects were to varying degrees estranged from their everyday sense of bodiliness. Subjects' attitudes toward attempting suicide ranged from ambivalence to determination regarding the prospect of death. In attempting suicide, S.s sought to transform if not annihilate their identity deficiencies--whether through self-transformation, the transformation of others, or irreversible self-destruction. Specifically, S.s sought to transform their helplessness and hopelessness into a sense of agency, purpose or destiny. While S2 experienced himself as fulfilling a fate to die prematurely, the other three subjects experienced their suicide attempts as opportunities to redefine their identities and destinies while resurrecting the will from which they had come to feel so alienated.

The subjects' estrangement from their everyday sense of bodiliness recalls the Laufers' (1984) observation that adolescent suicide attempts are often at first accompanied by a state of depersonalization in which the body is calmly experienced as separate from the person by virtue of its intended death, while consciousness is believed to be liberated from the noxious significations previously associated with their bodiliness. As previously noted, due to the inequity between the circumscribed scope of the research interviews and the Laufers' more extensive experiential data, a further dialogue is not feasible regarding the relation of body image disturbance to adolescent suicidality.

The subjects' bodily estrangement, though, does appear to be related to the degree of ambivalence they expressed regarding the motivation for their suicide attempts. For example, the subject who expressed the most determination to die (S2) also described the most depersonalized mode of bodily comportment, one in which he felt immune to the events around him and in which he was intently focused on executing the actions required to insure his death. However, S2's also acknowledged that the deliberateness of his actions was intended to guard against the potential of experiencing ambivalence about his decision to die. This defensive mode of depersonalization is similar to the dynamic noted by Zinberg (1989), who described how an especially suicidal adult patient had "... achieved a dissociation so that all affects other than those concerned

with self-destruction were separated and repressed" (p. 315).

The other study subjects, who remained more aware of their ambivalence, were estranged from their everyday sense of bodiliness in ways that-- compared to S2-- more included anxiety, agitation, and general doubts about the motivation for their suicide attempts. It is in this connection that the subjects' suicide attempts seemed to have signified an effort to negate if not transform their sense of helplessness through a willful act, one which at least symbolically endows the previously will-less body with the potential for potency. This bid to revive their impaired sense of agency and autonomy recalls Shneidman's (1985) observation that "suicide is an effort to do *something*, to do something effective, impactful, noteworthy" (p. 237).

Further, in attempting suicide, the subjects' sought to transcend their sense of hopelessness through transforming if not annihilating their identity deficiencies-- whether through self-transformation, the transformation of others, or irreversible self-destruction. The ‘transformational motive' for suicide attempts has been explicitly noted by numerous authors (e.g. Diekstra, 1987b; Douglas, 1967; Hillman, 1976; Rosen, 1976). Hillman (1976) has written most extensively on this dimension of the suicidal desire, which he understands within the context of emphasizing that death is generally the way in which transformation is symbolically experienced in psychic life (or for the ‘soul', to use Hillman's preferred phrase). Along these lines, Hillman (1976) notes how "... *death appears to make way for transformation* (p. 67).... The death experience breaks down the old order.... The soul favors the death experience to usher in change (p. 68)."

Regarding the relation of transformative death to suicide, Hillman (1976) is worth quoting at length, with him declaring that

> ... *suicide is the urge for hasty transformation*. This is not premature death, as medicine might say, but the late reaction of a delayed life which did not transform itself as it went along. It would die all at once, and now, because it missed its death crises before (p.73).... the person obsessed with suicide fantasies has not been able to experience death psychologically (p. 88).

Hillman here points to the way in which the suicidal person has failed to experience death symbolically, necessitating the literalization of the death experience. From Chapter 3, we can recall how Smith (1991) deemed development to proceed only through the disruption, disintegration, and death of a previously achieved level of unity, which must be reintegrated into a higher level, presumably in the form of a less rigidified, more differentiated, and nondefensive unity. Along Lacanian lines, Hillman's perspective speaks to the fatal consequences of the imaginary order of the ego having been insufficiently deconstructed by the agency of the symbolic order. Indeed, it should be evident that Hillman's position bears to striking resemblance to Lacan's reinterpretation of the Freudian death drive-- particularly as explicated by Boothby (1991).

My review of Boothby (1991) in Chapters 2 and 6 has prepared us to appreciate

the relevance of Hillman and Lacan for the study findings. We can recall that Boothby (1991) noted that "... it would not be wholly inappropriate to speak of the death drive in some more neutral and moderate terms as a self-mutative or self-transformative drive" (p. 219). The relation of the death drive to suicidality was implied by Boothby (1991) when he highlighted how "the imaginary form of the ego tends to become the target of a destructive impulse to the extent that it excludes or alienates the subject from the unfolding of its own desire" (p.147). From this perspective, confirmed by the study findings, suicidality was borne of the subjects' desire to destructively transform the anachronistic ego identity structures within which they had become imprisoned-- an imprisonment that was experienced as enforced by those others with whom the subjects had identified and on whom the subjects had depended for assistance in becoming emotionally emancipated.

Indeed, it is notable that the findings have thus far been explicated predominantly in terms of the dyadic relations that Lacan described as characterizing the imaginary order, where relations with others are pervasive yet problematic. This dimension of the study findings perhaps most dramatically exemplifies the way in which the subjects were 1) captured by predominantly imaginary modes of experience, and 2) alienated from those modes of symbolic functioning that may have permitted a less literalized attempt to deconstruct their identities. From Chapter 2, we can recall how the child's Oedipalization includes the formation of the superego as the agency responsible for deconstructing the imaginary unity of the ego and facilitating the transition to symbolic modes of functioning in which the integrity of the body and the identity of the subject are transformed. Of further relevance, from Chapter 6, is Boothby's (1991) distinction between the super- ego's activity and the aggressivity of the imaginary, which both endeavor to deconstruct the ego's unity in its alienating manifestations and which are both understood as reflective of the death drive's operation. Boothby (1991) articulated this distinction as follows:

> Narcissistic aggressivity is enacted on the level of literal violation of the body's imaginary integrity.... what emerges on the level of the imaginary as literal violence is accomplished in the function of the superego by means of a symbolically mediated transformation of identity. The graduation of the subject from the imaginary plane to that of the symbolic might thus be called a sublimation of the death drive. (p.176-77).

Given Boothby's distinction, it appears apparent from a Lacanian perspective that each subject's suicide attempt reflected 1) an effort to destroy if not transform a constricted identity structure, and 2) that his effort was enacted in a literalized fashion insofar as the actual body became targeted for destruction. In Lacanian terms, the subjects' suicide attempts might be said to reflect a deficient accession to the symbolic order, where the suicide attempt is an act of self-castration in which transformation is sought through the literalized destruction of the body.

Heidegger's (1927/1962) relevance for this aspect of the findings, implicit in

Boothby and Hillman, is made explicit by Hoeller (1973) in his framing suicide as a literalization of dread's requirement that the subject "... die from the world of *das Man* [‘the they'] in order to live in a world that is truly one's own (p. 206).... suicide... is simply the reality that a person's way of living, his world, is killing him... (p. 207)." Young (1985) further affirms the status of suicide attempts as an effort to destructively transform that which could not be creatively transcended through a redemptive encounter with symbolic death. Rosen (1976) terms such symbolic death ‘egocide', which he too considers in contrast to the ‘rebirth' sought through the literalized death of suicide.

In a related vein, Bollas (1989) has developed a distinction between ‘fate' and ‘destiny' that speaks to the identity dilemma with which the study subjects struggled. We can recall from the previous section that Bollas' definition of fate was quite akin to the experience of helplessness and hopelessness described by the subjects, and that he linked this experience to the oppression of the Winnicottian ‘true self' by the ‘false self'. Bollas in fact prefers the phrase ‘human idiom' to that of the ‘true self'. He defines "... the idiom of a person [as referring]... to the unique nucleus of each individual, a figuration of being that is like a kernel that, under favorable circumstances, evolve and articulate. Human idiom is the defining essence of each person..." (Bollas, 1989, p. 212). Bollas considers the subject's ‘destiny' to be related to his idiom's potential realization, and he posits a ‘destiny drive' as a motivating force within subjectivity which seeks to instantiate one's idiom. Bollas (1989) defines the destiny drive as referring to "... the urge within each person to articulate and elaborate his idiom through the selection and use of objects [including others] (p. 211).... This destiny drive is that force imminent to the subject's idiom in its drive to achieve its potential for personal elaboration" (p. 33). He further recognizes the destiny drive as fundamentally invested in cultivating the possibilities offered by the future, an investment which entails "... the creative destructiveness... of the past and present..." (Bollas, 1989, p. 41). It was precisely this destiny driven ‘creative destructiveness' that was not possible for the study subjects, who instead felt compelled by a sense of fate to seek a more literalized self-destruction. In this regard, drawing upon the work of Fromm (1955), Young (1985) has noted how "the will to destroy arises when the need for transcendence through creativeness cannot be satisfied" (p. 58). In accord with Bollas, and not far from Lacan, it might be said that through their suicide attempts the study subjects sought to destroy their fatedness and create a renewed sense of destiny.

It is particularly in connection with the death dimension of my findings that I feel the phrase ‘who-lessness' to be an appropriate companion to the helplessness and hopelessness that have been more commonly described as characterizing the phenomenology of the adolescent suicide attempter. We have already seen to what extent the study subjects experienced an ‘identity loss' in the face of their failed identity ideals. Indeed, in experiencing such pervasive shame, the subject ‘lost face'. Goldberg (1991) has described shame as threatening the subject with "... the dreaded loss of self. This is the feeling that the self is crumbling away, without a new valued self emerging to replace it" (p. 51). Baumeister (1991) speaks to the suicidal potential of this predicament.

He observes how following the deconstruction of identity, the potentially suicidal person "... is unable to replace what has been lost, unable to evolve new definitions of self and world. The individual remains stuck in the narrow, deconstructed state..." (Baumeister, 1991, p. 249).

Through the course of this chapter, we have seen that the study subjects' sense of who-lessness was constituted by: the depersonalizing discourse of depended upon others; the shameful degradation and 'confiscation' of their identities; their isolation from others as sources of affirmation; the impaired sense of agency that informed their helplessness; and the foreclosed future that accompanied their hopelessness. Analogues to the concept of 'who-lessness' have been noted in numerous sources, usually in connection with the concept of 'identity loss' (e.g. Akhtar, 1992; Erikson, 1963; Lichenstein, 1977). Josephs (1991) has noted how "... the loss of the sense of identity is perhaps the most disorganizing force of the personality" (p. 13). The relation between identity loss and suicidality is noted by Farberow (1970), who has written of the association between suicide and 'identity deprivation'-- which he defines as the theft of an individual's most meaningful roles by an imposed or alien social milieu (e.g. being hospitalized). Similarly, Lester (1988) cites the concept of 'deindividuation' (Diboye, 1977) as potentially relevant for understanding suicidality. Lester (1988) defines deindividuation as "... the process of losing one's distinctiveness or individuality..." (p. 116) and notes how this experience can result in "... aggression whose aim is to achieve reindividuation" (p. 116)-- with suicidal behavior being more likely when the person feels at fault for the deindividuation, as did the study subjects for the most part.

All S.s survived their suicide attempts without the hoped for identity transformations being immediately manifest, and they instead came to draw upon alternative resources to initiate the changes they desired. Therefore, in themselves, the subjects' suicide attempts proved to be rather impotent in effecting the transformations they sought-- which is consistent with Maris' (1982) contention that "... suicide is an impoverished self-transformation" (p. 4). This finding is in contrast with the research of Rosen (1976), which was based upon interviews with survivors of suicide attempts involving leaps from two prominent bridges. Rosen (1976) found that all of his subjects "... experienced transcendence and spiritual rebirth phenomena" (p. 209). It is likely that Rosen's results were influenced by the rather dramatic circumstances of his subjects' suicide attempts, coupled with their having had the improbable fortune of surviving a usually lethal leap.

In the aftermath of the study subjects' comparably mundane suicide attempts, the more critical transformative factor proved to be the empathic responsiveness of others. This is by no means surprising given how the subjects' motivation to attempt suicide was in the first place so saturated with disappointment and anger regarding the empathic failures of others in their past and present lives. The subjects' expanded experience of empathic responsiveness was in part influenced by their all having had psychiatric hospitalizations and subsequent outpatient psychotherapy following their suicide

attempts. This fact brings us to one of the two concerns for the dissertation's concluding chapter--1) guidelines for the clinical assessment and treatment of suicidal adolescents, and 2) possible directions to be taken by future research in the domains of both identity and suicidality. I will first attend to the latter of these two concluding concerns.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION: FROM THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF IDENTITY TO THE METAPSYCHOLOGY OF SUBJECTIVITY

Review of related qualitative studies and recommendations for further research

Regarding directions for future research, the respective constituents of identity confusion are worthy of separate studies employing a phenomenological-qualitative approach. In fact, several such studies have already been completed in the form of doctoral dissertations at Duquesne University. I will briefly review four of the most recent and relevant of these phenomenological studies (Calhoun, 1992; Carter, 1988; Goldsmith, 1987; Vallelonga, 1986).

Calhoun (1992) studied the adolescent experience of noncompliance with parental desires. Her research supports the present study findings regarding the close relationship between identity and will, with her noting how "in being able to assert his will and personal authority in the world, the noncompliant adolescent experiences and expresses his identity " (Calhoun, 1992 p. 80). Calhoun highlights the bond between adolescent action and self-definition, an emphasis which is in accord with the present finding that through their suicide attempts the subjects were seeking to redefine their identities. The present study also points to the dangers posed by the adolescent experience of will-lessness, a dimension of will upon which Calhoun did not focus at length.

Goldsmith's (1987) findings on the structure of despair converge in several respects with the present study. Her concept of the individual's 'founding project' is similar to the concept of the 'identity ideal' that I have introduced. She deems the threatened annihilation of the person's founding project to have a decisive influence in evoking despair. Goldsmith (1987) defines the founding project as the individual's "... endeavor to express and actualize his or her fundamental values, beliefs, and ideals.... endowing existence with sense of meaning or purpose... this meaning or purpose is crucial to establishing the individual's core sense of self" (p. 62).

The most significant difference between the founding project and the identity ideal is that the definition of the latter is explicitly intersubjective. Compared to Goldsmith, my General Structure accentuates the co-constitutive role of others in the formation and failure of the identity ideal. This difference may in part be a product of Goldsmith's subjects having been between age 30-38, therefore being less dependent than my adolescent subjects were with respect to others' delineations of them. However, this difference is also likely a function of my data analysis having been hermeneutically informed by theorists with a more radically intersubjective perspective than those cited by Goldsmith in her study. In particular, the work of Lacan, Kohut, and the object relations

family therapists (Scharff, 1989) sensitized me to the intersubjective issues described by my study subjects. A crucial question for Goldsmith's definition of the founding project is therefore that of "What is the 'founding project' founded upon?". For example, is it founded upon a fault formed in the face of others' shaming gaze and discourse? As cited earlier, Broucek (1991) has noted how "...to repair... [such a] fault... becomes the life project, and the formation of the ideal self and the ideal other are the products of that reparative effort" (p. 45).

Nonetheless, Goldsmith's (1987) structural description of despair does convincingly converge with that of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. Specifically, her General Structure includes reference to the experiences of confusion, failure, doubt, shame, guilt, mistrust, loneliness, helplessness, and hopelessness. Although three of Goldsmith's six study subjects did experience suicidal ideation at some point in the unfolding of their despair, she did not find the transformational motive that was implicit in the suicide attempts of my subjects. Rather, her subjects considered suicide primarily as a means of escaping rather than transforming their painful hopelessness.

It would appear that my study subjects, in attempting rather than simply thinking about suicide, were more desperate than Goldsmith's subjects to deconstruct their identities through self-destructive actions. Goldsmith's subjects did not conclude that their 'founding projects' were in themselves unrealizable, as my study subjects did in regard to their identity ideals. Goldsmith's subjects were able to transform their despair into hope by recognizing that their founding project itself did not necessarily require replacement, but instead that the means of realizing this project required modification. For Goldsmith's (1987) subjects "the founding project and its prior idealized, now unworkable, modes of realization... [were] no longer viewed as equivalent" (p. 67). With this restoration of the founding project's viability, Goldsmith's subjects experienced a renewed sense of agency and purpose-- precisely what my study subjects sought through their suicide attempts.

Carter's (1988) phenomenological study of clinical depression also complements the study findings. Comparing his results with those of Goldsmith (1987), Carter notes that while Goldsmith's despairing subjects were primarily preoccupied with the preservation of moral and altruistic identity projects, his depressed subjects were concerned with bolstering a more fundamental dimension of their identities-- being worthy of love. Specifically, Carter describes the depression prone person's project as focused on earning the approval and affirmation of valued others through actions that are assumed to be desired by these others. Carter found that his subjects' childhoods were characterized by relationships with parents who were experienced as withholding unconditional affirmation. Carter (1988) notes how the child vulnerable to depression concludes that

> if her parents will not love her for who she is, she hopes that they will love her for what she can do (p. 226).... In order to pursue her project to earn approval from a

> valued other, the premorbid depressed person forms the illusion that she can control the affirmation of the other through effort. Depression emerges only after this critical illusion is formed, then shattered. It appears that this must occur in a relationship which the premorbid depressive regards as her last chance [for affirmation], and in which the valued others' rejection is clearly perceived (p. 277).

Carter's findings converge with those of the present study in several respects. His description of depression more shares the intersubjective dimension of my findings than did Goldsmith's (1987) description of despair. We saw that the study subjects came to attempt suicide in the emotional aftermath of events and interpersonal encounters that recapitulated in an intensified form the most demoralizing aspects of their past relationships. This finding intersects with Carter's description insofar as the study subjects' demoralization included the frustrating failure of others to affirm the identity ideals to which the study subjects aspired. Further, similar to Carter's findings, the study subjects made repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to elicit responses from others that affirmed their identity ideals. We can recall that, also in congruence with Carter's findings, the study subjects' experience prior to their suicide attempts was characterized by depressed modes of being in which they lacked the energy, motivation, and confidence required to continue combating the ways in which they had been demoralized and their identity ideals disparaged by valued others.

There are nonetheless evident differences between Carter's description and my findings. My concept of the identity ideal is more encompassing than Carter's concept of the depressive project, as the former extends beyond ‘being worthy of love' to include the subjects' aspirations regarding how they hoped to define themselves and be affirmed by others within specific experiential spheres-- particularly with regard to the familial, peer, and bodily dimensions of their existence. Further, the study subjects were not only demoralized by others' failure to affirm their identity ideals, but were also demoralized by others' failure to advocate or embody a more accomplished version of the subjects' aspirations (i.e. the idealizing selfobject function). This identity dimension was implicitly present for Carter's subjects, but was not articulated as an aspect of the depressive project per se. This difference between my and Carter's findings likely reflects the fact that identity confusion is a more global phenomenon than clinical depression and in fact includes depression as one among numerous other experiential constituents.

Although Carter does acknowledge the possibility of suicide for his subjects, he does so primarily in connection with their sense of helplessness and hopelessness. While Carter's General Structure does make a passing reference to the role of shame in his subjects' depression, my findings demonstrated shame to have a significantly more pervasive influence on identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. Given this, it seems essential to briefly review the relevance of Vallelonga's (1986) phenomenological study of shame.

Vallelonga distinguished what he considered to be two classes of shame

phenomena-- being-embarrassed and being-ashamed-of-oneself. Based on the intensity of his subjects' self-disesteem, he identified three modes of being-ashamed-of-oneself: 1) self-dislike, 2) self-disgust, and 3) self-hatred. Vallelonga's findings on these three modes are consistent with the shame literature reviewed in Chapter 10. He agrees with the fundamental distinction between shame and guilt, emphasizing how in shame one focuses on a deficiency in oneself rather than in one's actions. In all three modes of being-ashamed-of-oneself, the subject experiences a failure in the domains of ‘doing' or ‘having' "... as unequivocally signifying a failure in ‘being"' (Vallelonga, 1986, p. 1007). Vallelonga affirms that although shame often is interpersonally evoked, it is for the most part an intrasubjective phenomenon founded upon a discrepancy between one's present experience and specific identity ideals or self-projects (this latter phrase is employed by Vallelonga).

Of particular interest is the self-hatred mode of shame, since this is the mode Vallelonga identifies as most likely to be transformed into depression or despair, with an ensuing suicidal potential. In this mode, the failed identity project has been lived with a "... ‘must' motivational investment..." (Vallelonga, 1986, p. 1007) in which the person has highly valued ideas both about who he must and must not be. In being-ashamed-of-oneself, there is the conviction that "... one is the negative person one does not want to or must not be" (Vallelonga, 1986, p. 1055). Further, in the self-hatred mode of shame, "... one lives a definition of oneself... as being only the absolutely-negatively-valued-self" (Vallelonga, 1986, p. 1077).

It is from this shameful stance that Vallelonga imagines the movement toward depression and suicidality to be initiated. Vallelonga acknowledges that none of his ashamed subjects experienced this progression to suicidal depression. His descriptions in this regard were therefore articulated through imaginative variations he performed on his actual research results. My study findings generally confirm the accuracy of Vallelonga's speculations on the relation of shame to suicidality. He correctly conjectures that this relation is mediated by demoralization, helplessness, and hopelessness regarding the possibility of identity redemption and transformation. Vallelonga also accurately imagines that suicidality follows from the foreclosure of the future that accompanies the more intensified elaborations of being-ashamed-of-oneself.

As was the case in Goldsmith (1987) and Carter's (1988) research, Vallelonga (1986) found that the unfolding of his focal phenomenon had the potential to culminate in attempted suicide. My study is therefore an apropos counterpart to these other studies insofar as I made attempted suicide my empirical starting point, from which I worked my way back through a similar set of identity dynamics as those explicated by Goldsmith, Carter, and Vallelonga. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that none of these authors suggested the study of attempted suicide as a follow-up to their findings.

Nonetheless, the present project only provides a partial reply to these researchers' phenomenological findings on despair, depression, and shame. Whereas my study focused on adolescent research subjects, these other studies were based upon adult

subjects. A phenomenological study of adult suicide attempts would therefore be one way to further explore and explicate the structure of identity formation and deformation. Additional phenomenological research on adolescent experience would also be a welcome contribution to the literature. For instance, a qualitative study of adolescent depression would provide a valuable comparison point for my study findings and Carter's (1988) research on adult depression.

Regarding the prospect of additional phenomenological research on identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts, the most evident alternative approach would be to study families of adolescents who have made suicide attempts. We have seen both in the literature review and in the study findings that adolescents' familial experiences are profoundly influential in co-conspiring to summon the suicidal desire. A study of suicidal adolescents and their families would certainly call for creative modifications in traditional qualitative methodology, which has almost exclusively been employed in researching the experiential descriptions of individual subjects.

It should be acknowledged that one of the limitations of the study was the way in which adolescent suicide attempts were studied in the service of understanding identity. That is, in both the design of the study and in the direction taken by the data analysis, there was a hermeneutic component that likely altered what would have emerged had descriptions of adolescent suicide attempts been explicated without a prior commitment to investigating the phenomenon of identity confusion. Nonetheless, I believe that any phenomenological study of adolescent suicide attempts would have to specify some guiding research interest, and that my choice of identity confusion permitted a generous range of findings to emerge.

Psychotherapeutic suggestions and concluding reflections

There are several ways in which the study findings call into question traditional assumptions about the assessment and treatment of suicidal adolescents. We have seen that there was a ‘transformational motive', a reparative intent, contained within the destructive meaning of the subjects' suicide attempts. There was the death tinged desire to deconstruct and renovate what was experienced as an anachronistic identity structure. It has been Hillman (1976) who has spoken most directly to the psychotherapeutic implications of the fact that the suicidal subject is seeking redemption through an encounter with death (Rosen, 1975). Hillman is critical of the common assumption that the subject's suicidal desire is borne primary out of conclusions concocted through flawed cognitions, the correction of which is taken as a paramount therapeutic goal. Rather, Hillman (1976) contends that in the suicidal subject "we do not have before us a ‘logical fallacy', but a man in the grip of a symbol" (p. 87).

It is of course the symbolism of death that is literalized in the suicidal act. For Hillman, the confusion that most afflicts the suicidal subject is not cognitive in character but that rather revolves around the confusion between the symbolic and the literal-- i.e. a

confusion between the psyche's symbolization of death and the projected instantiation of these deathly symbols in the world, which of course includes one's relationships with others. In the suicidal scenario, according to Hillman, the psychotherapeutic task entails assisting the subject in experiencing death psychologically. He warns the therapist against too readily seeking to silence the subject's deathly discourse, noting that such "... resistance only makes the [suicidal] urge more compelling and concrete death more fascinating" (Hillman, 1976, p. 87).

Instead, Hillman advocates the therapist's permitting the subject to fully voice his hopelessness and despair. From the perspective of this study, the therapist's task is to both identify the parts of the subject that require death and the parts that are calling for rebirth. Hillman (1976) contends that "by confirming the psychic death, it can be released from its organic fixation" (p. 88). Included in this confirmation of psychic death is the confrontation with false hopes and untenable identity ideals. That is, contrary to the inclination of many clinicians, the suicidal subject's hopelessness should not be prematurely extinguished. Rather, as Richman and Eyman (1990) have recommended, the subject must be assisted in recognizing the legitimacy of their hopelessness regarding the realization of particularly problematic if not impossible dimensions of their identity ideals. These authors assert that "[suicidal] patients need to be allowed, carefully and gradually, to feel realistically hopeless about never realizing the unattainable aspects of their ideals" (Richman & Eyman, 1990, p. 144).

Richman and Eyman (1990) further note that a mourning process is entailed by the subject's loss of cherished identity ideals, with the therapist having the task of attending to this grief. However, we must also bear in mind Goldsmith's (1987) previously cited finding that the individual's sacrifice of his founding project is not necessarily essential for the resolution of despair. Rather, despair can be resolved as the subject comes "... to differentiate the founding project from accustomed but now unworkable modes of realizing that project" (Goldsmith, 1987, p. 188). The therapeutic task with suicidal adolescents therefore must include assessing the viability of their identity ideals. This assessment could include determining the extent to which the identity ideal revolves around a depressive project. Combining Carter's (1988) and Goldsmith's (1987) definitions, the depressive project to earn the withholding other's affirmation constitutes an unworkable mode of realizing the identity ideal. If the identity ideal in itself appears viable, then the therapeutic task becomes one of developing alternative modes of realizing the identity ideal. Where a depressive project has been operative, an element of mourning may be entailed in acknowledging the impossibility of pleasing the valued other while accepting the necessity that one's worthiness for others cannot be controlled (Carter, 1988).

In relinquishing the impossible dimensions of their identity ideals, adolescents experience both the death of an untenable part of themselves and the transformation of their relationships with those others whom they had previously held to be predominantly responsible for their suffering. These others come to be perceived more sympathetically

as the adolescent is able to forgive himself for his imagined transgressions and deficiencies. Further, as the adolescent's experience of himself is expanded to include previously excluded dimensions, he correlatively comes to experience others in an increasingly differentiated and diversified fashion.

The psychotherapeutic situation presents the adolescent with the opportunity to safely and gradually expand his experience of himself beyond the constricted identity ideal within which he was previously imprisoned. Minimally, the therapeutic relationship provides the suicidal adolescent with the opportunity to begin alleviating the mistrust and loneliness that pervade his experience. The study findings also point to the importance of the therapist's being especially sensitive to the role played by shame in setting the stage for the identity dynamics that culminate in adolescent suicide attempts. In working with these adolescent clients, therapists should be aware of how the psychotherapeutic situation itself can evoke shame in the adolescent. The therapist-client relationship is an asymmetrical one in which the autonomy seeking adolescent is put in the dependent position of revealing more than he may feel prepared to reveal (Broucek, 1991). The potential for shame is heightened further by the inevitability of the adolescent's disclosures being at times misunderstood by the therapist, if not subject to premature or inappropriate interpretation. In such instances disclosure may be experienced as exposure, with the client feeling shamefully objectified by the therapist's insufficiently empathic responses.

We have seen that shame, borne of failed identity ideals, participates in spawning the sense of isolation, helplessness, and hopelessness that characterize the experience of the adolescent suicide attempter. While these latter characteristics have been frequently cited in the literature, the influence of shame has remained for the most part concealed. This is not surprising given the fact that the desire to hide and conceal is one of the most significant features of shame. It is precisely this type of elusive affect that escapes the methodological myopia of psychological research in its natural scientific mode-- in which operational definitions, hypothesis testing, and quantified findings guarantee that the subtleties of human experience will be obscured.

The present project therefore affirms the value of a phenomenological-qualitative method for psychological research. My methodology for this study permitted access to the breadth and depth of meanings present in the phenomenon of identity confusion as exemplified by adolescent suicide attempts. In accomplishing this task, significant features of the psychological literature were both confirmed and amplified. The hermeneutic dimension of the study did not appear to impede the emergence of unanticipated findings, such as the pervasive role of shame. Rather, the hermeneutic movement between the literature review and the findings resulted in the mutual enrichment of each pole in the interpretive dialectic. The study was not adversely affected by the fact that the data was not subjected to a purified form of the phenomenological reduction, in which I would have attempted to set aside all presuppositions regarding the meaning of the subjects' descriptions. Merleau-Ponty (1962) of course proclaimed the

impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction. To this judgment we might add that such a reduction is in fact undesirable to the extent that a fertile interpretive starting point has been articulated prior to the task of explicating experiential descriptions. My interpretive starting point was clearly most informed by the work of Lacan, whose very theory would insist that the identity and subjectivity of the researcher inescapably infuses the form assumed by research results.

Yet, ambitious theoretical proclamations are still no substitute for sound phenomenological descriptions. This principle is perhaps most impressively illustrated by the way in which Erikson's work emerged as so consistently relevant to the study findings. On the one hand, this is not surprising given Chapter 7's explication of Erikson's pertinence to the subject matter. On the other hand, many previous portions of the literature review challenged and critiqued numerous features of Erikson's work. These critiques were predominantly directed at problematic metapsychological and sociological aspects of Erikson's theory. Erikson so successfully survived these critiques due to his brilliance in structurally and developmentally describing the experiential constituents of identity formation and deformation. The study findings support Knowles' (1986) contention that there is much of value in Erikson that remains insufficiently appreciated in psychology, a rather incredible fact given the profound influence that Erikson has had in so many domains. As we saw in Chapter 1, the ‘identity status' research has been the most prolific offspring of Erikson's work. Yet, in light of the study findings, the identity status perspective remains rather impoverished and leaves much to be desired.

Speaking of desire, Lacan of course comes to mind. Where Erikson's strength is in his phenomenology of identity, Lacan's virtue is in his metapsychology of subjectivity. His interpretation of the mirror phase as the foundation for ego formation should over time prove to be a profound contribution to the identity literature. Even more radically original is Lacan's account of the subject's accession to the symbolic order-- an account that captures the parasitic interdependence of bodiliness, temporality, and the symbolization of death in relation to the desire of the absent other.

Lacan's relevance for explicating the study findings was apparent at numerous points throughout the discussion. The study subjects' struggles exemplified Lacan's contention that the achievement of autonomy is by no means an automatic or conflict-free undertaking. A specific configuration of intersubjectivity is required for the development of autonomy. That is to say, the autonomy seeking subject is paradoxically dependent on the other for permission and inspiration to pursue the path projected by desire. Impediments to this path-- whether bestowed through the image, discourse, actions, or absence of depended upon others-- portend a potentially fatal fate for the adolescent whose sense of identity and destiny cannot be redeemed through the symbolic order's transformative force.

ENDNOTES

1. Erikson's (1982) kinship with Husserl's vision of ego-centered consciousness is quite clear in the unintentionally phenomenological language found in one of his more recent theoretical proclamations:

... the 'I', after all, is the ground for the simple verbal assurance that each person is a center of awareness in a universe of communicable experience, a center so numinous that it amounts to a sense of being alive, of being the vital condition of existence (p.87).... it is apparently one of the functions of the ego's unconscious work to integrate experience in such a way that the I is assured a certain centrality in the dimensions of being (p.89).... the ego's synthesizing methods in establishing workable defenses against undesirable impulses and affects restore to what I call a sense of 'I' certain basic modes of existence... namely, a sense of being *centered* and *active*, *whole* and *aware*-- and thus overcome a feeling of being peripheral or inactivated, fragmented, and obscured (p.85-86).

2. Marcia's (1980, 1987) four identity statuses are:

a) **Identity Foreclosure--** the person is committed to occupational and ideological positions which are parentally chosen rather than arrived at through a period of crisis. In short, this status indicates commitment without crisis.

b) **Identity Moratorium**-- the person is currently struggling with possibilities for commitments (e.g. actively experimenting with different roles). The person is in crisis; in short, this status indicates crisis without commitment.

c) **Identity Diffusion**-- the person lacks definitive commitments, and may or may not have experienced or be experiencing a decision-making period or crisis. In short, this status indicates a lack of commitments, with or without crisis, often with confusion.

d) **Identity Achievement**-- the person has experienced a decision-making period or crisis, and has emerged from this crisis with a relatively stable yet flexible set of commitments. In short, this status indicates commitment with crisis.

3. Jalbert (1983) nicely articulates the metaphorical character of Lacan's conception of the mirror phase, an essential corrective to the incredibly common misunderstanding that Lacan was only concerned with literal mirrors. Jalbert states that

... the mirror phase is not merely an empirical, concrete event which consists of the child observing his or her self-image as it is reflected in the mirror surface. The mirror phase is also a metaphor which describes the child's psychological relationship with a primary care-taker who

‘reflects' the child's image' to the child.... The main point Lacan seeks to make concerning the mirror phase is that the child or the subject comes to see himself or herself as being seen, as an object who knows that he or she is being seen (Lacan, 1988a). This reflecting process is first of all interpersonal or intersubjective in that it occurs as the child relates to his or her primary caretakers. The reflective process essentially takes place by means of the parents' response to the child's presence and uniqueness (p. 125).

4. To substantiate his theory of the mirror phase, Lacan integrated empirical research from numerous fields-- including ethnology, anthropology, and physiology (Ver Eecke, 1983). The empirical support for Lacan's theory of the mirror phase has continued to accumulate, as Muller (1982, 1986) has documented in his reviews of numerous contemporary studies from experimental and developmental psychology. These studies have confirmed that the mirror phase typically unfolds between 6-18 months-- a period which coincides with the consolidation of object permanence and with the developing capacity for long-term memory of visual forms (Muller, 1986).

5. Lacan thus clearly posits a primacy of the visual in the construction of the body-image. Such senses as hearing, touching, and smelling make a less dramatic contribution to this construction since they only permit partial experiences of the body. In contrast, the sense of sight alone allows the child access to a totalized body-image (Grosz, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Ver Eecke, 1975, 1989). Research on the development of children born blind reveals that it takes them significantly longer to appropriate a unified body-image and to subsequently learn the stable use of the pronoun ‘I' (Fraiberg & Adelson, 1973; cited in Ver Eecke, 1989). Further, even once this appropriation is achieved, the blind children's "... postural schema... [and] image and experience of... [their bodies]... vary considerably from that of sighted subjects" (Grosz, 1990).

6. In the Lacanian perspective, this ability is significant even during the mother's pregnancy and is reflected in her fantasies about and images of her future child. Does she imagine the child as an autonomous and complete body, or does she imagine the child to be only an organic extension of her body who, once born, will be experienced as an assemblage of body parts dependent upon her for sustenance? (Ver Eecke, 1975, 1984; De Waelhens, 1978). This is an aspect of what Lacan called the subject's ‘prehistory', to which he attributed much significance not only in terms of the mother's image of her future child but, even more so, in regard to the discourse of both parents about what kind of child they will have. I will touch upon Lacan's concept of ‘prehistory' at several other points in the dissertation.

7. An example from the work of Ver Eecke illustrates this point. Ver Eecke (1975) recalls an incident he observed in which

a mother had before her a cake that was to be divided among her family and guests. She started by asking her youngest son, between 2 and 3 years old, if he wanted a piece. After saying "no"

to the surprised mother, the mother repeated the question two more times, with the same result. When the child said "no" for the third time, he took the mother's hand and kissed it. The mother then divided up the cake and some was left over. After most [of the guests] had finished their piece, the mother asked if anybody wanted another. Before anybody could answer, the child said: "I want a piece" (p.234).

Ver Eecke (1975, 1984, 1989) goes on to note how the child's no-saying in this situation signified an effort to differentiate his desire from that of his mother and declare a point of view independent of her without yet clarifying how his perspective differs from hers. Saying "no" to his mother's request did not mean that he didn't want a piece of cake. Rather, his "no" meant that he did not want his mother assuming that she knows what he wants or when he wants it. Further, his kiss on her hand following his third "no" expressed mild guilt about the aggressiveness expressed in his refusal of her offer.

8. Smith (1991) speaks to this point when he writes that

... in general, a third term can be taken as any factor that unsettles the oneness and self-sameness presumably experienced in moments of symbiotic tranquility. Any primarily given or secondarily established trait, function, or structure that serves to maintain nondefensive differentiation is a third term. By nondefensive differentiation I mean differentiation in which loss, lack and limit are owned. (p. 96)

9. The no-saying child thus initially encounters his father through his mother as a phallic attribute (Ver Eecke, 1984) and in so doing begins to differentiate between himself and his mother. The child next turns to the father with the hope that the father's sole task will be to fulfill the child's desires. However, this hope is dashed by the child's discovery that the father is a figure distinct from his mother and that he has an affective relation with her. The father is no longer experienced by the child as merely a phallic attribute of the mother but as a person who possesses the phallic attribute. In now being confronted with not just the attribution but the existence of the father, the child of course enters the Oedipal complex wherein the father is seen as an intruder who must be eliminated (Ver Eecke, 1984).

10. The importance of these points for Lacan is summarized by Jalbert (1983) when he states that

the signifier of the <u>proper</u> <u>name</u>... may help the subject recognize that he or she is not the mirror image and, consequently, cannot fuse with another person who might represent the mirror image. The subject is located in the symbolic by being named (p.154). By having a proper name... the subject may differentiate himself from the mirror image and from the reality of his body. The proper name is a symbol which allows the subject to ascertain that he is <u>and</u> he is not his mirror image.... The subject <u>is</u> his mirror image insofar as he identifies with the exteroceptive

image of his own body. The subject is not the mirror image insofar as the subject identifies with the [fragmented] intero- and proprioceptive experiences of his body which contrast with the unity provided by the exteroceptively perceived mirror image.... That is, the proper name acknowledges the individuality and the subjectivity of the subject. The subject is a symbol to himself and others because of his proper name (p.174-75) .... It is be means of the symbol that the child can desire his own desire and, consequently, develop a 'subjectivity', or a sense of personal uniqueness and separateness from the mother (p.343-44).... It is by integrating the symbolic order that the child is assured of his uniqueness as a desiring subject (p.347).

11. Regarding the relation between symbolic identification and the proper name, Fink (1990) has described how the latter

... is a signifier which often precedes his [the subject's] birth, inscribing him in the symbolic; the subject disappears behind it, in a sense, but must assume it (in the French sense of assuming responsibility for it, taking it upon himself). A priori this name has nothing to do with the subject; it is as foreign to him as any other signifier. But in time this signifier-- more perhaps than any other-- will go to the root of his being and become inextricably tied to his subjectivity. It will become the signifier of his very absence as subject, standing in for him (p. 87).

12. To concretize these points, Boothby (1990) cites the behavior and drawings of children three- to six-years-old, who he initially notes "... relish tearing off doll's heads... gleefully threaten to pluck out the eyes and bite off the fingers of caretakers and peers... [and] squirm with giddy but delighted fascination at fairy-tale scenes of violence" (p.221). In the drawings of a 3 1/2 year old boy, though, Boothby notes how much attentiveness there is to including all bodily appendages and preserving the body's wholeness. Boothby (1990) wonders whether this attentiveness reflects "... a dawning anxiety about the body's integrity" (p.228), a suspicion which seems supported by the dramatic differences in the drawings of the same boy beginning at age 5. These later drawings consist of dismembered body parts which have been personified with faces and names, such as "Fingerman" and "Footman". Boothby (1990) observes how "... when compared to the earlier drawings, which so conscientiously rendered the body's wholeness, this [later] series seems to suggest a sort of deliberate experimentation with the body's fragmentation, as if the challenge were to see how far the body could be cut up and still retain a sense of self" (p.229).

Lacan (1977) makes direct reference to this phenomenon when he observes how

... one only has to listen to children aged between two and five playing, alone or together, to know that the pulling off of the head and the ripping open of the belly are themes that occur spontaneously to their imagination, and that this is corroborated by the experience of the doll torn to pieces (p.11).

Clearly, the child's symbolic ability to name each body part is an essential aspect of pushing the boundaries of bodily fragmentation without undue anxiety about the body's actual integrity.

13. Richardson (1983, p.64) notes how Lacan, in his 1954-55 seminar ("The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis"), "... takes Erikson as his whipping boy..." based on Erikson's psychosocial reinterpretation of Freud's Irma dream (Erikson, 1954). In response to Erikson's psychosocial perspective, Lacan (1988b) declares that

If this point of view is true, we will have to abandon the notion I tell you to be the essence of the Freudian discovery, the decentering of the subject in relation to the *ego*, and to return to the notion that everything centers on the standard development of the *ego*. That is an alternative without mediation-- if that is true, everything I say is false (p.148).

14. Indeed, paying simultaneous allegiance to Winnicott and Lacan, Gorney (1979, p. 539) has noted that "... the genesis and evolution of language find their original necessity as transitional phenomena." Bronfen (1989) makes a related point in noting that in the Fort-Da game ".. the child plays in an intermediary zone connecting the imaginary register of the mother/infant dyad (governed exclusively by unrestrained drives) and the symbolic register (governed by forbiddances).... (p. 969)"

15. Indeed, one year after Freud's grandson played the Fort-Da game, he was observed by Freud (1920) to angrily throw a toy to the floor while exclaiming "Go to the fwont!"
The boy had heard that his absent father was away at war and ‘at the front'. Freud (1920) interprets his grandson's angry exclamation "Go to the fwont!" to signify that "... far from regretting his [father's] absence]... he made it quite clear that he had no desire to be disturbed in his sole possession of his mother" (p. 16). Although Freud's interpretation focuses on the child's efforts to symbolically negate his father, it nonetheless implies that the child has already begun to acknowledge that his relation to his mother's desire was mediated by a third term. Beira (1992) has suggested that, even more so than the Fort-Da game, this second instance of play exemplifies "... the child's proper birth into the Symbolic... [which] originates with his or her commitment to the Name-of-the-Father as locus of the Law" (p. 123-124, translation from the Spanish provided by Beira).

16. In this regard Ver Eecke (1974) declares that

where Erikson indicates how the body-experiences imposed on the child prepare him for the virtues necessary in his society, Lacan shows that the child encounters three times a radical frustration of his deepest needs and desires (p.263).... [where] Erikson stresses the successful use made by society of those anxieties [encountered by the child at each period of development],... Lacan underlines the fact that in his development the child... [experiences] forced renunciations and... imposed frustrations... (p.265)

The key Lacanian renunciations and frustrations listed by Ver Eecke (1974) are:

...[having] to give up the protective and reassuring presence of the mother (complex of weaning), the ideal of self-possession (complex of intrusion and mirroring), and the hope of being the unique object of attention from the parents (Oedipus-complex) (p.265).

17. Erikson (1964) metaphorically describes the adolescent's predicament when he states that

Like the trapeze artist, the young person in the middle of vigorous motion must let go of his safe hold on childhood and reach for a firm grasp on adulthood, depending for a breathless interval on a relatedness between the past and the future, and on the reliability of those he must let go of, and those who will ‘receive' him (p.90)... The young person, in order to experience [a sense of inner identity or wholeness], must feel a progressive continuity between that which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future... (p.91)

18. Here are the virtues Erikson (1961, 1964, 1968b, 1982) has described for each of his psychosocial stages, with the corresponding crisis issues stated in parentheses: hope (basic trust vs. basic mistrust), will (autonomy vs. shame and doubt), purpose (initiative vs. guilt), competence (industry vs. inferiority), fidelity (identity vs. identity confusion), love (intimacy vs. isolation), care (generativity vs. stagnation), and wisdom (integrity vs. despair).
. Along these lines, Heidegger (1927/1962) has asserted that

when the ‘I' talks in the ‘natural' manner, this is performed by the they-self. What expresses itself in the ‘I' is that Self which, proximally and for the most part, I am *not* authentically (p.368).... the they-self keeps on saying ‘I' most loudly and most frequently because at bottom it *is not authentically* itself (p.369)...

19. Thompson (1985) alludes to this important point when he asserts that

The essential unity of time is the only way to explain how it is possible for a person to go through life as the same person and achieve any continuity from one moment of his existence to the next. This means that there is nothing which supports my existence, whether we call this support a substance, ego, self, or soul (p.123-24).

20. I will defer until Chapter 6 my discussion of the significance of death in the convergence between psychoanalytic and existential-phenomenological conceptions of identity.

21. Marcel (1950/1978), while minimizing the significance of narrativity, also accentuates the contribution that particular actions make in both expressing and shaping human identity--

especially acts of self-sacrifice such as a soldier dying in battle. Marcel (1950/1978) notes how the person sacrificing his life experiences "... the feeling that through self-sacrifice he is reaching self-fulfillment; given one's own situation and that of everything dear to him, he realizes his own nature most completely, he most completely *is*, in the act of giving his life away" (p.166). The relevance of Marcel's statement to an understanding of suicidal acts should be self-evident.

22. Schneiderman (1983b, p.75) speaks to this point in noting how in Erikson's statements about the pronoun 'I'-- which he takes to imply "... nothing less than that I am alive, that I *am* life" (Erikson, 1968, p.220)-- "... it has nothing to do with its linguistic function but is transformed into a quasi-mystical affirmation of the value of life." Erikson's affirmation of the 'value of life', from Lacan's perspective, is an outgrowth of his emphasis on the work of the ego in which 'to love and be loved' is the most important aspect of living. This emphasis is consistent with Freud's (1917, 1923) description of how the ego, through the processes of introjection and identification, never completely relinquishes lost love-objects -- therefore denying a place for death and insisting on only love and life. Schneiderman (1983b) further speaks to these important points when he states that:

When the experience of love is made out to be primary, the dominion of the ego is extended and death is reduced to a loss of love. The ego denies death by idealizing love and life; the dead remain alive in the strong ego, still loving and beloved. Thus the ego may recover from its loss by believing that, through death, love has been made eternal (p.151-52).

23. A significant difference nonetheless remains between Kohut and Lacan on the issue of aggression, as Hamburg (1991) has highlighted:

Kohut's interpretive framework sought to normalize every instance of alienation or aggression.... he relentlessly refused to consider them as legitimate phenomena in their own right. For Kohut every aggressive impulse could be translated into a story of disappointment; conflict was always a misunderstanding. Aggression was never regarded as a fundamental human attribute.... (p.354).

24. De Waelhens (1978) nicely articulates the reciprocity and reversibility of the imaginary couple when he states that

the subject seeks to find his identity in the image, but this identity with himself is, in some fashion, his other. Inversely, the 'I' which he takes on in the image qualifies as 'other' the eye and the coenesthesia which see it.... The one who sees, sees *himself*. I see myself, but it is this seeing which allows (will allow) me to say 'I' (p.73).

25. Gorney (1990) presents a clinical vignette which, among other things, illustrates the way in which suicidality may also reflect an as yet unsymbolized dimension of existence. He describes

the psychoanalysis of a woman, Lisl, "... whose main complaints since her early teenage years centered around powerful suicidal feelings and impulses. Indeed, for many years she had often ruminated on the troublesome and paradoxical thought, 'I might as well kill myself since I already feel dead' (Gorney, 1990, p. 148). The turning point in Lisl's analysis was the revelation that her mother had named her after her own psychoanalyst. Lisl's mother was Jewish and had grown up in Nazi Germany. As a troubled adolescent, Lisl's mother saw a Jewish analyst who waived the fee and stated "Someday when you are rich and famous, you will pay me back" (p. 149). During the Holocaust, Lisl's mother escaped to America and subsequently attempted to facilitate the escape of her analyst. However, the analyst was arrested and more than likely executed. Lisl was named after her mother's murdered analyst-- whose body was of course never recovered and who therefore did not receive a proper burial. Drawing upon Lacan, Gorney (1991) notes how following this revelation in her analysis

Lisl began to recognize and realize herself in the dialectical context of the transmission of an unpaid debt-- and the guilt engendered by it.... resonant access was gained into an associative chain leading back to the discovery of an unburied corpse. This corpse, linked to the patient by a name, had been previously incapable of being signified within the dialectic of Lisl's analytic discourse. At the same time, it had haunted her, unsymbolizable in the real, throughout the course of her life, perpetually lived in the shadow of the unburied dead (p. 150).

26. Rank gives several fascinating concrete descriptions of the relation between the subject and the mirror image, illustrating both the self-love and self-hatred borne of this relation. In regard to the latter and its accompanying aggressivity, Rank draws on a newspaper account of an incident in 1913 London where a young lord punished his unfaithful lover by locking her for 8 days in a room with walls of highly reflective glass. She thus could not look in any direction without seeing her reflection. Rank notes how in the course of her stay in this room the woman...

... felt such a horror of the ever recurrent image of her face that her reason began to be confused. She continually attempted to avoid the reflection; yet from all sides her own image grinned and smiled at her. One morning, the serving woman was called in by a terrible rumpus: Miss R. was striking the reflecting walls with both fists; fragments were flying around and into her face, but she paid not heed to them; she kept on smashing with only the purpose of no longer seeing the image of which she conceived such a horror (1925/1971, p.73n) .

Rank's description presents in a single stroke Lacan's conception of the relation between aggressivity and the narcissism of the mirror phase. The woman was imprisoned by her egoic reflections, with the illusory unity and harmony of her mirror image alienating her from the turbulent state of affairs permeating her experience. This alienation seemingly evoked a desire to destroy the false unity depicted by the mirror image. It is easy to imagine this woman next picking up a piece of the glass and further cutting herself, perhaps making a suicide attempt. It is also not difficult to picture this woman reacting to her ever present mirror image by initially

attempting to directly harm her body rather than the mirror (e.g. to scratch her face and arms until they bleed).

27. The sadomasochistic dimension of suicidality was further highlighted by Menninger (1938), who delineated the wish to kill, to be killed, and to die as three components of every suicidal act.

28. Erikson gives an example of such an ‘inescapable identity choice' in citing the case of a young woman who hung herself after being sent away when she was falsely accused of prostitution. He notes how the woman's mother "... had repeatedly expressed the thought that she would rather see her daughters dead than become prostitutes..." (1959/1980, p.137). Erikson adds that once the accusation was made, the young woman was "... forcefully impressed with the kind of ‘recognition' society had in store [for her]..." (p.137), with no appeal to her mother being possible. The young woman thus could not count on ever being recognized for the identity she had been moving towards, with her suicide becoming a desperate way to have a say in how she would be recognized. In terms of temporality, her former identity had been negated and she saw "... no other future available [to her] ... except that of another chance in another world" (Erikson, p.137).

29 An example of the potential for negative identity through suicide is given by Erikson (1959/1980) when he observes how a mother who lost her first born child and cannot become as attached to her later sons may arouse in one of them "... the conviction that to be sick or **dead** is a better assurance of being ‘**recognized'** than to be healthy and about" (my emphasis, p.141). Here Erikson articulates another way in which suicide can become an ‘inescapable identity choice'.

30. Peter Blos (1979, 1980), the foremost American psychoanalytic theorist on adolescence, has emphasized pre-Oedipal experience in the development of adolescent psychopathology. Influenced by ego psychology and the object-relations work of Margaret Mahler, Blos (1968, 1979) has described adolescence as a ‘second individuation phase' in which both pre-Oedipal and Oedipal conflicts are not only recapitulated but resumed with the opportunity for a resolution that was not previously possible. Blos' recent work is a modification and elaboration of the traditional psychoanalytic view of adolescence as a revival of Oedipal sexual conflicts due to the biological changes associated with puberty (A. Freud, 1958).

31. To assess these women's sense of identity, Breakwell employed such methods as the ‘I am...' sentence completion and predetermined bipolar semantic differential scales. Breakwell was surprised, though, to find that these women were generally unable to describe themselves in what she terms ‘abstract self-description'. Breakwell (1986) acknowledges that this inability is problematic for the framework she proposes for understanding identity, since this framework is ".... founded upon the assumption that people are self-aware, possessing abstract self-knowledge which is reflexively monitored" (p.188). In conducting her research, Breakwell fails to

appreciate the priority of the prereflective realm of experience as well as the value of naive first person description free from theory laden language (Giorgi, 1985). Instead, she imposed the principles and presuppositions of the information-processing model on her subjects, expecting them to conform to the cognitive requirements of this model in describing themselves.

32. One of the most dramatic of these entries is a passage from a letter written 10 days before the girl actually completed suicide by hanging herself. The following excerpt from this passage clearly invites a productive dialogue with the Lacanian conception of identity formation and confusion:

... I happened to be standing by the mirror. I looked at myself with a sort of wince, and then, almost mechanically, my hands stretched round my throat and centered in for what seemed like a long while. And then the ringing in my ears stopped and everything became soft and hazy and I could just make out my head in the mirror like a separate, bloated object. I started swaying (with no rhythm to it) and fell into my bedposts and boxes on the floor etc. Unconsciously, I put my hand out to steady myself, and in so doing, started up my circulation. This in turn started me jolting uncontrollably, while still swaying I caught hold of the mirror and my jolts sent the mirror crashing against the wall. KRSHSH! KRSHSH! again and again. As soon as I could I stopped it because it was so loud.... (Mack, 1986, p. 69).

Having read this account, Shapiro and Freedman (1987) saw this adolescent as having practiced strangling herself as part of "... the narcissistic fantasy of taking control of her body, even in death..." (p. 199).

33. To exemplify this problem, Curran (1987) cites the finding that suicidal adolescents tend to experience losses earlier in life than other troubled youth and that, although comparison groups of nonsuicidal adolescents may have had the same number of losses, there are significant qualitative differences in the meanings suicidal adolescent attribute to such losses.

34. Abler, Binswanger, Freud, Jung, Menninger, G. Kelly, H. Murray, Shneidman, H.S. Sullivan, and Zilboorg are the 10 theorists whose formulations regarding suicide are the focus in Leenaars' (1988) study of suicide notes.

35. For instance, the young woman treated by Novick (1984) attempted suicide by driving a car down a steep embankment, with her suffering severe internal injuries and requiring major surgery to survive. However, it wasn't until her third year of analysis that she recalled how it was in her mother's car that she made her suicide attempt-- a car she hated but her mother loved. This point is also cited by Novick to exemplify how in many suicide attempts "... the very choice of method will itself be of dynamic significance and not just fortuitous" (p.132).

36. In the ‘soliloquy technique' of Melges and Weisz (1971), subjects were given detailed

instructions designed to elicit tape recorded recollections of attempting suicide. The interest of these researchers, though, was less in analyzing the actual descriptive recollections than in administering pre- and post-soliloquy questionnaires to assess the relation of suicidal ideation to a constricted sense of personal future. Therefore, they did not contend with issues of qualitative protocol analysis.

37. It is worth noting that Shapiro's (1989) view of the deceptive character of human speech is consistent with Lacan's (1988a) characterization of speech as inherently deceptive insofar as it passes through the ruses of the ego. Yet, not unlike Shapiro, Lacan affirms that speech can deceive only insofar as it is dialectically related to some truth that the subject wishes to conceal. Lacan is quite clear in describing this dynamic when he states that:

... in order to deceive, speech affirms itself as true.... For the one who speaks deception itself requires from the beginning the support of the truth that must be dissembled, and, as it unfolds, it presupposes a veritable deepening of the truth to which, if one can put it this way, it replies.... In fact, as the lie is organized, pushes out its tentacles, it requires the correlative control of the truth it encounters at every twist and turn of the way, and which it must avoid (1988a, p.263).

38. It is in reading Felman's (1987) work on Lacan that I have appreciated the importance of maintaining contact with the discontinuities and particularities of the subject's speech in the process of transforming the ‘thematic excerpts' into psychological language. The following statement by Felman (1987) regarding Lacan's approach to ‘reading a text' can readily be read as response to and critique of Giorgi's (1985) rather linguistically naive conception of qualitative research methodology:

The history of reading has accustomed us to the assumption-- usually unquestioned-- that reading is finding meaning, that interpretation can dwell only on the meaningful. Lacan's analysis of the signifier opens up a radically new assumption, an assumption that is an insightful logical and methodological consequence of Freud's discovery: that what <u>can</u> be read (and perhaps what <u>should</u> be read) is not just meaning but the lack of meaning; that significance lies now just in consciousness but, specifically, in its disruption; that the signifier can be analyzed in its effects without its signified being known; **that the lack of meaning-- the discontinuity in conscious understanding-- can and should be interpreted as such, without necessarily being transformed into meaning** (my emphasis; p.44-45).

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