

Predictable crises of adulthood by gail sheehy

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The Trying Twenties In the text, Gail Sheehy describes the difficulties, as well as freedom, which twenty-somethings are presented with when they enter the adult world. The twenties is the period when one is eager to find his own way of life. Some choose to go to graduate school, some get married early and try out different jobs to see which suits them best, and some stay single and put their career first. Two impulses are at work during this period. One is to be set as early as possible; the other is to keep experimenting. A balance struck between the two determines what one's twenties will be like.

People in their twenties have many "illusions" which fill them with enthusiasm in every effort they make. Illusions also bring will power. Young people don't usually have much money while the problems they face are endless, but with sturdy wills they can overcome any difficulty. Twenty-somethings also tend to believe there is only one true course in life, which cannot be altered. They are blind to other possibilities. Thus if they find any part of their personality not congruent with that course, they will regard it as undesirable and try to suppress it.

They shape their character to fit the course they have chosen, instead of the other way round. They will rediscover those suppressed parts later in their forties. In the text of further reading, the same author continues to talk about the problems people are likely to face in their 30s through 50s. If one can pass through the midlife transition, he will find new purposes in life. But if one refuses to undergo such a transition, he will be disappointed about life which may turn him into a person reconciled to the situation. The motto at 50 might be "No more bullshit". Text

The Trying Twenties confronts us with the question of how to take hold in the adult world. Incandescent with our energies, having outgrown the family and the formlessness of our transiting years, we are impatient to pour ourselves into the exactly right form — our own way of living in the world. Or while looking for it, we want to try out some provisional form. For now we are not only trying to prove ourselves competent in the larger society but intensely aware of being on trial. Graduate student is a safe and familiar form for those who can afford it. Working toward a degree is something young people already know how to do. It postpones having to prove oneself in the bigger, bullying arena. Very few Americans had such a privilege before World War II; they reached the jumping-off point by the tender age of 16 or 18 or 20 and had to make their move ready or not. But today, a quarter of a century is often spent before an individual is expected or expects himself to fix his life's course. Or more. Given the permissiveness to experiment, the prolonged schooling available, and the moratoria allowed, it is not unusual for an adventurer to be nearly 30 before firmly setting a course.

Today, the seven-year spread of this stage seems commonly to be from the ages of 22 to 28. The tasks of this period are as enormous as they are exhilarating: To shape a dream, that vision of one's own possibilities in the world that will generate energy, aliveness, and hope. To prepare for a lifework. To find a mentor if possible. And to form the capacity for intimacy without losing in the process whatever constancy of self we have thus far assembled. The first test structure must be erected around the life we choose to try.

One young man with vague aspirations of having his own creative enterprise, for instance, wasn't sure if his forte would be photography or cabinetmaking or architecture. There was no sponsor in sight; his parents worked for the telephone company. So he took a job with Ma Bell. He married and together with his wife decided to postpone children indefinitely. Once the structure was set, he could throw all his free-time energies into experimenting within it. Every weekend would find him behind a camera or building bookcases for friends, vigorously testing the various creative streaks that might lead him to a satisfying lifework.

Singlehood can be a life structure of the twenties, too. The daughter of an ego-boosting father, taught to try anything she wished so long as she didn't bail out before reaching the top, decided to become a traveling publicist. That meant being free to move from city to city as better jobs opened up. The structure that best served her purpose was to remain unattached. She shared apartments and lived in women's hotels, having a wonderful time, until at 27 she landed the executive job of her dreams. " I had no feeling of rootlessness because each time I moved, the next job offered a higher status or salary.

And in every city I traveled, I would look up old friends from college and meet them for dinner. That gave me a stabilizing influence. " At 30 — Shazam! The same woman was suddenly married and pregnant with twins. Surrounded by a totally new and unforeseen life structure, she was pleasantly baffled to find herself content. " I guess I was ready for a family without knowing it. " The Trying Twenties is one of the longer and more

stable periods, stable, that is, in comparison with the rockier passages that lead to and exit from it.

Although each nail driven into our first external life structure is tentative, a tryout, once we have made our commitments we are convinced they are the right ones. The momentum of exploring within the structure generally carries us through the twenties without a major disruption of it. One of the terrifying aspects of the twenties is the conviction that the choices we make are irrevocable. If we choose a graduate school or join a firm, get married or don't marry, move to the suburbs or forego travel abroad, decide against children or against a career, we fear in our marrow that we might have to live with that choice forever.

It is largely a false fear. Change is not only possible; some alteration of our original choices is probably inevitable. But since in our twenties we're new at making major life choices, we cannot imagine that possibilities for a better integration will occur to us later on, when some inner growth has taken place. Two impulses, as always, are at work during this period. One is to build a firm, safe structure for the future by making strong commitments, to be set . Yet people who slip into a ready-made form without much self-examination are likely to find themselves following a locked-in pattern.

The other urge is to explore and experiment, keeping any structure tentative and therefore easily reversible. Taken to the extreme by people who skip through their twenties from one trial job and one limited personal encounter to another, this becomes the transient pattern. The balance struck between these two impulses makes for differences in the way people pass through this period of provisional adulthood and largely determines the way we feel

about ourselves at the end of it. The Power of Illusions However galvanizing our vision in the early twenties, it is far from being complete.

Even while we are delighted to display our shiny new capacities, secret fears persist that we are not going to get away with it. Somebody is going to discover the imposter. To have seen the vivacious, 24-year-old junior executive at her work in a crack San Francisco public relations firm, one would probably not have guessed the trepidations underneath: " I realized that I had not grown up. I was amazed at how well I functioned at work. When clients would deal with me as an equal, I'd think, ' I got away with it', but the feeling wasn't one of joy. It was terror that eventually they would find out I was just a child. Simply not equipped.

The other half of the time, I would have tremendous confidence and arrogance about who I was — a hotshot out there accomplishing all sorts of things and everybody thinking I was so terrific. I was like two people. " Many of us are not consciously aware of such fears. With enough surface bravado to fool the people we meet, we fool ourselves as well. But the memory of formlessness is never far beneath. So we hasten to try on life's uniforms and possible partners, in search of the perfect fit. " Perfect" is that person we imbue with the capacity to enliven and support our vision or the person we believe in and want to help.

Two centuries ago, a fictional young poet in Germany, torn by his hopeless passion for the " perfect" woman, drank a glass of wine, raised a pistol, and put a bullet through his head. It was a shot heard round the world. The lovelorn dropout who fired it was the hero of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which contributed to the romantic movement that colors our

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expectations of love to this day. Goethe himself was a poet of 25 when he wrote the story. And like the fictional Werther, he suffered from an infatuation with a married woman, an unreachable woman, whose very mystery invited his fantasies of perfection.

Goethe's hero struck such a chord in young people throughout Europe that a wave of suicides followed the book's publication. Today, as then, it's enlightening to speculate on the degree to which a young man invents his romanticized version of the loved woman. She may be seen as the magical chameleon who will be a mother when he needs it and in the next instant the child requiring his protection, as well as the seductress who proves his potency, the soother of anxieties (who shall have none of her own), the guarantor of his immortality through the conversion of his seed.

And to what degree does the young woman invent the man she marries? She often sees in him possibilities that no one else recognizes and pictures herself within his dream as the one person who truly understands. Such illusions are the stuff of which the twenties are made. "Illusions" is usually thought of as a pejorative, something we should get rid of if we suspect we have it. The illusions of the twenties, however, may be essential to infuse our first commitments with excitement and intensity, and to sustain us in those commitments long enough to gain us some experience in living.

The tasks before us are exciting, conflicting, and sometimes overwhelming, but of one thing most of us are certain in our twenties. Will power will overcome all. Money may be scarce, the loans and laundry endless. The evil bait of selling out may tempt the would-be doctor, writer, social worker. But clearly, or so it seems, we have only to apply our strong minds and sturdy

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wills to the wheel of life, and sooner or later our destiny will bend under our control. A self-deception? Yes, in large part. But also a most useful modus operandi at this stage.

For if we didn't believe in the omnipotent force of our intelligence, if we were not convinced that we could will ourselves into being whatever kind of persons we wish to be, it wouldn't make much sense to try. Doubts immobilize. Believing that we are independent and competent enough to master the external tasks constantly fortifies us in our attempts to become so. Language Study 1. Incandescent with our energies, having outgrown the family and the formlessness of our transiting years, we are impatient to pour ourselves into the exactly right form-our own way of living in the world. . Full of energies, we don't rely on the family any more and are beginning to establish our own identity. We are eager to find a way of life that is most suited to us. 3. ...they reached the jumping-off point by the tender age of 16 or 18 or 20 and had to make their move ready or not. 4. ...They started to make a living as early as 16, 18 or 20, no matter whether they were ready or not. 5. The tasks of this period are as enormous as they are exhilarating. 6. Although the tasks of this period are immense, they are at the same time extremely exciting. 7.

And to form the capacity for intimacy without losing in the process whatever constancy of self we have thus far assembled. 8. The young people should also learn how to love someone deeply though not to the point of losing their own identity they have established so far. 9. The daughter of an ego-boasting father taught to try anything she wished so long as she didn't bail out before reaching the top, decided to become a traveling publicist. 10. A

girl, whose father encouraged her to do anything as long as she didn't give up until she succeeded, decided to become a publicist who would travel frequently. 1. The Trying Twenties is one of the longer and more stable periods, stable, that is, in comparison with the rockier passages that lead to and exit from it. 12. Compared with the other stages in life, the Trying Twenties is longer and more stable. It is more stable than the teenage period and the thirties. 13. Although each nail driven into our first external life structure is tentative, a tryout, once we have made our commitments we are convinced they are the right ones. 14.

Although we are only experimenting when we do the things that may fix our life's course, we are confident enough to believe what we have done is always correct. 15. Yet people who slip into a ready-made form without much self-examination are likely to find themselves following a locked-in pattern. 16. Yet people who follow exactly in others' footsteps without considering whether it suits him may find that there is too little excitement in their life. 17. " Perfect" is that person we imbue with the capacity to enliven and support our vision or the person we believe in and want to help. 8. The " perfect" person is someone who stands by us and helps us realize our dreams, or it is someone we trust and want to help. 19. And like the fictional Werther, he suffered from an infatuation with a married woman, an unreachable woman, whose very mystery invited his fantasies of perfection. 20. And just like the character Werther he created in the novel, Goethe suffered from his love with a married woman. He could never get this woman and didn't really know her very well, but that made him imagine the woman to be perfect 21.

That the parental figures, unknowingly internalized as our guardians, provoke the very feelings of safety that allow us to dare all these great firsts of the twenties. They are also the inner dictators that hold us back. 22. Our parents, whom we deem as our protectors and guides without consciously being aware of it, give us a sense of safety which fills us with the courage to face up to the challenges of the twenties. 23. She may be seen as...the guarantor of his immortality through the conversion of his seed. 24.

She can be regarded as someone who guarantees the man's immortality by bearing him children. 25. Well into our forties, we will still be dredging up exactly those suppressed parts we are now making every effort to ignore. 26. When we are in our forties, we will rediscover and expose the parts of our personality that we find undesirable and try to suppress now. 27. That the parental figures, unknowingly internalized as our guardians, provoke the very feelings of safety that allow us to dare all these great firsts of the twenties.

They are also the inner dictators that hold us back. 28. Our parents, whom we deem as our protectors and guides without consciously being aware of it, give us a sense of safety which fills us with the courage to face up to the challenges of the twenties. 29. Well into our forties, we will still be dredging up exactly those suppressed parts we are now making every effort to ignore. 30. When we are in our forties, we will rediscover and expose the parts of our personality that we find undesirable and try to suppress now.