



**THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF HUMAN MATING STRATEGIES AND
THE LOSS OF
MALE INITIATION RITES**

by

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Cover illustration: The ancient Celtic symbol of the “endless knot” or “knot of eternity” represents the interconnection of all things in an evolving but eternally self-regulating and self-perpetuating universe.

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Henry Alfred Paddon, who has gone ahead to the place of ancestors.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indians often tell me that the difference between a colonist (non-Indian settler) and an Indian is that the colonist wants to leave money for his children and that the Indians want to leave forests for their children.

—Colombian anthropologist Martin von Hildebrand

This thesis is an examination—from an evolutionary psychology perspective of human behavior and culture—of the relationship between particular rites of passage referred to as “male puberty initiation rites,” and the long term environmental sustainability of cultures.

I will explore the following questions:

- How do evolved human mating strategies contribute to environmental destruction?
- How did sustainable pre-agricultural societies solve this problem?
- How did male initiation rites moderate the environmental impact of human mating strategies and help maintain the long-term ecological balance of cultures?
- Why are traditional initiation rites absent in modern Western society?
- What new role can male initiation rites play in restoring long-term ecological values to Western culture?

Overview

This thesis argues that human mating strategies, which in turn are the result of the evolutionary mechanisms of natural selection, are a significant contributing factor to our current ecological misfortune. The global spread of Western cultural values that encourage excessive material consumption and the lack of meaningful male initiation rites contribute to the current environmental destruction we are witnessing worldwide.

An accurate diagnosis of any malady is essential to develop an effective treatment. In this introductory section I review the symptoms of this “ecopsychological disease” humanity is suffering from and briefly outline various diagnostic approaches proposed by others which may prove helpful to the examination.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the reader to the field of sociobiology and review the genetic origins of behavior I consider relevant to the discussion. This is followed by an analysis of human mating strategies in Chapter 3. I argue that human mating strategies have evolved

through the process of natural selection as successful solutions to the problem of achieving reproductive success, and that humans achieve reproductive success primarily by striving for its prerequisites: wealth, status and power. This drive for reproductive success can be lethal in the long run unless some governing mechanism is present that limits the reproductive capacity of the human species.

In Chapter 4, I examine the consequences if a society does not develop these governing mechanisms, or abandons previously developed ones. I argue that if the cultural response to the loss of governing mechanisms is the development of colonialist economies that actively encourage the accumulation of wealth and the pursuit of status and power, they run the risk of being stuck in the “adolescent” stage of cultural development, leading ultimately to environmental destruction and cultural collapse.

In Chapter 5, I examine the life-ways of hunter-gatherer societies and their unique ability to maintain a relatively harmonious relationship with the natural world over many generations. Evidence indicates that these societies generally enjoyed a sustainable relationship with their environment, but this harmony was precarious and required diligent maintenance through religious customs, taboos, gift economies, and rituals. Of particular importance were male initiation rites at puberty.

I review the nature and typical structure of traditional male initiation rites in Chapter 6. I argue that male initiation rites of hunter-gatherer societies had a powerful effect on the male psyche and thus played a significant role in the transformation of the male identity. They mitigated the drive for wealth, status and power as a result of human mating strategies, and communicated a culture’s environmental values from generation to generation, thus ensuring its sustainability.

Continuing in Chapter 7, I note that male initiation rites are conspicuously absent from modern Western societies and propose a few historical explanations for their demise. I discuss the social, psychological and environmental consequences of their absence and argue that the uninitiated male remains in an adolescent state of consciousness. He is thus vulnerable to the corruptive influences of economic systems and cultural values that indulge his mating strategies and encourage the abuse of the Earth’s resources.

Finally, I propose in Chapter 8 a new model of male initiation for modern Western society structured around the ethics of the emerging Deep Ecology movement. I believe this

will help our culture abandon its adolescent ways and regain its reverence for nature, protect the Earth and all its creatures, and create a sustainable future.

Plundering the Earth

As with every species, Homo Sapiens needed to establish its niche, a sustainable position in the larger community of life, to fulfill its need for food, shelter, and clothing, for security for family and community. The need for community was special because of the unique human capacity for thought and speech, aesthetic appreciation, emotional sensitivities, and moral judgment. Fulfilling these needs resulted in a cultural shaping that established the specific identifying qualities of the human being.

Whatever the cultural elaboration of the human, its basic physical as well as psychic nourishment and support came from the surrounding natural environment. In its beginnings, human society was integrated with the larger Earth community composed of all the geological as well as biological and human elements. Just how long this primordial harmony endured we do not know.

Classical civilizations came into being some ten thousand years ago. Along with the classical and generally literate civilizations of the past five thousand years, the great cultural worlds of the human developed, whereby humans became oppressive and even destructive of other life forms through vast and powerful social establishments. Alienation from the natural world increased, and new ideals of human well-being neglected the needs of other living species. Because of this dysfunctional relationship with the Earth, some of these human cultures became unsustainable. We can observe this especially in the classical Mediterranean civilizations of Greece and Rome. Fortunately, neither the Earth nor the human species as a whole was seriously endangered because these experiences were regional and limited in their consequences.

In recent times, however, this situation has changed dramatically. It seems a deep cultural pathology has developed in Western society and is now threatening to spread throughout the planet. A relentless plundering of the entire Earth is taking place through industrial exploitation. Thousands of poisons unknown in former times are being released into the air, the water and the soil. The habitats of a vast number of living species are being damaged, some permanently. In this universal disturbance of the biosphere by human agents, the human being now finds that the harm done to the natural world is returning to threaten

the human species itself. Edward O. Wilson has commented that the human species is “an environmental hazard. It is possible that intelligence in the wrong kind of species was foreordained to be a fatal combination for the biosphere. Perhaps the law of evolution is that intelligence usually extinguishes itself”.¹

Our industrial economy, in its relentless pursuit of profit, production and development, is responsible for appalling damage to the Earth: massive ocean oil spills, hi-tech militarism producing and exporting weapons of mass destruction, nuclear reactor accidents, mass chemical poisonings, and agricultural abuse of the land, species extinctions by the thousands. We are plundering the world, putting our children’s future and most of life on Earth at risk. In Richard Heinberg’s words, “. . . we are presiding over a worldwide biological holocaust.”²

The planetary crisis embraces everything from the personal and social to the global, yet most of our gestures—recycling, eating lower on the food chain, driving more fuel-efficient automobiles—seem to serve only to relieve our conscience or mask our growing feeling of impotence.

Books predicting an ecological collapse are appearing at an ever increasing rate. Scientific groups and environmental activists plead with governments, industries, and consumers to heed the signs. Green-washing—deceptive corporate advertising designed to deflect environmental concerns—is all too often the response. Many who try to address the critical issues of the day find themselves preaching only to the converted, while the global economy plunges the world faster toward a precipice of environmental disasters that threaten to destroy the very web of life itself.

Modern society, having lost its harmonious relationship with the natural world, has become increasingly unbalanced. Several scholars, including Paul Shepard, George Sessions, Richard Heinberg, and Dolores LaChapelle, now suspect all these harmful effects are the result of our departure from a hunting and gathering way of life based on a respectful, balanced relationship with nature, to a life of increasing manipulation and exploitation of animals, water, natural resources, and people.

¹ Edward O Wilson, In Search of Nature, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996) p. 186.

² Richard Heinberg, A New Covenant With Nature, (Illinois: Quest Books-Theosophical Publishing House, 1996), p. xx.

Ecopsychological Models

Many other eminent scholars, including Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, Erich Fromm, Martin Buber, Theodore Roszak, Barry Commoner, William Ophuls, Gerry Mander, Kirkpatrick Sale, and Thomas Berry, have studied these afflictions in an attempt to understand their origins and point a way to a saner, more sustainable future. Several ideas have been proposed to explain the alienation between the human species and the natural world. Some of these explanations attempt to illuminate a central ecological question: *how to identify the historical transition that accounts for human beings' peculiar capacity to distance themselves from their habitat*—especially in the religious, scientific and economic beliefs of Western society.

Some “diagnostic metaphors” have been proposed to explain this ecologically disastrous split—this pathological alienation—between human consciousness and the rest of the biosphere: ontogenetic crippling, autism, addiction, dissociation, and amnesia. From one point of view these concepts are metaphors, analogies transferred from the realm of individual psychology to society, or even to the entire species, *Homo Sapiens*, and its relation to the non-human natural world. From another point of view, they are diagnostic tools that could be applied to the realm of collective or mass psychology of historic events. In any case, the purpose of such diagnostic speculation is to discern the nature of the psychological disturbance that has modern humans in its grip, so that we may find effective ways of healing this disturbance and mitigating the present eco-catastrophe.

Paul Shepard, who was Avery Professor of Natural Philosophy and Human Ecology at Pitzer College, was the first person to articulate a psychopathological metaphor for our destructive and exploitative treatment of the natural world in his book *Nature and Madness*. Drawing upon a diverse body of literature, dealing with broad historical time frames, in the fields of biology, genetics, zoology, anthropology, psychology, ethology, history, theology, poetics and myth, and in particular upon the work of psychoanalytic developmental psychologists such as Erik Erikson and Harold Searles, Shepard brilliantly dissected the cultural pathology of Western Judeo-Christian civilization as a case of arrested development, or what he called “ontogenetic crippling.” We are suffering, Shepard says, from “an epidemic

of the psychopathic mutilation of ontogeny.”³ He traced the progressive distortion of normal developmental pathways, which could still be seen in surviving hunter-gatherer societies, through four historical stages: agricultural domestication, the era of the desert fathers, the Reformation, and the founders of mechanistic science. I prefer Paul Shepard’s diagnostic metaphor, ontogenetic crippling, and will use it as the conceptual framework within which to build this thesis.

Another psychopathological metaphor proposed by ecotheologian Thomas Berry is that the human species has become *autistic* in relationship to the natural world. Autism is a disorder in which a young child can’t develop normal social relationships and behaves in compulsive and ritualistic ways. Berry traces the origin of this ‘social autism’ to Descartes’s invention of the mechanistic worldview. The exact cause of infantile autism is unknown, except that it is now believed to be a biochemical brain disorder and most children afflicted are untreatable. However, Nikolaas Tinbergen believes autism is an indication of the failure of real socialization in our culture and attributes its cause to stress in infancy.⁴

Yet another model from psychopathology that offers considerable insight is that of *addiction*. Our inability to stop our suicidal and ecocidal behavior fits the clinical definition of addiction or compulsion. One of the first to develop the addiction diagnosis was the Deep Ecologist and mountaineer Dolores LaChapelle in her book *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex*. In a chapter entitled “Addiction, Capitalism and the New World Ripoff,” she analyzes the interrelationships between the pursuit of addictive substances, such as gold, silver, sugar, and narcotics, and the insidious global spread of the capital-accumulating, growth-oriented industrial society from the sixteenth century to the present. Others have suggested fossil fuel as yet another addictive substance to add to the list. Some authors, such as Alan Durning, see the spread of consumerism and the obsession with industrial-economic growth as symptoms of an addictive society. Chellis Glendinning has attributed the “techno-addiction” that characterizes industrial civilization to “re-traumatization.”

There has been in recent years a revival of interest in the concept of *dissociation*. Dissociation is a psychological defense mechanism in which one’s identity, memories, ideas, feelings, or perceptions are separated from conscious awareness and can’t be recalled or

³ P. Shepard, (1982), p. 15-16.

⁴ Nikolaas Tinbergen, “Ethology and Stress Diseases.” *Science* 185 (July 5, 1974): pp. 20-26.

experienced voluntarily. Dissociative disorders are usually precipitated by overwhelming stress, such as witnessing a traumatic event, accident, or disaster. Dissociative disorders, such as “post-traumatic stress disorder”—first observed among Vietnam veterans—are being recognized more frequently. Richard Heinberg, in his book *A New Covenant With Nature*, further elaborates on this as a psychopathological metaphor by proposing that civilizations can also exhibit the symptoms of collective post-traumatic stress disorder—still suffering from the effects of an ancient trauma as the result of some horrific disaster, such as a volcanic eruption triggering a catastrophic climate change. The effects of this trauma are then passed along from generation to generation through abusive child rearing.

In Chellis Glendinning’s view, the original trauma leading to human separation from the rest of nature was domestication, when “the human relationship to the natural world was gradually changed from one of respect for and participation in its elliptical wholeness, to one of detachment, management, control, and finally domination.”⁵ Donald Hughes pointed out that the first urban societies were also the first societies to abandon a religious attitude of oneness with nature and to adopt one of separation.⁶ Bruce Wilshire, in his book *Wild Hunger*, believes addictions stem from more primal roots—“from breaking the participatory bond our species has had with regenerative source, with wild nature over the ages . . .” and that “Addictions try to fill the emptiness left by the loss of [that] ecstatic kinship.”⁷

Another psychopathological metaphor that has been proposed is the notion that we as a species are suffering from a kind of collective *amnesia*. We have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practiced—certain attitudes and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with non-human life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world. Paul Devereux, in his book *Earth Mind*, writes, “For a long time now, we have been unable to remember our former closeness with the Earth. Due to this amnesia, the ecological problems now thrust upon us come as a shock . . .”⁸ The psychoanalyst Immanuel Velikovsky, in his book *Mankind in Amnesia*,

⁵ Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), pp. 70-71.

⁶ Donald J. Hughes, *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations* (New Mexico, University of New Mexico Press, 1975), p. 35.

⁷ Bruce Wilshire, *Wild Hunger, The Primal Roots of Modern Addiction*, (New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), pp. x,xi.

⁸ Paul Devereux, et al., *Earthmind*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 2-3.

proposed a similar theory explaining “traumatic amnesia.” He argued that planetary near-collisions in prehistoric times caused massive and violent Earth changes, leading to almost total amnesia and permanent fear and insecurity among humans. The amnesia metaphor seems more hopeful than some of the other models, since it may be easier to recall something we collectively forgot than to develop an entirely new adaptation.

One area of study that has been largely overlooked throughout the new ecopsychology movement is the emerging discipline of evolutionary psychology and the contribution it can make to ecology. Its analysis of human mating strategies in particular, I believe is crucial to understanding the role biology plays in setting the stage for the development of environmental problems. This thesis is an attempt to address that neglect and make a small contribution to lead us out of the dire predicament in which we have found ourselves. I will first examine the evolutionary roots of our behavior as a species, and then examine our mating strategies in particular.

THE GENETIC ORIGINS OF BEHAVIOR

There are at least half a dozen different academic theories of why humans behave the way they do, falling into two general categories. One group of theories points to evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology origins; the other suggests personal psychology (referred to as the Standard Model psychology) and the dictates of society (referred to as the Standard Social Science Model) form the rules by which humans behave. These two kinds of theories address the same questions: Is human behavior a product of selective pressures that have evolved over generations, (commonly referred to as “nature”), or is it a result of culturally relative and variable learned options, (commonly referred to as “nurture”)? Although each view merits consideration, there is very strong evidence from a large and rapidly growing body of research that supports the validity of *both* models, whereas the biological origin of universal mechanisms lie beneath variable social behaviors.⁹ In other words, nature sets the “stage” and nurture influences the “script”. This is known as the Integrated Causal Model. (A thorough discussion of this model is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a comprehensive

⁹ Leda Cosmides, John Tooby & Jerome H. Barkow, ed., The Adapted Mind - Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture, (New York,: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992) p. 5.

coverage of domain-specific and evolutionary psychology, a critical analysis of the Standard Social Science Model, and the presentation of an alternative Integrated Causal Model, the reader may refer to *The Psychological Foundations of Culture* by Tooby & Cosmides, 1992: *The Adapted Mind*, Barkow, Cosmides, & Toby, 1992.) I will first discuss the “stage” set by our biological origins by examining the evolutionary process of natural selection.

Natural Selection

Natural selection is the creative process in evolution. Natural selection is a feedback process that is driven by the differential reproduction of alternative designs.¹⁰ If a change in an organism’s design allows it to out-reproduce the alternative designs in the population, then that design change will become more common, that is, it will be *selected for*. If this reproductive advantage continues, then over many generations that design change will spread through the population until all members of the species have it. Design changes that enhance reproduction are selected for; those that hinder reproduction relative to others are selected against and, therefore, tend to disappear. This ongoing process leads over time to the accumulation of designs organized for reproduction.

Adaptations are evolved solutions to problems posed by survival and reproduction. For example, natural selection has produced hunger mechanisms to solve the problem of providing nutrients; taste buds with a preference for fat and sugar; emotions such as fear and rage that motivate fight or flight responses to cope with danger.; and a complex immune system to combat diseases and parasites. These adaptations are survival strategies.

As a result of this simple evolutionary principle, animals, including humans, have adopted behaviors that ensure their genes will be passed on from one generation to the next, forever. The logic is simple: If an animal’s ancestors had not inherited instincts to cause it to act as if it cares about its own reproductive success, then its ancestors would have been less reproductively successful and that animal would never have been born in the first place. The fundamental reason humans have sex is because their genes have made sex pleasurable to serve the end of passing on genes.¹¹ If humans did not have this preprogrammed urge to mate and pass on genes, they would never have sex at all. As a result, humans have been very

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6

¹¹ Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1990)

reproductively successful. Despite the recent availability of contraceptives, the exponential population growth of humans on this Earth, rapidly approaching six billion, is certainly direct evidence to support this fact.

Energy Consumption

In order to survive and reproduce, organisms also require inputs of external energy. Organisms can exist only if they find ways to forestall entropy. This self preservation requires using some outside source of energy to keep themselves intact over time. In a sense, all living organisms are parasites, in that they live off the energy that keeps some other organisms alive.¹² Joseph Campbell was fond of pointing out that life lives by killing and eating itself. Humans destroy plants and animals, for example, to get the calories they need to survive. Early man recognized this cycle and sanctified it with a covenant between plants, animals and people. The yearly renewal of this covenant became the focus of their worship. However, humans are now in the “privileged” position of being at the top of the food chain without the worry of becoming a human “Power Bar” for tiger and bear “parasites”, as our ancestors did. This position carries with it a greater responsibility for humans to consciously maintain their balance with the biotic community by devising and transmitting ecocentric values to their offspring, particularly the male. I will argue later that this was one of the principal responsibilities fulfilled by male initiation rites.

Genetic Programming

Human nature is about the same all over the world and throughout history. It is not very different from chimpanzee nature. In the past twenty years, biologists specializing in animal behavior, anthropologists, and psychologists with an evolutionary perspective have assembled a vast body of scientific research that supports this position. Although humans and chimpanzees diverged from a common ancestor about three million years ago, chimpanzees are more closely related to humans than horses are to zebras. Human DNA is 98.4 percent identical to chimpanzee DNA.

How we experience the world is limited and structured—*but not exclusively determined*—by the chemical instructions encoded in our genes. These instructions have been

¹² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A psychology for the third millenium*, (New York: Harper Collins,1993), p. 105.

passed on, more or less, unchanged for many millions of years from ancestor to ancestor, eventually down to our parents. What they tell us to do is to follow the best strategy for survival that our ancestors were able to develop. They tell us to search for food when hungry, defend ourselves if attacked, be attracted to members of the opposite sex, and so on.¹³

Genes determine instincts, just as they determine all other inborn characteristics, such as the size and shape of ears, the color of eyes, hereditary talents, and hereditary diseases. For an instinct to be passed from one generation to the next, it must support *reproductive success*. That is, the instinct must support perpetual survival of the individuals or families that possess it. Thousands of instincts and physical characteristics are constantly evolving in every species of animal. Each animal is likely to have a mix of slightly favorable and slightly unfavorable characteristics. Eventually, the favorable characteristics will spread throughout the population, and the unfavorable ones will disappear. Genetic instructions are only general. They apply to average situations, and prompt us to act in ways that generally tended to be useful in the past. These instructions are solidly embedded, or “hard-wired” in the brain, and their effects are automatic.

However, when a person is confronted with a new situation, the wisdom of the genes is no longer reliable.¹⁴ Evolution has not been able to build an accurate detector for letting us know which behaviors are worth imitating and which are not. Mammals might be genetically equipped to instinctively avoid snakes, but not unscrupulous used-car salesmen. An infant will imitate an abusive adult as a well-meaning one. This is why proper socialization and cultural education of a human is such an indispensable part of his/her development.

The Selfish Gene

Generally we assume that instincts, drives, and bodily needs constitute the most genuine core of personality, that they are the essence of who we are. But lately evolutionary biologists have begun to argue that the individual person, as far as the genes are concerned, is only a vehicle for their own reproduction and further dissemination.

In 1976, Richard Dawkins, a lecturer in zoology at Oxford University, published an international, best seller book titled *The Selfish Gene*. Though revolutionary at the time, it

¹³ Ibid p. 64.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.64.

soon became textbook orthodoxy. He proposed that we exist as animals for the preservation of our genes. We are nothing more than their throwaway survival machines. Thus, the world of the selfish gene is one of savage competition, ruthless exploitation, and deceit. The genes don't really care about us at all, and if it helped their reproduction they would just as soon have us live in ignorance and misery. Genes are not our little helpers; it is *we* who are *their* servants.

For example, the chemical instructions that predispose an unwed teenager to become pregnant were not designed to make her happy or successful in the complex society in which she now lives. They are just a mechanism for making sure that the information in her genome is going to be copied and passed down to another generation. In the past, when the life span was short and infant mortality high, genes that were able to stimulate a young girl to become pregnant as soon as she could bear a child had a better chance of spreading than genes prompting more modest behavior. Whether this was actually good for the individual girl or not is beside the point. It was good for her genome. The teenager, of course, is blissfully unaware of all this, and obeys the call of nature in the mistaken belief that what feels good at the moment will also be good in the long run. Evolution operates by the ruthless criterion of reproductive success, no matter how repugnant we may find the strategies produced by that process, and no matter how abhorrent the consequences of those strategies may be.¹⁵ The genes are programmed to protect us only for as long as we produce viable offspring. Afterward, we might as well be dead meat. Genes are not interested in how long people live past the time their children are old enough to survive on their own.¹⁶ From this point of view, it would seem that these genes are certainly not a very friendly bunch.

There is a tendency in the basic life force in each species to maximize its reproductive success and therefore proliferate in a cancerous way. This leads to species "bloom," destroying its own biotic support, and ultimately to collapse. Environmental sustainability requires limits, a balancing of one species' drive for life with the life drives of all others with which they are in community, so that the whole remains in life-sustaining harmony. Nature strives to develop governing mechanisms that limit this tendency through a diversity of beings

¹⁵ David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc. , 1994) p.

¹⁶ R. Dawkins, p. 111.

in interrelationship so that no species out-runs its own niche in the web of life, and thus a biological homeostasis is maintained—a climax ecosystem.

But when *Homo Sapiens* appeared on the scene, it would seem that Darwin's dice had rolled badly for the Earth. Many scientists believe it was a misfortune, for the living world in particular, that a carnivorous primate and not some more benign form of animal made the evolutionary breakthrough. Humans retain hereditary traits that contribute to their destructive impact and seem to have limited automatic governing mechanisms. We are tribal and aggressively territorial, intent on private space beyond minimal requirements, and oriented by selfish sexual and reproductive drives.

The selfish gene theory is considered by some scholars as a somewhat biased position. Granted, our genes do play an important role however, the stage upon which this selfish gene plays is quite complicated, filled with other players to be reckoned with: organisms can often adapt to their environment, genes adapt to the organism, and organisms often modify their environment, especially if they have the capability of developing consciousness and technology. According to E. O. Wilson, "Culture is rooted in biology. Its evolution is channeled by the epigenetic rules of mental development, which in turn are genetically prescribed."¹⁷ But culture is not without cause and disembodied. Culture is created and shaped by biological and evolutionary processes while the biological processes are simultaneously altered in response to cultural.¹⁸ To understand this dance between culture and biology one must first understand the architecture of our evolved psychology. Past attempts to leapfrog the psychological—to apply evolutionary biology directly to human social life have—for this reason have not always been successful.¹⁹

A relatively new field of study, evolutionary psychology, attempts to unravel this complexity. Evolutionary psychology recognizes the fact that the inherited architecture of the

¹⁷ E. O. Wilson, p. 126.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111

¹⁹ J. H. Barkow, "Darwinian psychological anthropology: A biosocial approach," *Current Anthropology*, 14(4) (1973), p. 373-388.

——— "Biological evolution of culturally patterned behavior," in *Sociobiology Examined*, ed. J. S. Lockard (New York & London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980) p. 171-192.

——— *Darwin, Sex and Status: Biological approaches to mind and culture*, (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1989).

J. Tooby & L. Cosmides, "Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture, Part I, Theoretical Considerations," *Ethology & Sociobiology*, 10, (1989), p. 29-49.

human mind is the product of the evolutionary process. It links evolutionary biology to psychology and psychology to culture—a process that naturally entails consistency across fields. The central premise of evolutionary psychology is that there is a universal human nature, but that this universality exists primarily at the level of evolved psychological mechanisms, not of expressed cultural behaviors. A second premise is that these evolved psychological mechanisms are adaptations, constructed by natural selection over time. A third assumption is that the evolved structure of the human mind is adapted to the way of life of Pleistocene hunter-gatherers, and not necessarily to our modern circumstances.²⁰ Evolutionary psychology represents a true interactionist view, which identifies the historical, developmental, cultural, and situational features that formed human psychology and guide that psychology today.²¹

Human behavior is the product of both evolution and culture. Organisms, through the process of natural selection, are designed for reproduction. The encoding of their genes determines an animal's instincts for survival, and thereby supports reproductive success. This drive for reproductive success can potentially be lethal in the long run unless some governing mechanism is present to limit the reproductive capacity of a species. Homo Sapiens occupy a critical niche in the biotic community by residing at the top of the food chain. They are thus vulnerable to bloom-and-collapse life cycles due to their enhanced capacity to destroy their environment. Culture is the product of evolutionary and biological processes while culture, in turn, influences biological behavior. Underlying human nature are psychological mechanisms that evolved through the process of natural selection in a hunter-gatherer environment. Human mating strategies are one very important adaptive psychological mechanism that has evolved as a method for accomplishing the goal of reproductive success. What is the psychology of these evolved mating strategies and how might they contribute to environmental destruction?

²⁰ Cosmides, et al., The Adapted Mind - Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture, p. 5.

²¹ Buss, p. 17.

HUMAN MATING STRATEGIES

I govern the Athenians, my wife governs me.

—*Themistocles, 528-462 B.C.*

Sexual strategies are adaptive solutions to mating problems. Those who failed to mate successfully in our evolutionary past failed to become our ancestors. Those of us who have survived descended from ancestors who competed successfully for desirable mates who were reproductively valuable, retained mates long enough to reproduce, discouraged interested rivals, and solved any problems that could have impeded success.

How do animals achieve reproductive success? Although the details are complex, the essential elements are quite simple. First, they must survive to reproductive age. Then they must attract a willing mate. (Unless, of course, they are hermaphroditic.) Mates with adaptive genes are more desirable than mates with maladaptive or unhealthy genes. In order to attract a willing mate, they must themselves appear to possess “good” genes. Females must be healthy and well fed enough to withstand the demands of gestation and lactation until their offspring are self sufficient. Possessing a territory rich in food, nesting sites, and other essentials is very helpful in this regard, but of course other animals of the same species will want to use the territory for the same purposes, so they must also be able to defend it.

For a female, if the offspring of that species are helpless and require care, attracting a mate who will help feed and protect her and her young is essential. The reproductive success of males improves if they are able to attract a mate who will feed and protect their young offspring with particular effectiveness. Producing a large number of offspring is more favorable to reproductive success than producing a small number of offspring, assuming sufficient resources are available.

Perhaps it is more accurate to state that human beings and animals strive for the *prerequisites* to reproductive success, for when the prerequisites are met, reproductive success should take care of itself. For example, bears strive to establish territory, eat a lot during the summer and fall, survive hibernation, and find a desirable mate during mating

season. They nurture and protect the cubs until they are ready for independence. Bears pursue each goal in the appropriate place and time. The net result is reproductive success.

Human reproductive strategies vary depending on their environment and their culture. Underlying all this complexity are a few simple factors. The primary prerequisites to reproductive success in humans are wealth, status, and power. Obviously, these are not entirely distinct and often are associated with each other. Wealth often brings power and status, status often begets wealth, and so on.

The biological differences between the sexes sets the stage for an amazing drama. In *The Evolution of Desire*, (1994), David M. Buss, Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan and the Director of the International Consortium of Personality and Social Psychologists, proposed the first unified theory of human mating behavior, based on the most massive study of human mating ever undertaken, encompassing more than 10,000 people of all ages from thirty-seven cultures worldwide. He discovered that beneath human cultural variability there is an enduring and intricate logic forged by our evolutionary past that guides the sexual choices of women and men everywhere.

Evolutionary psychologists believe that the way humans choose their mates is determined by desires hardwired into their brains.²² Their approach is based on sound theoretical reasoning and extensive cross cultural studies that go like this: Choosing a mate is a major component of reproductive success and such a task would not be left up to chance. Natural selection would have devised mechanisms to ensure the best possible choice of mates, the best possible mother or father for our genes. This is not necessarily a conscious decision. It is difficult to detect who might have “good genes” or predict parenting skills. Only proximate clues, like appearance, general health and behavior are available to make decisions about our future. Humans have evolved mechanisms to detect the best partners from a group of possibilities, and the ability to choose “the best” mates.²³ If this is true, it would mean there must be universal, species-specific traits that identify what the best mate is to everyone. We see this behavior as falling in love, or being attracted to someone for, seemingly, no logical reason. However, our primitive brain compels us to choose certain

²² D. Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979); David M. Buss, p.17.

²³ B. J. Ellis, “The Evolution of Sexual Attraction: Evaluative Mechanisms in Women”, in *The Adapted Mind - Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, Cosmides et al, eds., p. 267-288

mates, copulate, and pass on our genome. Our conscious psychology about choosing mates has a genetic basis that evolved over millions of years because it makes evolutionary sense.

These theorists then ask what those traits might be that would prove so important to mating and having children. The first assumption is that the two sexes must go about passing on genes in different ways. Males have many sperm to spread around and females have a strictly limited supply of eggs and must therefore invest heavily in their infants. It therefore follows that the sexes will also have different criteria for choosing mates. These differences in required parental investment dictate how each sex goes about finding mates and making their reproductive plans.²⁴ And because they have such different criteria for mating and parenting, the sexes will forever be in conflict.²⁵

According to this theory, men, with their low cost, abundant sperm, “should” be interested in spreading their genes around. They should want sexual variety, a high number of partners, and be ready to copulate at the drop of a hat. But these men are constrained from such a “perfect” mating strategy by what women do and want. Women have to think about the needs of their babies, and if men want their genes to make it to adulthood, they, too, have to be concerned about the nurturing of offspring. In that case, men will also choose the best females for reproductive purposes when they decide to choose a partner for the long term. Their mate would ideally be a fertile, healthy woman who shows no signs of having sex with other men. If he is going to invest his reproductive future in her, he wants to be sure any children that result from their mating are his.

A woman, on the other hand, has an entirely different agenda. She wants a man who will provide for her and her children. She needs his money, his resources, and his protection to care for the children she is going to raise. The ideal man would then be someone of high socioeconomic status, someone with a lot of resources, or at the very least, shows a promising future.²⁶

²⁴ R. Trivers, “Parental Investment and Sexual Selection,” in Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972), p. 136-179.

²⁵ Buss, p.218-220.

²⁶ Symons, (1979), pp. 30-32, Buss, (1994) pp. 22-25, 38-40.

The great initial parental investment of women makes them a valuable, but limited, resource.²⁷ Gestating, bearing, nursing, nurturing, and protecting a child are exceptional reproductive resources that cannot be allocated indiscriminately. Nor can one woman dispense them to many men. Those who hold valuable resources do not give them away cheaply or indiscriminately. Because women in our evolutionary past risked enormous investment as a consequence of coitus, evolution favored women who were highly selective about their mates. Ancestral women suffered severe costs if they were indiscriminate—they experienced lower reproductive success, and fewer of their children survived to reproductive age. An ancestral man, on the other hand, could walk away from a casual coupling having lost only a few hours of his time. His reproductive success was not seriously compromised. An ancestral woman could also walk away from a casual encounter, but if she got pregnant as a result, she bore the costs of that decision for months, years, and even decades afterward. Although modern birth control technology has changed this particular situation, we still possess this underlying sexual psychology.²⁸

The Role of Status

Status plays a very significant role in human mating behavior. Among humans, status is a complex matter. People recognize various forms of status in every society, and all people, but men in particular, dread the loss of whatever social status they have. It can be hard to define precisely, though all adults and older children in every known society recognize it in similar ways and conform their actions to its dictates.

Essentially, status is a question of who makes the rules, who gives orders and who takes them, who gives praise and who receives it, and, most importantly, who controls access to resources. In a few hunter-gatherer societies, high status sometimes required the ability to defeat one's rivals in combat, though this was not universally true. In some cases, feeble old men or women enjoy the highest status in a society because many stronger, younger people will support them if they are challenged. All individuals in all pre-industrial societies recognize status and usually agree on how much status each individual is entitled to. All

²⁷ R. Trivers, *Social Evolution*, (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1985), p.136-179.

²⁸ Buss, (1974).

human societies have some system of indicating relative status with clothing, ornaments, rituals, language, and other means.

In modern society a person's status and resource holdings often cannot be observed directly. They must instead be inferred from tangible representations. Among humans, one set of cues is people's ornamentation. Gold chains, expensive artwork, or fancy automobiles signal an abundance of resources that can be directed toward parental investment.²⁹

Generally, men who are accorded high status have developed a long track record of actions that benefit the social group. In warlike societies, success in battle enhances status. In societies that depend on hunting, success in hunting enhances status. Societies that depend primarily on gathering food will accord high status to people particularly effective in locating nutritious fruits, berries, edible plants, and so on. In societies that depend on certain tools or implements or agricultural techniques, mastery of these crafts bring status.³⁰ The willingness to do favors for others often enhances status, as well as healing skills, storytelling, music, dance or art, resolving conflicts within the group, or other socially useful talents. Unusually attractive, strong, well-coordinated people are usually accorded some status just by virtue of their appearance, because it suggests a high level of resistance to disease and parasites, good nutrition, an uninjured brain, and desirable genes.

Just as with horses, wolves, or chimpanzees, high status within a human society invariably confers benefits likely to be associated with reproductive success. Even if they are not the richest members of the group, generally, high status individuals are the best nourished. The children of high-status men and women are better fed, better protected, and are the least likely to be attracted or abused by other members of the group. High-status men and women are most likely to be protected and assisted by others during times of crisis. High status men have a much easier time getting sexual access to women, and they are often the only ones with whom high-status women will mate. In turn, high status women successfully demand special favors from their many suitors, including material rewards.

²⁹ B. S. Low, "Sexual selection and human ornamentation", in *Evolutionary biology and human social behavior*, eds. N. A. Chagnon & W. Irons, (Boston: Duxbury Press, 1979).

³⁰ This may explain why men seem to have a greater fascination for tools, machines and technology than women. We live in a society that accords high status and wealth to those men who master science and technology, for we have become a culture that depends upon that technology for our survival.

What Women Want

So the stage was set for women to evolve a preference for men with resources. Economic resources provided her with the most direct cue. Evidence from dozens of studies documents that women value economic resources in mates substantially more than men do. David M. Buss, Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan, and his colleagues conducted an international study on choosing a mate over a period of five years, in thirty seven cultures on six continents and five islands. The participants ranged from nations that practice polygyny, such as Nigeria and Zambia, to nations that are more monogamous, such as Spain and Canada. The study sampled 10,047 individuals. Male and female participants in the study rated the importance of eighteen characteristics in a potential mate on a scale from unimportant to indispensable. It was found that women place more value than men on good financial prospects – across all continents, all political systems (including socialism and communism), all racial groups, all religious groups, and all systems of mating (from intense polygyny to presumptive monogamy). Overall, the study found women value financial resources roughly twice as much. There were some cultural variations. In Japan, for example, women value good financial prospects roughly 150 percent more than men do whereas women from the Netherlands deem financial prospects only 36 percent more important than their male counterparts do.³¹ This may help explain why Japanese men are Western workaholics. In the past twenty years sudden deaths (karoshi) among top Japanese executives have increased by 1,400 percent.³²

Evolution has favored women who prefer men who possess attributes that offer benefits to her and her children, and who dislike men who possess attributes that impose costs.³³ Consider the case of an ancestral woman who is trying to decide between two men, one of whom shows great generosity with his resources to her and one who is stingy. Other things being equal, the generous man is more valuable to her than the stingy man. The generous man may share his meat from the hunt, aiding her survival. He may sacrifice his time, energy, and resources for the benefit of the children, furthering the woman's

³¹ D. M. Buss, "Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures", Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 12, 1989, p. 1-49.

³² Elaine Kurtenbach, "Death from Overwork Growing Problem in Japan," The Sunday Camera, July 16, 1989.

³³ Ellis, (1992), p. 267-288.

reproductive success. In these respects, the generous man has higher value as a mate than the stingy man. If, over evolutionary time, generosity in men provided these benefits repeatedly and the cues to a man's generosity were observable and reliable, then natural selection would favor the evolution of a preference for generosity in a mate.

In fact, the evolution of the female preference for males who offer resources may be the most ancient and pervasive basis for female choice in the animal kingdom. Ancestral women could often garner far more resources for their children through a single spouse than through several temporary sex partners. Men provide their wives and children with resources to an extent that is unprecedented among primates. Among most other primate species, for example, females must rely solely on their own efforts to acquire food, because males usually do not share food with their mates.³⁴ Men, in contrast, provide food, find shelter, and defend territory. Men protect children and they tutor them in the art of hunting, the craft of war, and the strategies of social influence. They transfer status, aiding offspring in forming reciprocal alliances later in life. Such benefits are unlikely to be secured by a woman from a casual sex partner. Of course, not all potential husbands can provide all of these benefits, but over thousands of generations, when some men were able to provide some of these benefits, women gained a powerful advantage by preferring them as mates.³⁵

Many studies of female mate preferences have focused on the relative importance women place on a man's status versus his physical attractiveness.³⁶ Ford and Beach, in a cross cultural survey of sexual patterns in nearly 200 small non-urban societies drawn from the Human Relations Area Files, document dramatic variations in cultural standards of sexual attractiveness. Yet, "one very interesting generalization is that in most societies the physical beauty of the female receives more explicit consideration than does the handsomeness of the male. The attractiveness of the man usually depends predominantly upon his skills, social status, prowess, strength and bravery rather than on his physical appearance"³⁷ Intelligence,

³⁴ B. Smuts & R. Smuts, "Male aggression against female primates: Evidence and theoretical implications," in P. Slater, et. al. Eds., Advances in the Study of Behavior, (New York: Academic Press, 1993)

³⁵ Buss, (1994), p. 47.

³⁶ Ellis, (1992)

³⁷ C. S. Ford, & F. A. Beach, Patterns of Sexual Behavior, (New York: Harper & Row, 1951) p. 94.

the will to succeed, and the tendency to work hard are qualities strongly and universally desired by women.³⁸

Townsend and Levy investigated the effects of male status on female willingness to engage in various romantic relationships. Status was conveyed through the type of clothing worn by the models used in the study. They discovered that women were significantly more willing to engage in liaisons with the high-status/homely males than with either the medium- or low status/handsome males at all levels of sexual intimacy and marital potential. In contrast, male subjects always preferred pretty females over homely females, regardless of costume, ascribed occupational status, or type of relationship proposed.³⁹

The importance of male economic status has also been studied cross-culturally as part of the International Mate Selection Project (IMSP), which investigated mate preferences in 37 cultures spread over six continents and five islands. Subjects rated 18 mate characteristics on desirability. In 36 of the 37 samples, women placed significantly more value on “good financial prospect” than men did, and, overall, females valued “good financial prospect” more highly than “good looks.”⁴⁰

Most women everywhere have always been attracted to relatively dominant and prosperous men. Henry Kissinger once remarked that power is the most potent aphrodisiac. Most women desire men who command a high position in society because social status is a universal cue to the control of resources. Under hunter-gatherer circumstances, the ability of the male to accumulate more wealth than other males in his group is indirect evidence that he has good genes to pass on to a mating partner. This is also true if his family members have accumulated wealth that they are willing to share with him, since he and his relatives have many genes in common. Accumulated wealth is also conducive to his own survival, and increases the likelihood that his children will survive.

In one study of 186 societies ranging from the Mbuti Pygmies of Africa to the Aleut Eskimos, high-status men invariably had greater wealth, better nourishment for children, and

³⁸ J. A. Howard, P. Blumstein, & P. Schwartz, “Sociological or evolutionary theory? Some observations on preferences in human mate selection,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, (1987), p. 194-200.

³⁹ J. M. Townsend & G. D. Levy, Effects of potential partner’s attractiveness and socioeconomic status on sexuality and partner selection, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 371, (1990), p. 149-164.

⁴⁰ Buss, (1989), p. 1-49.

more wives.⁴¹ Most men have been rewarded by women for accumulating wealth long enough that instinctive mechanisms almost certainly encourage them to do it and to admire others who do it. Women in the United States do not hesitate to express a preference for mates who have high social status or a high status profession, qualities that are viewed as only slightly less important than good financial prospects.⁴² If a long history of evolution by selection has fashioned men to look at women as sex objects, it has also fashioned women to look at men as success objects.

Marrying Up

Because hierarchies are universal features among human groups and resources tend to accumulate to those who rise in the hierarchy, women solve the adaptive problem of acquiring resources in part by preferring men who are high in status. Social status gives a woman a strong indicator of the ability of a man to invest in her and her children. The contemporary evidence across many cultures supports the evolutionary prediction that women key onto this cue to the acquisition of resources. Women worldwide prefer to marry up.⁴³ (I recently observed a license plate frame on a woman's car that read, "If you're rich, I'm single.") Those women in our evolutionary past who failed to marry up tended to be less able to provide for themselves and their children.

Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. Census Bureau finds that women who are heads of households have a net worth that is 141 percent of the net worth of men who are heads of households.⁴⁴ The women's average net worth is \$13,885; the men's is \$9,883. Although male heads of households have higher gross incomes and assets, they also have much higher financial obligations (liabilities). They are much more likely to support wives or ex-wives, than wives are to support them. Among the wealthiest 1.6 percent of the U.S. population (those with assets of \$500,000 or more), women's net worth is more than men's. The wealthiest women's net worth averages \$1.17 million; the wealthiest men's averages \$1.11

⁴¹ Laura Betzig, Despotism and differential reproduction: A Darwinian view of history, (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986)

⁴² Hill (1945); Langhorne & Secord (1955); McGinnis (1858); Hudson & Henze (1969); Buss & Barnes (1986).

⁴³ Buss, (1994), p. 27.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstracts of the US, 1989, 109th edition, p. 459, table 747 – "Household Net Worth–Medium Value of Holdings:1984."

million.⁴⁵ How can so many of the wealthiest people be women when women hold none of the top corporate jobs? In part by selecting the men who do hold those jobs and by outliving them, and in part by having lower financial obligations.

The importance of resources to attraction is not limited to Western cultures. For example, among the Siriono of Eastern Bolivia, one man who was a particularly unsuccessful hunter and had lost several wives to men who were better hunters suffered a loss of status within the group. The anthropologist A. R. Holmberg began hunting with this man, gave him game that others were told he had killed, and taught him the art of killing game with a shotgun. Eventually, as a result of the man's increased hunting prowess, he "was enjoying the highest status, had acquired several new sex partners, and was insulting others, instead of being insulted by them".⁴⁶

Nor is the power of resources to attract a mate observed merely as a recent phenomenon. Ovid noted the same behavior two thousand years ago, testifying to the long-standing nature of this tactic: "Girls praise a poem, but go for expensive presents. Any illiterate oaf can catch their eye provided he's rich. Today is truly the Golden Age: gold buys honor, gold procures love".⁴⁷

Nor does the value of a man as a mate necessarily decline from age twenty to forty, as it does for a woman, because his capacity to accrue resources often increases with age.⁴⁸ Men who increase their status and prestige remain highly desirable over the years. Men who fail to accrue resources and status become increasingly sidelined in the field of mating.

Sex as a Resource

Because sex is one of the most valuable reproductive resources women can offer in exchange for a man's parental investment, they have evolved psychological mechanisms that cause them to resist giving it away indiscriminately. Requiring love, sincerity, and kindness is a way of securing a commitment of resources commensurate with the value of the resource that women give to men. Requiring love and kindness helps women to solve the critical adaptive

⁴⁵ Based on the latest data available from the Internal Revenue Service as of 1990. See the Los Angeles Times, August 23, 1990.

⁴⁶ A. R. Holmberg, Nomads of the Longbow: The Siriono of Eastern Bolivia, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, 1950), p. 58.

⁴⁷ Ovid, The Erotic Poems - Peter Green, Trans., New York, Penguin Books, 1982.

mating problem of securing the commitment of resources from a man that can aid in the reproduction and survival of her offspring.⁴⁹ Men admit they like sex for its own sake, while women often express a need for emotional intimacy as part of sex.⁵⁰

For a woman, sex is a valuable source of power in a relationship. Buried in the recesses of their evolutionary heritage lies the subliminal message that sex is a woman's most important asset, especially if it is rationed. A popular book entitled *The Rules* blatantly advises women on the employment of this very strategy for manipulating the male she wants to attract. Sexual withholding preserves their ability to choose men of high quality, who are willing to commit emotionally and to invest materially. By withholding sex, rendering it a scarce resource—a maneuver any shrewd trader can tell you will enhance the value of a commodity—they also increase its value.

Women's mating strategies have evolved to keep sex in short supply while men's mating strategies have evolved to demand sex. This creates a gap between supply and demand, giving the woman the bargaining edge. If the only way men can gain sexual access is by heavy investment, then they will make that investment to the best of their abilities within, of course, economic, moral, technological and environmental constraints. Men who fail to invest, fail to mate.

That American men who marry in a given year earn about 50% more money than men of the same age who do not is probably due in part to female choice for male resources.⁵¹ A man's ability and willingness to provide a woman with resources are central to his mating value, central to her selection of him as a marriage partner, and central to the tactics that men use to attract and retain mates. Likewise, provisioning failure by men world wide is a cause of divorce and in no society does a woman's failure at providing resources constitute grounds for divorce.⁵² Women are likely to discontinue a long-term relationship with a man if

⁴⁸ Buss, (1994), p. 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁰ Symons, (1979); J. L. Carroll, K. D. Volk & J. S. Hyde, "Differences between males and females in motives for engaging in sexual intercourse," in *Arch. Sexual Behavior*, 14, (1985) p. 131-139.

⁵¹ R. Trivers, (1985), p. 331.

⁵² Buss, (1994), p. 178.

he loses his job, lacks career goals, or shows a lazy streak.⁵³ Evolution has selected for women who consciously or unconsciously know that their beauty and their sex are worth a man's labor, resources and life.

Many social scientists (e.g., Coombs & Kenkel, 1966; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1979; Murstein, 1980) have offered a different explanation for the preferences of women for men with resources based social conditioning and men's and women's differential access to power. Their argument is this: Because women are typically excluded from power and access to resources, which are largely controlled by men, they seek in men those characteristics associated with power—such as status, security, and control of resources. The primary means for a woman to move upward in society is to marry upward in socioeconomic status; hence her life chances are largely determined by the job performance of her husband. Since his occupational success depends so much on his skills and personal qualities, she must choose him carefully. According to this theory, men do not experience the same kinds of structural constraints and therefore, the same kinds of needs and desires. Men do not value economic resources in a mate as much as women do because they already have control over those resources. Men concern themselves with cosmetic qualities because sex is the main reward males seek in a relationship. Social conditioning, it is speculated, maintains and re-enforces the whole process, imparting sex-role-appropriate values from generation to generation. Buss and Barnes call this theory the “structural powerlessness and sex role socialization” hypothesis and note that it does not address “the question of the origins of sex role socialization practices and of the existing economic power structure.”⁵⁴ Nor does it explain the transcultural nature of sex differences or men's preferences in a mate.⁵⁵

The structural powerlessness hypothesis is directly contradicted by available data. Interview studies of both medical students and leaders in the women's movement reveal that women's sexual tastes become more, rather than less, discriminating as their wealth, power, and social status *increases*. Fifteen feminist leaders, when asked what traits they sought in a man, recurrently used words that connote high status: “very rich” or “brilliant” or “genius.”

⁵³ M. C. Langhorne & P. F. Secord, “Variations in marital needs with age, sex, marital status, and regional composition”, Journal of Social Psychology, 41, (1955), p19-37.

⁵⁴ D. M. Buss & M. F. Barnes, “Preferences in human mate selection,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50, (1986), p. 568.

⁵⁵ Ellis, (1992), p. 267-288.

Lavish dinners, large tips, stunning suits, and so forth were regularly referred to. In short, these high power women wanted super-powerful men.⁵⁶ Women in medical school as in general, want men who are at least on a par with their own socioeconomic level, and preferably more so, regardless of how high that level is.⁵⁷ These findings concur with those of Buss who found that “women who make more money tend to value monetary and professional status of mates more than those who make less money.”⁵⁸ The evidence suggests that the female tendency to favor high-status males is the product of a psychological mechanism that operates whether a woman’s own socioeconomic status is high or low. Buss concludes that:

Structural powerlessness does have an element of truth in that men in most cultures do control resources and exclude women from power. But the theory cannot explain that men try to exclude other men from power at least as much as women, that the origins of male control of resources remain unexplained, that women have not evolved larger, stronger bodies to acquire resources directly . . . Evolutionary psychology accounts for this constellation of findings. Men strive to control resources and to exclude other men from resources to fulfill women’s mating preferences. In human evolutionary history, men who failed to accumulate resources failed to attract mates. Men’s larger bodies and more powerful status drives are due, at least in part, to the preferences that women have expressed over the past few million years.⁵⁹

Buss’ findings provide the first extensive cross-cultural evidence supporting the thesis of an evolutionary basis for the psychology of human mating. Because ancestral women faced the tremendous burdens of internal fertilization, a nine month gestation and lactation, they would have benefited tremendously by selecting mates who possessed resources. These preferences helped our ancestral mothers solve the adaptive problems of survival and reproduction.

What Men Want

Simply stated, men want females. Not just ordinary females, but physically attractive ones, and as many as they can acquire. Men’s preference for physically attractive mates is among the most consistently documented, species-wide psychological mechanism that transcends

⁵⁶ Fowler cited in D. Freedman, Human Sociobiology: A holistic approach, (New York: Macmillan, 1979)

⁵⁷ Blumstein & Schwartz, (1983); Goldman, Westoff, & Hammerslough, (1984); Townsend, (1987, 1989); Udry, (1981); Townsend & Levy, (1990); Wiederman and Allgeier, (1992)

⁵⁸ Buss, (1994), p. 41.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 47.

culture.⁶⁰ Ancestral men who actualized this preference enjoyed greater reproductive success than those who did not. Universal standards for female beauty embody cues to women's reproductive capacity.⁶¹ Female beauty can be considered as nature's marketing tool—the way of marketing a woman for the survival of her genes. Contrary to modern humanistic ideals, all societies in all places generally agree on what constitutes an attractive female or male form or face.⁶² The main exception to this rule is that—within certain limits—a slim figure is considered more attractive in societies in which food is plentiful, and plump figure is considered more attractive in societies where food is scarce. Nevertheless, men in all societies tend to desire women whose waists are about 30 percent narrower than their hips. It turns out that hip-to-waist ratio is a strong predictor of biological fertility.⁶³

Men who are high in occupational status are able to marry women who are considerably more physically attractive than are men who are low in occupational status.⁶⁴ Kings and despots routinely stocked their harems with young, attractive and nubile women and had sex with them frequently. The Moroccan emperor Moulay Ismail the Bloodthirsty, for example, had a harem of 500 women and admitted having sired 888 children.⁶⁵ Roman, Babylonian, Egyptian, Incan, Indian and Chinese emperors all shared the tastes of Emperor Ismail and scoured their kingdoms for as many young pretty women as could be found.⁶⁶ Men across cultures seek attractive women (“trophy wives”) as mates not simply for their reproductive value but also as signals of status to same-sex competitors and to other potential mates.⁶⁷

Although most men place a premium on youth and beauty in a mate, not all men are successful in achieving their desires. Men who lack the status and resources that women want generally have the most difficult time attracting pretty, young women and must ultimately

⁶⁰ Thakerar & Iwawaki, (1979); Morse, Reis, Gruzen, & Wolf, (1974); Cross & Cross, (1971); Jackson, 1992; Buss, (1987).

⁶¹ Orions & Heerwagon, (1992); Symons, (1979); Ford & Beach, (1951)

⁶² M. R. Cunningham, et al, “The facialmetric prediction of physical attractiveness across races, ethnic groups, and cultures.” (Unpublished manuscript, Dept. of Psychology, Univ. of Louisville, Kentucky, 1989) in Buss, (1994).

⁶³ D. Singh, “Adaptive significance of waist-to-hip ratio and female physical attractiveness,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, (1993), p. 293-307.

⁶⁴ Elder, (1969); Taylor & Glen, (1976); Udry & Eckland, (1984).

⁶⁵ Daley & Wilson, (1983), p. 79.

⁶⁶ L. Betzig, “Roman polygyny”, Ethology and Sociobiology, 13, (1992), p. 309-349.

⁶⁷ Buss, (1994), p. 59.

settle for less. (The old folk wisdom of advising a young man to marry a homely wife, and thereby avoiding the excessive economic and material demands associated with keeping a pretty wife happy, currently would seem to be sound environmental advice).

The unpleasant fact of human mating is that desirable partners are always outnumbered by those who desire them. Some men demonstrate a superior ability to accrue resources; because women typically desire these men, women compete with each other to attract them. Only women high in desirability, however, succeed. Women of striking beauty—“the face that launched a thousand ships . . .”—are desired by many men, but only a few men succeed in attracting them.

Hierarchy and Territory

Hierarchy and territory are the two basic methods that animals use to demonstrate to potential mates that they are healthy and possess good genes. Many animals employ some combinations of the two methods. Most animals are territorial to some degree. The size of the territory depends on the species and the environment. Sometimes an individual defends a territory; sometimes a group defends a territory. When it is a group, the group usually contains many close relatives. A small fish might claim and defend a territory of a few square feet. A grizzly bear might claim and defend a territory covering several square miles. Typically, an animal or clan claims a territory large enough to provide enough food to ensure reproductive success, yet small enough that its borders can be defended from intruders of the same species. Environments rich in food supplies produce smaller territories. Territorial combat does not often result in death or severe injury to either of the combatants. Once that it is clear that one animal has the strength and skill necessary to defeat the other, the weaker animal signals its submission and retreats, surrendering part or all of its territory.⁶⁸

The ability to claim and defend territory is strong circumstantial evidence of reproductive success, and vice versa. Other animals, especially females of the same species instinctually recognize this and respond accordingly. Males who claim bountiful territories are considered highly desirable mates by females. However, these gender mating strategies encourage male competition for resources. Among human animals, if left unchecked by some

⁶⁸ Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 220.

social control mechanism, it is readily apparent this competition can lead to wars over scarce resources and the over-exploitation of existing natural resources. Most wars have been fought over the control of resources such as forests, cropland, oil, coal, and minerals, with increasing carnage as a result. Almost one out of three American men is a veteran.⁶⁹ In one World War I battle alone (the battle of the Somme), more than one million men were killed or maimed.⁷⁰

Competition and Aggression

Animals that live in social groups form dominance (status) hierarchies. Some animals live in social groups year-round and form hierarchies accordingly. Other animals live solitary territorial lives for part of the year and then congregate during certain seasons for the purpose of forming hierarchies and mating. High-status males get their pick of females, though they tend to prefer high-status females. Females in turn compete with each other to get access to high status males, food for themselves and their offspring, the best nesting sites, and so on. Almost all females eventually mate. In most species only the high-status males mate. The others wish to, but are driven off by the dominant males. It not just coincidental that in nearly every society ever studied, men try to defeat other men in athletic competition, and champion athletes are considered desirable mates by large numbers of women. The basketball star, Magic Johnson, has boasted he slept with over a thousand women.

Scientific studies abound establishing the link of testosterone to aggression. High concentrations of testosterone have been found in those men who are more likely to have committed crimes of a violent nature.⁷¹ The Darwinian usefulness of a high testosterone level is fairly obvious: muscle mass and stamina helped in the hunt. The bottom line is this: the better hunter our male "criminal" ancestor was, the more resources he acquired. The more resources our long ago male gathered, the better the chance of obtaining a higher-ranking female who would be lured by his comparatively larger cache of resources. The ancient Celts

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: (1991), 111th ed., p. 348.

⁷⁰ John Laffin, *Brasseys Battles: 3500 Years of Conflict, Campaigns, and Wars from A-Z*, (London, A. Wheaton & Co., 1986), p. 39.

⁷¹ Mesquida and Wiener, *Ethology and Sociobiology*, Volume 17, Number 4, (July 1996), *Human Collective Aggression: A Behavioral Ecology Perspective*.

were renowned throughout the European continent for their superior fighting skills and ferociousness in battle. Legend speaks of Celtic women baring their breasts in the midst of battle to reinvigorate their warriors. Men were aggressive then, and in most cases are aggressive today because it is this "aggression," that helps to acquire what females want most: resources, and what males want most: females. This is as true of a "successful" CEO of a Silicon Valley corporation, as it is of a gang member in East Oakland. Violence is often the recourse of people who lack resources that would otherwise elicit voluntary compliance with their wishes.⁷² Rape is perpetrated more often by marginal men who lack the status and resources that women seek in long-term mates.⁷³

If analyzed from an evolutionary psychology perspective, male "aggression" was and is used to obtain resources which ultimately attract and benefit the female. The primal motivation is not to commit "crime" but to attract a mate, copulate, and thereby pass one's genes on to the next generation. This simple rationale explains how aggression becomes selected-for as a beneficial trait from generation to generation. Those individuals who readily learned violence had a greater chance of producing more offspring and surviving in the harsh environments common to early societies.

The theory that reproductive competition and the struggle to pass on one's genes is a cause of violence in human societies is a well developed and highly specialized explanation from the field of anthropology. Those who readily learn and use violence to acquire resources are more prone to the survival of their genes and the passage of their beneficial traits. There are many ethnographic cases that support this theory, ranging from Native American tribes and their scalping rituals to Pacific Islanders and their sexually involved initiation rites. However, the most outstanding ethnographic example of violence related to sexual selection is found in the work done by Napoleon Chagnon, a prominent anthropologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Throughout his lifelong studies with the Yanomamö of the Amazon River area, Chagnon has been able to develop many theories on the nature of human violence. The most remarkable evidence he reports is that those males in the tribe who have amassed many kills over a lifetime tend to have more wives than those who have not

⁷² M. Wilson, "Conflict and homicide in evolutionary perspective", in Sociobiology and the social sciences, eds. R. Bell & N. Bell, (Lubbock: Texas Tech Univ. Press, 1989), p.53.

⁷³ R. Thornhill & N. Thornhill, "Human rape: An evolutionary analysis", Ethology and Sociobiology, 4, (1983). p. 63-99.

murdered.⁷⁴ Thus reproductive competition could be a means of instigating violent behavior among the males of a contained population. In the case of these Amazonian natives, violent individuals are able to pass on more of their genes to subsequent generations. Aggressive behavior is respected and is selected for in this small society. This actual account of living natives provides an example of how violence is related to sexual selection and the passage of genes.

Another one of men's key mating strategies is to form coalitions (i.e. gangs) with other men. These organized alliances give men the power to triumph over other men in their quest for resources and thus, sexual access. In animals, strong coalitions are seen among baboons, chimpanzees, and dolphins.⁷⁵ Human males, too, form alliances for gaining resources such as large game, power within the extended group, ways to defend against coalitions of other men, and sexual access to women.⁷⁶ The survival and reproductive benefits derived from these coalitional activities constituted tremendous selection pressure over human evolutionary history for men to form alliances with other men. Since ancestral women did not hunt large game, declare war on other tribes, or attempt to forcibly capture men from other tribes they did not experience equivalent selection pressure to form coalitions.⁷⁷

Given men's tendency to take physical risks in their pursuit of the resources needed for success at mating, it comes as no surprise that warfare is almost exclusively a male activity. Among the Yanomamö, there are two key motives that spur men to declare war on another tribe—a desire to *capture* the wives of other men or a desire to *recapture* wives that were lost in previous raids. When Chagnon explained to his Yanomamö informants that his country declared war for ideals such as freedom and democracy, they were astonished. It seemed silly to them to risk one's life for anything other than capturing women.⁷⁸

Other societies, for example the Narragansett, an early Native American tribe, believed that wars with other tribes were “more for pastime, than to conquer and subdue enemies.” The Narragansett form of war, like that of most indigenous peoples, and virtually

⁷⁴ N. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The fierce people* (3rd ed.), (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983), p. 987.

⁷⁵ Conner, Smolker & Richards, (1992); Nishida & Goodall, (1986); Goodall, (1986)

⁷⁶ R. D. Alexander, *The biology of moral systems*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987); Chagnon, (1983).

⁷⁷ Tooby & Cosmides, (1989), p. 29-49.

⁷⁸ Chagnon, (1983).

all Native American tribes, does not have extermination of the opponent as the goal. After all, neighbors are necessary to trade with, to maintain a strong gene pool through intermarriage, and to ensure cultural diversity. Most tribes wouldn't even want the lands of other tribes, because they would have concerns about violating their sacred areas. Even the killing of "enemies" is not most often the goal of tribal "wars". It is most often to fight to some predetermined measure of "victory" such as seizing a staff, crossing a particular line, or wounding or submission of the opponent⁷⁹

Overabundance of Males

A related theory on male aggression and violence is based on recent work presented to the Association for Politics and Life Sciences by psychologists Christian Mesquida and Neil Weiner of York University in Toronto, Canada. They claim war is a form of intrasexual male competition among groups, occasionally to obtain mates, but more often to acquire the resources necessary to attract and retain mates. If the sexual access levels of certain populations are very low in some places, violent behavior allows one to obtain wives in these societies. The likelihood of war is apparently higher in societies with a high ratio of males than in societies with a low ratio of males.⁸⁰ According to Mesquida and Weiner, what triggers most wars is not ideology or honor but a society bottom-heavy with young, unmarried and violence-prone males who are vulnerable to the manipulations of propaganda and the self-serving interests of the state. Napoleon Chagnon theorizes that wars have been a convenient means for older leaders to deal with a surplus of young men vying with them for women and the resources that attract them.⁸¹ He also believes that various societies, including the Yanomamö of Brazil, have tried to diffuse this danger by creating back-breaking chores for young men, or in the case of medieval society, by sending them off on the Crusades.

Young male fighters may not be conscious that what they are doing is seeking resources in order to compete for wives, but in evolutionary terms, that is their fundamental motivation. Mesquida and Weiner found that "all violent group confrontations are perpetrated

⁷⁹ Hartman, (1998), p. 117

⁸⁰ W. Divale & M. Harris, "Population, warfare, and the male supremacist complex", *American Anthropologist*, 78, (1976), p. 521-538.

⁸¹ Chagnon, (1983)

almost exclusively by young males of reproductive age, most of them unmarried.”⁸² Their evidence suggests that an abundance of young males is a necessary condition for the emergence of violent conflicts. If so, the gender ratio in China, currently heavily weighted towards young males, bears close watching.

Men’s dominant control of resources can be traced, in part, to women’s preferences in choosing a mate.⁸³ These preferences, operating repeatedly over thousands of generations, have led women to favor men who possess status and resources and to disfavor men who lack these assets. Women’s preferences thus established a critical set of ground rules for men in their competition with one another. Modern men have inherited from their ancestors psychological mechanisms that not only give priority to resources and status but also lead men to take risks to attain resources and status. Ancestral men who failed to take calculated risks to acquire such resources failed to attract women as mates.

Women’s preferences for successful, ambitious and resourceful mates and men’s competitive mating strategies evolved together creating the conditions for men, pursuing the prerequisites to reproductive success, to dominate in the realm of resources. The origin of male control over resources reveals some of the primary causes of men’s continuing control of resources. Women today continue to want men who have resources and reject men who lack resources. These preferences are expressed repeatedly and invariably in dozens of studies conducted on tens of thousands of individuals in scores of countries worldwide.

Many have argued that the present values and behaviors of Western civilization are primarily due to the rise of patriarchy and subsequent predominance of typically male traits. Granted, males have evolved to be tough, aggressive, competitive, unemotional, able to lead and to conquer in order to acquire the prerequisites to reproductive success. By the same token, women continue to reinforce this behavior by encouraging competition between males and rewarding men who accumulate wealth, status and power as a result of their inherited mating strategies. However, the fundamental problem, from an ecological perspective, is that there is no such thing as *enough* reproductive success. No *inherent instinct* tells men or women that they have accumulated enough status, wealth or power—the prerequisites to reproductive success. To the contrary, such an instinctive mechanism would contradict the

⁸² “Excess of young men cited as spark that ignites wars”, Boston Globe, (September 21, 1998)

⁸³ Buss, (1989).

basic principles of evolution. The excessive resource consumption now threatening the viability of the Earth's living systems is deeply rooted in the interplay of both male and female mating strategies. The results of these mating strategies are multiplied on a grand scale by a growing population employing powerful technologies and a global economic system that is rapidly threatening to exceed the carrying capacity of the planet. Yet, both males and females are unaware of the biological forces underlying such behavior.

Wealth accumulation has short-term survival value, whereas resource conservation has long-term survival value. The acquisition of wealth has immediate survival value to a male, for it helps him to acquire a mate and reproduce his genetic offspring. The accumulation of wealth has immediate survival value to the female, for her immediate interest is ensuring she has adequate resources available for her children to survive to adulthood. Following the law of evolution, this survival mechanism ensured reproductive success only over the short term (from generation to the next immediate generation), and became part of our genetic heritage. According to Edward O. Wilson:

This admittedly dour scenario is based on what can be termed the juggernaut theory of human nature, which holds that people are programmed by their genetic heritage to be so selfish that a sense of global responsibility will come too late. Individuals place themselves first, family second, tribe third, and the rest of the world a distant fourth. Their genes also predispose them to plan ahead for at most one or two generations. They fret over the petty problems and conflicts of their daily lives and respond swiftly and often ferociously to slight challenges to their status and tribal security. But oddly, as psychologists have discovered, humans also tend to underestimate both the likelihood and impact of such natural disasters as major earthquakes and great storms.

The reason for this myopic fog, evolutionary biologists contend, is that it was actually advantageous during all but the last few millennia of the two million years of existence of the genus *Homo*. The brain evolved into its present form during this long stretch of evolutionary time, during which humans existed in small, preliterate hunter-gatherer bands. Life was precarious and short. A premium was placed on close attention to the near future and reproduction, and little else. Disasters of magnitude that occurred once every few centuries were forgotten or transmitted into myth. So today the human mind still works comfortably backward and forward for only a few years, spanning a period not exceeding one or two

generations. Those in past ages whose genes inclined them to short term thinking lived longer and had more children than those who did not. “Prophets never enjoyed a Darwinian edge.”⁸⁴

My genes, a biochemical unit of inheritance, cannot “know” the impact my mating strategies have on my descendants generations in the future. They are merely programmed to reproduce themselves *now*, in any way they can. On the other hand, the survival value of resource conservation, which primarily deals with the survival of several generations spanning a longer time period, is dependent upon social customs and education for its transmission to subsequent generations. Thus, while we may not be able to totally undo a genetic disposition, we can shape it to some extent. Culture has the ability to modulate biological drives. In fact, it is the *responsibility* of culture to modulate those biological drives if that society expects to survive long enough to mature into a sustainable culture. If human mating strategies are left to operate without the governing effect of specific moderating mechanisms, such as taboos against the accumulation of wealth or religious customs that teach reverence for nature, does a society run the risk of being stuck in the “adolescent” stage of cultural development, and thereby ultimately risk its self-destruction?

⁸⁴ E. O. Wilson, p. 186.

ADOLESCENT CULTURE

The only society more fearful than one run by children, as in Golding's Lord of the Flies, might be one run by childish adults.

—Paul Shepard (1925-96)

An empire is an immense egotism.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82)

Culture is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture is not about what is absolute, real, or true. It is about what a group of people get together and agree to believe. Culture can be healthy or toxic, nurturing or murderous, long lived or short lived.⁸⁵ Culture can also be mature or immature.

Like the individual, cultures throughout history may be divided, for my purpose of analysis, into two general categories that reflect their respective developmental phases—that is, their “cultural ontogeny.” On the one hand, characteristically similar cultures have been variously described in the literature as traditional, older, indigenous, primitive, primal, hunter-gatherer, tribal, aboriginal, native, pre-agricultural, sustainable, Life Necessities Society, or “Leaver” cultures. For the purpose of consistency, I prefer to combine these related terms and refer to them collectively as **Mature Cultures**. The term is analogous to the ecological term, climax ecosystem, used to describe the stage of development of an ecosystem that has achieved a state of equilibrium with its physical environment—that is, a mature stage wherein the participating organisms are in balanced cooperation. The climax stage is characterized by the existence of a diversity of species, long, complex life cycles, and the efficient use of energy.⁸⁶

On the other hand, there are those cultures that have been variously described in the literature as modern, younger, colonialist, empire building, civilized, agrarian, pastoral, industrial, city-state, unsustainable, Industrial Growth Society, or “Taker” cultures. Similarly, I prefer to combine these related terms and refer to them collectively as **Adolescent**

⁸⁵ Australian anthropologist Derek Freeman observes that the doctrine of cultural relativism, which has dominated modern thought, may have blinded us to the deviate behavior of whole societies by denying normative standards for mental health.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Cultures. The term is analogous to the ecological term, pioneer ecosystem, used to describe the stage of development of an ecosystem in which the participating organisms compete for limited resources until one species wins out over the other. The pioneer stage is characterized by rapid growth of a few species, short life cycles, and the inefficient use of energy.⁸⁷ I will first examine the nature of Adolescent Cultures and then return to a discussion of Mature Cultures.

Adolescent Cultures are metaphorically “adolescent” because they exhibit characteristics which seem to reflect the psychological profile of the immature, adolescent male. They adopt political dominance and hierarchical authority structures. Their resources are obtained through trade and conquest, they absorb other cultures, and engage in genocidal warfare.⁸⁸ Like the egocentric adolescent who often sees the world as existing for his benefit alone, Adolescent Cultures are anthropocentric and thus merely “regard the world as a sort of human life-support system, as a machine designed to produce and sustain human life.”⁸⁹ They treat the natural environment with contempt. Aristotle expressed the typical Greek view in his essay *Politics*: “Plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man – domestic animals for his use and food, and wild ones for food and other accessories such as tools and clothing.” Cicero summarized the arrogant Roman attitude towards nature by declaring: “We are the absolute masters of what the earth produces. The mountains and plains are for our enjoyment. The rivers belong to us.”

Adolescent Cultures are unsustainable. They are still an experiment, and every time one has been attempted, (for example, Sumeria, Rome, Greece, Aztec, Babylonia, Egypt, Anasazi, Imperial China) it has self-destructed. Just like the development of the human, cultures may or may not progress successfully from “infancy” through “adolescence” towards a “mature” state. In all cultures, ancient and modern, negotiating the perilous adolescent stage of cultural development is a trial and error process. Some survive into maturity by not only being fortunate enough to devise social mechanisms—such as Earth-based religious traditions, rituals and rites of passage—facilitating the maturation process, but because they

⁸⁷ William Ophuls, *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity*, (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1977), p. 36.

⁸⁸ Hartman, p. 171.

⁸⁹ Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 59.

were also vigilant throughout their child rearing practices to ensure these customs were transmitted to successive generations.

Lloyd DeMause observed that “child-rearing practices are not just one item in a list of cultural traits. They are the very condition for the transmission and development of all other cultural elements, and place definite limits on what can be achieved in all other spheres of history.”⁹⁰ As every parent knows, morality and generosity are learned traits. Cultures that failed to develop Mature Culture characteristics, or failed to effectively teach them to their progeny, in Darwinian terms, were selected out. The civilizations of Rome, Greece, Mesopotamia, Easter Island and Egypt are just a few of many examples.

Paul Shepard believed two things are of paramount necessity for proper childhood development. The first is the opportunity to explore, understand and become intimately connected to nature. This provides the grounding for symbolic meaning. The second is mitigated neotony: the appropriate social and cultural responses that will guide and support the child. Our genetic heritage gives us a time plan for our lives, “our coming into being”, or ontogeny.

It commits us to cultural solutions according to a calendar of development. It succeeds only if this social care taking is in psychological and physical accord with the natural world. If our immaturity is unmitigated we remain stymied throughout our lives, sunk in the symptoms of infantile emotions and demands, of juvenile literalness and materialism, of the violence to which unmitigated adolescent idealism leads as callow ideology engenders dogmatism and impulsive action.⁹¹

According to Kenneth Keniston, “Historical or cultural conditions which may stimulate development in one sector of life may well fail to stimulate it or actually retard it in other sectors. . . . Some societies may ‘stop’ human development in some sectors far earlier than other societies ‘chose’ to do so.”⁹² For example, Western cultures leave most people stuck in early adolescence all their lives—a phase marked by intense emotion and rapid alternations between regressive infantile behavior and bold, aggressive behavior that is pseudo-mature.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lloyd DeMause, Foundations of Psychohistory, (New York, N.Y. : Creative Roots, 1982).

⁹¹ Paul Shepard, Coming Home to the Pleistocene (Washington, D.C., Island Press, 1998), p. 47.

⁹² Kenneth Keniston, “Psychological Development and Historical Change,” in Robert J. Lifton, ed., Explorations in Psychohistory, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974).

⁹³ P. Shepard, (1982), p. 6.

Perhaps one of the best known modern theorists on psychological growth and development during adolescence is Erik Erikson. In Erikson's developmental model, adolescence is the time when the child is enmeshed in a conflict between "identity and identity diffusion." The notion of a species-wide fixation at the stage of early adolescence fits with the kind of boisterous, arrogant pursuit of individual self-assertion that characterizes the consumerist, exploitative model of economic growth, where the short term-profit of entrepreneurs and corporate shareholders seems to be not only the dominant value, but the only value under consideration. It also fits the aggressive and predatory militarism and emphasis on the values and ideals of male warrior cults that have characterized Western civilization since the Bronze age. Adolescents who have difficulty negotiating the turmoil of this stage often become "remarkably clannish, intolerant and cruel in their exclusion of others who are 'different' in skin color or cultural background." Erikson points out how totalitarian doctrines have a special appeal to youths looking for solid identity structures: "The tempestuous adolescence lived through in patriarchal and agrarian countries . . . explains the fact that their young people find convincing and satisfactory identities in the simple totalitarian doctrines of race, class or nation."⁹⁴

According to Shepard, all people instinctively differentiate among themselves socially. But cultures differ in their criteria for doing so. Among Mature Cultures the criteria tend to be age, gender, and ability; in Adolescent Culture the social distinctions are more often wealth, power, and kingship.⁹⁵ Like the adolescent male, who's central concern is power, the core value of Adolescent Culture is power—of gods over men, of one group over another, of men over women, over property and nature. This attitude is implicit in the economic systems adopted by Adolescent Cultures.

*There is enough in the world for man's need, but not for man's greed.
Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication,
but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants.*

—M. K. Gandhi

⁹⁴ Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, (New York: Norton, 1980), p. 98.

⁹⁵ Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, p. 70.

Adolescent Economics

Economics is defined in most textbooks as “the study of the allocation of scarce resources among alternative ends.” Humans, it is said, have unlimited wants and limited means to satisfy these wants, so the inevitable result is scarcity. We cannot have everything we want, so we must choose what we would have. Every act of consumption is thus also an act of denial, resulting ultimately in deprivation. The familiar conception makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that human’s wants are great whereas their means of satisfying those wants are limited and therefore the only recourse is to maximize production. But wants may be satisfied either by producing much or desiring less.⁹⁶

Adolescent Economics is designed to maximize production and consumption at the expense of the community and well-being of the Earth.

The invention of money-based economies and the concept of private property ownership coincided with the development of Adolescent Cultures. The market economy slowly replaced the gift economy and barter as the primary means of exchange. The ancient empires of Greece, Rome, and Egypt developed rudimentary, money-based economies. These were necessary to facilitate foreign trade. However, usury soon emerged as a common way to transact an exchange between strangers who did not share a common reciprocal community relationship as they would in the gift economy of a Mature Culture.⁹⁷ Usury is the practice of lending money at excessive interest rates, and up to the Middle Ages it was considered a serious crime, often used as a instrument of war, and considered an aggressive act when charged to a foreigner.⁹⁸ Before the Reformation, *any* interest on a loan was considered usury and its opposite was a gratuitous loan, a gift.

In stark contrast to tribal economics, Adolescent Economics is practiced in cultures that draw a large portion of their livelihood from ecosystems that are far removed from the ones within which they exist. By 120 AD the Roman Empire—at that time centered in Constantinople—had extended its colonies (from which it extracted resources) as far as Britannia to the North, Egypt to the South, Armenia to the East and Spain to the West. Rather than being limited to coexistence with only their local ecosystems, which ordinarily

⁹⁶ Sahlins, (1972), p. 2.

⁹⁷ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 111.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 118.

would provide immediate feedback on their ecological impact, Adolescent Cultures import resources from outside their local ecosystems and export their wastes. By greatly enlarging their feedback loops, they can easily fail to notice their ecological mistakes. Hence, they ignore the consequences of these mistakes for a long time and displace their errors onto other societies. Even worse, the flourishing of Adolescent Economies fosters the appearance that their modes of interaction with nonhuman nature are preferable to the “primitive” ways of Mature Culture peoples.

Western Adolescent Culture

Modern, Western “predatory-industrial-electronic civilization”⁹⁹ is a contemporary example of an Adolescent Culture that appears to be degenerating even further into the least desirable aspects of infantile behavior. Something seems to have arrested the social development of modern Western society, freezing most people in an immature, younger stage of awareness about life—narcissistic, demanding instant gratification, and unconcerned about posterity. It is a stage that says, “I’m the center of the universe, I’m what’s important.” Deferred gratification is generally considered a measure of maturity.¹⁰⁰ At this stage of civilization there’s not even any question about providing for the future; it is “Gimme now.” We live in a culture that includes the extreme infantile principle that if somebody else has something we need, and they won’t give it to us, and we have the means to get it, it is not unreasonable to go get it, using whatever force we need to. In some cases it is even our *duty* to do so, even if it means killing the planet as a result.

Immature behavior is characterized as predominately egocentric. The adolescent is still psychologically attached to his mother, alienated from society and nature. He¹⁰¹ is prone to adopt addictive behaviors and obsessed with death, often suicidal.¹⁰² According to Anne Wilson Schaef, addiction is a disease “whose assumptions, feelings, behaviors, and lack of

⁹⁹ R. Heinberg, (1996).

¹⁰⁰ Paul Shepard, Nature and Madness (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982) p. 91.

¹⁰¹ The use of gender specific pronouns throughout the text is intentional depending upon the context. Whenever the discussion applies to both genders equally, neutral terms are used whenever possible.

¹⁰² Sandra M. Reeves & Alina Tugend, “Suicide’s ‘Unanswerable Logic’,” Education Week, June 18, 1986, Volume5, No. 39, p. 2.

spirit lead to a process of non-living that is progressively death-oriented.”¹⁰³ The suicide rate for adolescents has tripled in the last 30 years and is now the third leading cause of death (behind accidents and homicide) among adolescents.¹⁰⁴

Like the at-risk adolescent, vulnerable to adopting addictive behaviors and suicidal tendencies, our Western Adolescent Culture is drowning in addictions. As Morris Berman notes, “Addiction, in one form or another, characterizes every aspect of industrial society Dependence on alcohol (food, drugs, tobacco . . .) is not formally different from dependence on prestige, career achievement, world influence, wealth, the need to build more ingenious bombs, or the need to exercise control over everything.”¹⁰⁵ Al Gore has said, “I believe that our civilization is, in effect, addicted to the consumption of the Earth itself.”¹⁰⁶ And like the addicted adolescent, there is denial. In the face of ongoing, ever-worsening social, economic, and ecological disaster, the prevalence of defensiveness about Western Adolescent Culture’s obsessions stands as stark evidence of denial.

According to Robert Bly, modern culture is characterized as adolescent in its orientation precisely because it grew from the narcissistic psyche of the uninitiated boy and by reflection indulges that same behavior in men today, thus becoming self-perpetuating. Bly contends that we are always under commercial pressure to slide backward, toward adolescence, toward childhood. With no effective rituals of initiation, and no real way to know when their slow progress toward adulthood has reached its goal, young men in our culture go round in circles. Those who should be adults find it difficult or impossible to offer help to those behind.¹⁰⁷

Western Adolescent Economics

Western Adolescent Cultures are dominated by economics organized and driven by market forces and growth for the sole purpose of maximizing short-term profit for a minority of

¹⁰³ Anne Wilson Schaef, Co-Dependence, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p.21.

¹⁰⁴ A. Berman & D. Jobes, Adolescent suicide: Assessment & intervention, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1991).

¹⁰⁵ Morris Berman, The Re-enchantment of the World, (New York: Bantam, 1981), p. 82-84.

¹⁰⁶ Al Gore, Earth in the Balance, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 220.

¹⁰⁷ Bly, (1996), p. 44.

people. This economic system considers consumption and the accumulation of wealth to be the sole end and purpose of all economic activity. Market capitalism in the United States epitomizes Adolescent Economics. Its ethos is based on the stimulation of psychological envy of others and craving for possessions, which in turn can lead to shopping as an addiction. Statistics show that consumption trends have increased since the 1970's. A full two thirds of the American economy is driven by consumer spending—the personal accumulation, consumption and waste of resources. Almost all our planet-destroying activities are channeled through the simple act of handing cash or plastic to a clerk in exchange for merchandise.

The Earth is being systematically destroyed by over-consumption, particularly by wealthy elites.¹⁰⁸ Conspicuous consumption in our Western Adolescent Culture denotes status. In 1994 a major study of U.S. attitudes toward population and consumption revealed that Americans “cherish the ability to consume more than people elsewhere, and many perceive their ability to consume at high levels as an earned privilege.”¹⁰⁹ It seems that many people even consider it their patriotic duty to consume because it ensures a “strong economy” and “creates jobs.” In Western Adolescent Culture, success, status, contentment, and celebration are all expressed in acquisition and consumption.

Americans, who have come to view shopping as a primary cultural activity, spend, on the average, six hours shopping each week. Western Adolescent Economics has turned shopping into a major form of entertainment with a proliferation of mega-malls devouring the landscape. The number of shopping malls in the U.S. exceeded the number of high schools in 1987. Western Adolescent Economics glorifies personal and corporate greed, while it treats the planet simply as a commodity. It does not distinguish between renewable and non-renewable resources. Its continued prosperity is reliant upon non-renewable fuels, living parasitically on capital instead of income. Its measuring stick is the Gross National Product, not the quality of life. The deficit of the Earth is the profit of the trans-national corporation. The economist Jeremy Seabrook said, “If it had been the purpose of human activity on Earth

¹⁰⁸ Alan Durning, How Much is Enough?, The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth, (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992) p. 97.

¹⁰⁹ “Perspectives of American Voters on the Cairo Agenda: A Report to PrepCom III,” from survey and focus group research conducted for the Pew Global Stewardship Initiative, April 20, 1994, p. 13.

to bring the planet to the edge of ruin, no more efficient mechanism could have been invented than the market economy.”¹¹⁰

The advertising industry of Western Adolescent Economics works diligently at the cultivation of “needs.” For four decades, advertising has been one of the world’s fastest growing industries. In the U.S. alone, advertising expenditures rose from \$198 per capita in 1950 to \$495 in 1990. Marketers are increasingly targeting the young. The American teenager watches twenty thousand TV commercials a year.¹¹¹ Alan Durning tells us that “advertisements increasingly resemble dreams,” and that brand identification is “much akin to the role of myth in traditional societies.”¹¹² Commercial television promotes the restless craving for more wealth, power and status by portraying the high-consumption lifestyle as a model to be emulated.

Like ancient Adolescent Cultures, Western Adolescent Culture also has a tendency to treat the natural environment with contempt. Bertrand de Jouvenel, the eminent French political philosopher, characterized “Western man” as a person who

. . . tends to count nothing as an expenditure, other than human effort; he[she] does not seem to mind how much mineral matter he[she] wastes and, far worse, how much living matter he[she] destroys. He[she] does not seem to realize at all that human life is a dependent part of an ecosystem of many different forms of life. As the world is ruled from towns where men[women] are cut off from any form of life other than human, the feeling of belonging to an ecosystem is not revived. This results in a harsh and improvident treatment of things upon which we ultimately depend, such as water and trees.¹¹³

The forces of human greed, advertising, uneducated affluence, modern transportation, unrestrained development, the rise of trans-national corporations, and population increase continue to result in the over-exploitation of many plant and animal species. Indeed, excessive exploitation of the natural environment today constitutes the primary factor in the endangerment of one-third of all vertebrate species. Conservation biologist Stuart Pimm and his colleagues at the University of Tennessee, have calculated that some 50 percent of the

¹¹⁰ Seabrook, Jeremy, *The Myth of the Market: Promises and Illusions*, (London: Green Books, 1990)

¹¹¹ Walden Bello, “Population and the Environment: The Food First Perspective,” *Food First Action Alert*, winter 1992-93, p. 2.

¹¹² “Who’s Common Future?” *The Ecologist*, 22, no. 4 (July/August 1992) pp. 170-1

¹¹³ Cited in E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 59.

world's flora and fauna could be on a path to extinction within a hundred years due to the collective actions of humans.¹¹⁴ According to a scientific paper published in *Bioscience*, humans *directly* consume only 3 percent of the products of the land based ecosystem, yet “nearly 40% of potential terrestrial net primary productivity [of the ecosystem] is used directly, co-opted, or forgone because of human activities.”¹¹⁵ In their use of wild, living resources for food, fuel, fashion, clothing, sport, medicine, and decoration, humans continue to consume substantially beyond the replenishment capacity of the Earth's biosystems.

In its unbridled pursuit of the prerequisites to reproductive success—the accumulation of wealth, status and power—human mating strategies encouraged the development of the merchant mentality and money based economies of Adolescent Culture. In a reciprocal way, Western Adolescent Economics complements human mating strategies. Western style consumer capitalism indulges the most potentially environmentally destructive aspects of the self-centered pursuit of wealth, status and power. Unregulated, this pursuit ultimately leads to class separation and a growing disparity in relative wealth and power between people, men and women alike. Traditionally, the distance between the richest and poorest people, the highest-status and lowest-status people, the most-secure and least-secure in Mature Cultures is very small. According to Marshall Sahlins, contrary to the Western definition of poverty:

The world's most primitive people have few possessions, *but they are not poor*. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization. It has grown with civilization, at once as an invidious distinction between classes and more importantly as a tributary relation – that can render agrarian peasants more susceptible to natural catastrophes than any winter camp of Alaskan Eskimo.¹¹⁶

In Western Adolescent Culture, the distance between the richest and poorest people has become vast and is increasing exponentially. This in turn produces envy, greed, expectations, disappointment, depression, crime, warfare, and environmental destruction on a scale undreamed of by our ancestors. In the past, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Sumeria, Babylon, Persia,

¹¹⁴ Virginia Morrell, “The Sixth Extinction,” *National Geographic*, 195, no. 2 (February, 1999), p. 46.

¹¹⁵ “Human Appropriation of the Products of Photosynthesis,” *Bioscience*, (1986).

¹¹⁶ Sahlins, (1972), p. 37.

and Rome fell when a small percentage of the population controlled nearly all the wealth.¹¹⁷ Today 358 people are worth the combined income of 45 percent of the planet's population—2.5 billion people! In California, 1 percent of the population owns over 2/3 of the land. This trend is being repeated all over the world as Western style Adolescent Economics spreads. In Guatemala 2 percent of the population owns 63 percent of the best agricultural land. In Zimbabwe white farmers, less than 1 percent of the population, claim 60 percent of the farmland.¹¹⁸ Herman Daly, in his book, *Beyond Growth*, suggests that when the ratio between the wealth of the richest and the poorest in a society exceeds somewhere between 10:1 and 20:1, the society may become politically unstable. Just the ratio between the highest paid and the lowest paid employee in many U.S. corporations is at least 20:1.¹¹⁹ Adolescent Culture embodies permanent, institutionalized economic exploitation. Those who have the means of accumulating wealth are able to employ others who lack the means of making a living for themselves. By and large, the rich in Adolescent Culture have few scruples about using the energy of the poor for their own benefit.

Woman the Gatherer

The development of Western Adolescent Culture allowed women to stay at home, have fewer children and more conveniences, more control over their choice of having children, less likelihood of dying in childbirth, and less likelihood of dying from almost all diseases. It was this combination that led women living almost 50 percent longer in 1990 than in 1920.¹²⁰ The market-capitalism economy of Western Adolescent Culture indulges women's mating strategies. Overall, women control consumer spending by a wide margin in virtually every consumer category.¹²¹ Seven times as much floor space is devoted to women's personal items

¹¹⁷ Carol Brouillet, "Reinventing Money, Restoring the Earth, Reweaving the Web of Life", Speech given at the International Association for Feminist Economics Summer Congress, (June, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Tom Athanasiou, *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1998), p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Herman Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development*, (Boston : Beacon Press, c1996).

¹²⁰ USDH & HS/NCHS, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, vol. 38 op. cit.. & vol. 39, (1991).

¹²¹ Diane Crispell, "The Brave New World," *American Demographic*, (January 1992), p. 38.

as to men's.¹²² Ninety-three percent of American teenage girls surveyed in 1987 deemed shopping their favorite pastime.¹²³

Providing for one's family as a good husband and father is a water-tight excuse for making money hand over fist. Greed may be sin. Exploitation of other people might, on the face of it, look rather nasty. But who can blame a man for "doing the best" for his children?

—Eva Figs

Man the Hunter

Men's drive to obtain the prerequisites for reproductive success is unrelenting in Western Adolescent Culture, and they pay a high price as a result. Men frequently destroy their health through obsessive overwork, attempting to provide for their families. According to Warren Farrell, men are still responsible for approximately 75 percent of the financial support for the average American family. Until recently, 90 percent of all peptic ulcers were found in men, as well as significantly higher rates of heart disease. Men still die of work-related injuries approximately twenty to one over women. That is almost as many men killed at work as were killed during the average day in Vietnam.¹²⁴ Ninety-four percent of occupational deaths from job related injuries occur to men.¹²⁵ The more hazardous the job, the greater the percentage of men who occupy that job.¹²⁶ One reason the jobs men hold pay more is because they are more hazardous. Twenty four of the twenty five of the most hazardous jobs rated by the *Jobs Rated Almanac* are almost-all-male jobs.¹²⁷ And men who don't measure up in the cut throat world of capitalism are tossed aside. Ninety-six percent of the adult homeless in San Francisco are men. There are three times as many homeless men living on the streets as there are homeless children, adolescents and adult women *combined* who are living on the streets.¹²⁸

Adolescent Cultures are cultures "stuck" in an immature stage of development. Several ancient cultures, such as Rome, Babylonia, Sumeria, are examples of civilizations that

¹²² Farrell, (1993), p. 33.

¹²³ Laurence Shames, *The Hunger for More* (New York: Times Books, 1989).

¹²⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, (NIOSH),(1989).

¹²⁵ NIOSH, (1992).

¹²⁶ U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, (1991).

¹²⁷ Les Krantz, ed, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

¹²⁸ James Wright, *Address Unknown: The Homeless in America*, (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1989).

ultimately self-destructed as a result of this “crippled ontogeny.” Modern Western civilization, engulfed in a non-sustainable economic system focused on greed and unrestrained exploitation of the Earth’s resources, seems to be headed in the same direction. Within Western Adolescent Culture, men and women’s short term pursuit of the prerequisites to reproductive success—status, wealth and power—has dire social and environmental consequences. However, historically, not all cultures have remained “stuck in adolescence” and eventually perished. Many cultures, especially hunter-gatherers, maintained stability over very long periods of time. What was the nature of these sustainable cultures and how were they able to regulate these biologically rooted mating strategies that are reproductively successful over the short term, but self-destructive over the long term?

MATURE CULTURE

An Innu hunter's prestige comes not from the wealth he accumulates but from what he gives away. When a hunter kills caribou or other game he shares with everyone else in the camp.

—Daniel Ashini, Innu

Mature Cultures are metaphorically “mature” because they exhibit the characteristics of what is generally recognized as a mature, psychologically healthy adult. A mature person is not as egocentric as an immature person, nor is he as dominated by his own immediate needs. He is more socialized and “other-centered,” and has an integrated and stable self image.¹²⁹ From the community’s point of view, a mature adult is someone who knows how to preserve the larger group of which he is a part.¹³⁰ He engages in reciprocal altruism (cooperative social exchange) and does not cheat. His definition of power is the ability to control one’s life, not influence over others and access to scarce resources. The more allocentric a mature person becomes, the more he cares for others. The ideal mature adult is separated from his maternal bond, responsible, self-reliant, in control, able to go without, sexually balanced, spiritually aware, racially tolerant, a full, participating member of his community and Earth-mindful—that is, ecocentric. Ideally, he has outgrown the undesirable behavioral characteristics of an adolescent.

Mature Cultures seem remarkably free of greed and selfishness.¹³¹ They are self-sufficient and practice the custom of a gift economy.¹³² Their resources are obtained from renewable sources and they display sensitivity to ecological sustainability. Mature Cultures are typically politically independent, and exhibit egalitarian social structures.¹³³ They maintain a unique sense of identity, and respect the identity of other tribes.

Humans, for roughly 99% of their existence on Earth, lived as small bands of hunter-gatherers in societies that appeared to have solved the problems of production, distribution,

¹²⁹ Douglas H. Heath, “Model of the Maturing Person”, *Growing up in College*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968), p. 4-6.

¹³⁰ Robert Bly, *The Sibling Society*. (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1996) p. 45.

¹³¹ E. A. Cashdan, “Egalitarianism Among Hunters and Gatherers”, *American Anthropology* 82, (1980), p. 116-120.

¹³² Sahlins, p. 149-183; Lorna Marshall, *The San (!Kung) Bushman of Nyae Nyae* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976).

¹³³ Thom Hartman, *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* (Northfield, Vermont: Mythical Books, 1998), p. 166.

social equity, and environmental sustainability that modern Western culture seems incapable of addressing.¹³⁴ Mature Cultures, such as the Eskimo, African Bushman, Australian aborigines, and similar groups, represent the oldest and perhaps the most successful human adaptation. Until about 12,000 years ago, virtually all of humanity lived this way. Anthropologists have known for some time that there are peoples who lived, until quite recently, without the overarching discipline of the state. They lived in small groups without centralized authority, standing armies, professional soldiers or bureaucratic systems, and exchanged goods and services without relying on markets. They lived together surprisingly well, solving problems among themselves largely without courts or prisons and without a particular propensity for violence. With relatively simple technology—wood, bone, stone, fibers—they were able to meet their material needs with a modest expenditure of energy, leading anthropologist and social critic Marshall Sahlins to call them “the original affluent society.”¹³⁵ Mature Cultures demonstrate a remarkable ability to survive and thrive for long periods, in some cases thousands of years, without destroying their environment.

Mature Culture peoples generally have more leisurely lives, less poverty, virtually no crime, a more diverse and healthy diet, and less degenerative diseases. They hold as their primary values cooperation, sharing, mutual respect, long-term renewable care of resources, and equality between people, the sexes and nature.¹³⁶ We have much to learn from the ways in which these societies successfully dealt with the problems of everyday survival, socialization, and ecological sustainability.

Of course, native attitudes toward the natural world were not free of certain tensions. After all, nature is not only sacred and beloved—it must be exploited, to some extent, in order to survive. Native knowledge embodies an ethos for mitigating this universal conflict, but it cannot be expected always to do so in perfect harmony. Historians suggest that peoples of Mature Cultures, too, have on occasion, committed environmental “sins”—through wasteful hunting and trapping practices, for example, or the gradual depletion of agricultural soils. Some writers believe the worst of these excesses were generally of recent vintage and

¹³⁴ John Gowdy, ed., Limited Wants, Unlimited Means: A Reader on Hunter-Gatherer Economics and the Environment, (1998) p. xv-xxix.

¹³⁵ Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics (Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co., 1972), p. 1.

¹³⁶ R.E. Leakey, & R. Lewin, Origins, (New York, Dutton, 1977), p. 233.

occurred under the influence of powerful, imposed, non-native economic incentives and value systems. They reason that the earlier, pre-contact ecological infractions that occurred were done without the terrible technological leverage of modern Western violations.¹³⁷ However, there is now controversial evidence that preindustrial societies have been exterminating species, destroying habitats and undermining their own existence for thousands of years. Some of the best documented examples are the Maori of New Zealand who were responsible for the extinction of many large animals on the island. The Malagasy of Madagascar are suspected of exterminating ancient species of “elephant birds,” giant land tortoises, pygmy hippopotamus, aardvark and many other large mammals.¹³⁸

Although the Malagasy, the Maori and other ancient cultures like them are considered preindustrial, they did not maintain a sound ecological relationship with their environment and were therefore unsustainable. By definition, they cannot be considered Mature Cultures. The basic value of a Mature Culture is that each generation should meet its needs without jeopardizing the prospects for future generations to meet their own needs.¹³⁹ This value is embodied in the economic systems of Mature Cultures.

Tribal Economics

People fortunate enough to be members of a Mature Culture lived with almost no material possessions for thousands of years, yet enjoyed lives in many ways richer and more rewarding than members of Adolescent Culture. Despite the distorted portrayal as primitive savages struggling to survive during every waking moment, these people structured their lives so that they needed little, wanted little, and, for the most part, had all the means of fulfilling their needs ready at hand. The San (!Kung) Bushman of South West Africa, for example, spent only twelve to nineteen hours per week getting food. Young people were not expected to work until they were well into their twenties; nor were people expected to work after age forty or

¹³⁷ Suzuki & Knudtson, p. 19.

¹³⁸ Jared Diamond, The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 319-29.

¹³⁹ World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

so. They spent their abundant leisure time eating, drinking, playing, and socializing.¹⁴⁰ Tribal Economics is designed to minimize individual consumption and maximize community welfare.

Mature Cultures typically maintain self-sufficiency in food production, deriving most of their substance from hunting wild animals and gathering plants. They tend to rely only marginally on market or cash economies or on the organized production of livestock or crops. Mature Cultures usually lack fixed territories, are highly mobile, have small populations, and possess little or no written language. They tend to employ simple technologies, and possess few artifacts, mostly made of local materials. The Aborigines of Australia, the Hazda of Tanzania, and the San (!Kung) Bushman had technologies and social systems that allowed them to live for tens of thousands of years in equilibrium with their environments, without destroying the resources on which their economies were based.¹⁴¹

Many Mature Culture's way of life limits the amount of wealth an individual can accumulate. Although a migratory life can severely limit the accumulation of wealth, Mature Cultures have social sanctions against the accumulation of wealth that cannot be explained simply in utilitarian terms. Sanctions against accumulation go far beyond meeting the requirement of portability or storage, for they apply to the lightest objects such as beads, arrowheads or supplies of arrow poison. Leveling mechanisms come into operation precisely at the point where the potential for the development of the inequalities of wealth, power and status is greatest.¹⁴² These social control mechanisms in Mature Cultures moderated the biological drive to accumulate the prerequisites to reproductive success.

Sharing is the central rule of social interaction among members of Mature Cultures. There are strong injunctions on the importance of reciprocity. Generalized reciprocity, the giving of something without the immediate expectation of return is the social norm. Its presence in Mature Cultures is almost universal. This, combined with the absence of private ownership of land, has led many observers, from Lewis Henry Morgan on, to describe as "primitive communism."

¹⁴⁰ Richard B. Lee & Irvin DeVore, *Man the Hunter*, (New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1968).

¹⁴¹ John Gowdy, ed. *Limited Wants, Unlimited Means: A Reader on Hunter-Gatherer Economics and the Environment*, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998)

¹⁴² Ibid.

The reduction of the Earth to an object simply for human possession and use is unthinkable in most traditional cultures. In Mature Culture economies, instead of wealth being a function of who controls the most resources, wealth is a function of the entire tribe's ability to support itself as a single entity. Each person's role in the tribe is to support every other person. Everyone practices "economics for community." Socially imposed leveling mechanisms were often employed. For example, the San (!Kung) Bushman of South West Africa practice an elaborate meat sharing custom whenever large game animals are killed. The meat is distributed in waves of sharing through the camp until everyone receives a share. These social rules dissociated the hunter from his kill and denied him the privileges of ownership.¹⁴³

The predominant values that permeate Mature Cultures are cooperation and community, rather than possessions. The Shoshone accumulated no wealth. They had no systems for preserving or storing food, or anything other than what they could carry. The highest status act a Shoshone could commit in the presence of others was to give away whatever possessions he had. Similarly, in San (!Kung) Bushman culture, to eat without sharing in front of another person who is without food is considered an immoral act. Generosity was how one achieved social standing among the Shoshone.¹⁴⁴

In Mature Cultures, great importance was put upon the maintenance of balance and order within the community as well as with the surrounding environment. In cultures where there was great abundance of natural wealth, traditional wisdom prescribed potlaches (community giveaways) or destruction of surplus food or goods in order to maintain social harmony and prevent class differences from arising. In the latter case, great moral virtue was attributed to those who disdained the personal possession of large stores of fish, rice, copper shields, or other emblems of wealth, and who demonstrated that non-attachment by publicly destroying or giving away what they had. It is based on the idea that all wealth, material or symbolic, must circulate; it honors non-acquisitiveness, generosity, and redistribution of

¹⁴³ James Woodburn, "Malinowski Memorial Lecture for 1981", London School of Economics and Political Science, May 5th, Man (N.S.) 17, p.431-451

¹⁴⁴ Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization as Shown by the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State, (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1968), p. 16-33

wealth through exchange.¹⁴⁵ Mature Culture economics concerns itself with the long-term welfare of the whole community.

It is unfortunate for us that many traditional cultures have disappeared under the steamroller of modern Western culture, but some are resilient and surviving. Several aspects of their lifeways are especially valuable to modern-day ecological concerns. Their survival over thousands of years is proof enough they were good conservationists. They rely upon local “income” or renewable resources, not upon “capital” or non-renewable resources, as do most industrial based, Adolescent Cultures. Instead of focusing on production of goods, Mature Cultures produce for all their members the wealth of security, safety, and a context for touching the sacred.

Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Earth Wisdom

Over 90 percent of humanity’s history, humans viewed the world and its living creatures as sacred, as having souls or spirits. A person who caused permanent harm to that world was severely reprimanded or even banished from the tribe. The elders of the tribe realized that he was destroying the world of his children’s children, an unthinkable and aberrant act. Nurit Bird-David notes that many, but not all, hunter-gatherers have a notion of the giving environment, the idea that the land around them is their spiritual home and the source of all good things.¹⁴⁶ In direct opposition to the Judeo-Christian perspective of the natural environment as a “wilderness,” a hostile place to be subdued and dominated, their cosmologies are primarily ecocentric. George Sessions argues that

although this issue has been hotly debated in the literature over the last thirty years, it seems accurate to say, based on recent scholarship, that the cultures of most primal societies throughout the world were permeated with nature-oriented religions that expressed the biocentric perspective. These

¹⁴⁵ Julian Burger, *The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ Nurit Bird-David, *Beyond “The Original Affluent Society”: A Culturalist Reformulation*, (Washington, D.C., Island Press, 1998)

cosmologies, involving a sacred sense of the Earth and all its inhabitants, helped order their lives and determine their values.¹⁴⁷

The Judaic scholar and philosopher Martin Buber compared modern Europeans to primal societies in lamenting the state of western Adolescent Culture. Buber focused on relationships of mastery—human beings over other human beings and human beings over nature—as the root cause of Western malaise. “This is the exalted melancholy of our fate,” he wrote, “that every *Thou* in our world must become an *It*.”¹⁴⁸ Buber went on to express hope for the return of what he called “I-Thou” thinking, in which every self recognizes the integrity and holiness of every other self—human, animal, or even mineral. The concept was based on his understanding of “primitive groups”, who still experienced, he claimed, “the true original unity, the lived relation,” and so could serve as a model for the West. In fact, he said, the “power to enter into relation [is] the power in virtue of which alone man can live the life of the spirit.” Buber believed that “in the beginning”—of language, of human consciousness—there existed mutual and unhierarchized “relation.” If in the beginning, he asked, why not now?

Collections of Native American spiritual writings, like *Barefoot on the Sacred Earth*, embrace the whole of humankind and the entire cosmos. For example, anthropologist Stan Steiner describes the traditional American Indian philosophy of the sacred “Circle of Life”:

In the Circle of Life, every being is no more, or less, than any other. We are all Sisters and Brothers. Life is shared with the bird, bear insects, plants, mountains, clouds, stars, sun.¹⁴⁹

Countless expressions of this kind can be cited from Mature Cultures all over the globe.¹⁵⁰ Despite the present six billion people on the Earth, some anthropologists argue that the majority of humans who have lived on Earth, over the approximately 4 million years of human history, have been hunters and gatherers. If so, this means that biocentrism has been the

¹⁴⁷ George Sessions, “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour”, *ReVision* 13,3 (1991, Rev. 1993)

¹⁴⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, transl. Kaufman, (Walter: New York, Simon & Schuster, 1919).

¹⁴⁹ Stan Steiner, *The Vanishing White Man*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976)

¹⁵⁰ David Suzuki & Peter Knudtson, *Wisdom of the Elders, Sacred native stories of nature*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992)

dominant human religious/philosophical perspective throughout time.¹⁵¹ It would seem that, from an evolutionary perspective, a sacred view of nature has long-term survival value.

The eminent Swedish historian of religion, Ake Hultkrantz, suggests that the narrow Western term *nature* seems incapable of enfolding Mature Culture notions of a vast, spiritually charged cosmic continuum, in which human society, biosphere, and the whole universe are seamlessly rolled into one:

The Western religious dichotomy between a world of spiritual plenitude and a world of material imperfection, a dualism pertaining to Christian and Gnostic doctrines, has no counterpart in American Indian thinking. Indians value highly life on Earth, and their religion supports their existence in the world. The whole spirit of their religion is of harmony, vitality, and appreciation of the world around them.¹⁵²

According to Alfonso Ortiz, a Tewa Indian and well-known anthropologist:

Indian tribes put nothing above nature. Their gods are a part of nature, on the level of nature, not supra-anything. Conversely, there's nothing that is religious, versus something else that is secular. Native American religion pervades, informs all life.¹⁵³

However, it is important to emphasize that this inherent spiritual dimension does not mean that Native nature wisdom is somehow naively romantic, ethereal, or disconnected from ordinary life. Quite the opposite. Native knowledge is firmly rooted in reality, in keen personal observation, interaction and thought, sharpened by the daily rigors of uncertain survival. Its validity rests largely upon the authority of hard-won personal experience—upon concrete encounters with game animals and demanding treks across local landscapes, enriched by night dreams, contemplation, and waking visions. The junction between knowledge and experience is tight, continuous, and dynamic, giving rise to truths that are likely to be correspondingly intelligent, fluid, and vibrantly alive.

A landmark 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland report, boldly addresses the value of indigenous ecological

¹⁵¹ G. Sessions, (1993).

¹⁵² Ake Hultkrantz, *Native Religions of North America*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) p. 24.

¹⁵³ Alfonso Ortiz, "Why Nature Hates the White Man," interview by Jane Bosveld, *Omni* (March 1990), p. 77.

perspectives to many global efforts in dealing with ongoing environmental crises. It pleads for the prompt restoration of traditional land and resource rights to the worlds remaining indigenous and tribal peoples, and it calls for a renewed respect for their ecological wisdom.

Their very survival has depended upon their ecological awareness and adaptation . . . These communities are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that links humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems. It is a terrible irony that as formal development reaches more deeply into rain forests, deserts, and other isolated environments, it tends to destroy the only cultures that have proved able to thrive in these environments.¹⁵⁴

Even our scientific elders have spoken out on what they suspect may be inherently sacred, or spiritual, dimensions of nature: life scientists ranging from ecologists like Paul Ehrlich and brain biologists like Roger Sperry to anthropologists like Gregory Bateson, biologists like George Wald, and molecular geneticists like Francois Jacob. One remarkable public statement, titled *Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion*, was issued at a recent international conference on the environment and economic development in Moscow, attended by religious, political, and scientific leaders from eighty-three nations. It was signed by some of the most respected and articulate Western scientists of our time, including astronomers Carl Sagan and Freeman Dyson, physicist Hans Bethe, atmospheric scientist Stephen Schneider, and biologists Peter Raven, Roger Revelle, and Stephen Jay Gould. One of its most scientifically daring passages states:

As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.

How did Mature Cultures develop and maintain their sacred views of nature?

¹⁵⁴ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 114-15.

The Ritual of Connection

Homo Sapiens is a species of animal. We are part of the ecosystem of the Earth, and dependent upon it for all things necessary for life. As animals, we breathe the air, drink the water, consume other animals and the plants which grow in the indispensable soil, and in countless ways depend upon the Earth's natural cycles and the radiant energy of the sun which activates them. We are a product of a long evolutionary process in which the ecological balance played the decisive role.

Hunting and gathering societies were in ecological balance and social harmony to a degree unmatched in present times. The same features that ensured environmental harmony also promoted an egalitarian social structure. These features originated in the material characteristics of immediate-return tribal economies. Mature Culture peoples derive their livelihood from the ecosystems within which they exist. If they arrive at sustainable patterns of life, they do so by developing economic and cultural ways that enable patterns of interacting with the rest of nature and which do not destroy the ecosystems within which they exist. They are attuned to feedback from those systems that allows them to effectively coexist with them. This adjustment is not necessarily "rational" nor intentional. Rather, it may be effected through culturally enforced myths, stories, or patterns of religious belief that restrain them from ecologically destructive practices. Thus, Rappaport persuasively argues that the ritual activities of groups living in the interior of New Guinea help them maintain the biotic communities existing in their territory.¹⁵⁵ The feedback loops within which they exist are relatively short, and this facilitates social learning about mistakes. If a Mature Culture people fail to find such ways of coexisting with their ecosystems, they migrate, perish or resort to Adolescent Economics.

Perhaps these customs and rituals that moderate short-term drives toward maximizing reproductive success in favor of long-term sustainability, resource conservation, and ecosystem diversity had their origins in the evolution of biological instincts that were an efficient way of maintaining harmony with the environment that humans found themselves in. Biologists, Robert Augros and George Stanciv, say that

¹⁵⁵ Roy A. Rappaport, "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations Among a New Guinea People," in his Ecology, Meaning, and Religion, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979).

Within a species, we take for granted the profound cooperation of the family, the herd, the colony, the flock, and the school. But these are also founded on strong natural instincts. Lorenz speaks of the powerful inhibitions in male wolves, lizards, hamsters, gold finches and many other species against biting females.¹⁵⁶

But these subtle and delicate instincts are vulnerable to outside disturbances. Lorenz adds:

The fact that mothers of brood-tending species do not attack their young is thus in no way a self-evident law, but has to be ensured in every single species by a special inhibition Every livestock breeder knows that apparently slight disturbances can cause the failure of an inhibition mechanism of this kind. I know of a case where an airplane, flying low over a silver fox farm, caused all the mother vixens to eat their young.¹⁵⁷

Since the beginning of human life on this planet, members of Mature Cultures intimately understood that unless they lived in accordance with natural law, they wouldn't survive. These laws guided their relationship to the four life-giving elements—earth, air, fire and water—and taught respect for the oneness and interdependence of all life. Many of them had relationships that were respectful of the Earth, and those relationships were preserved in social taboos, rituals, and legends. It served sustainability, and gave continuity to their cultures. Ancient people understood the importance of ritual, and filled their lives with it. It was both a way of bringing predictability to an insecure world, and a way of constantly reminding themselves of the presence and sacred nature of the divinity filling the world. These ceremonies were practiced over and over again because our tendency to lose our connection to the living Earth is very ancient, perhaps rooted in the evolutionary legacy of our environmentally destructive mating strategies.

According to Dolores LaChapelle, “Most native societies around the world had three common characteristics: they were stable, ‘sustainable’ cultures, often lasting for thousands of years; they had an intimate conscious relationship with their place; and they had a rich ceremonial and ritual life.”¹⁵⁸ She cites a few, out of several hundred examples:

¹⁵⁶ Robert Augros & George Stanciv, The New Biology: Discovering the Wisdom of Nature, (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 123-4.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Dolores LaChapelle, “Ritual—The Pattern That Connects,” in Deep Ecology for the 21st Century, ed. George Sessions, (Boston & London, Shambhala, 1995), p. 57.

- The Tukano Indians of the Northwest Amazon River Basin, guided by their Shamans, make use of various myths and rituals that prevent over-hunting and over-fishing. They view their universe as a circuit of energy in which the entire cosmos participates . . . Reichel-Dolmatoff, the Columbian anthropologist, notes that the Tukano have very little interest in exploiting natural resources more effectively but are greatly interested in “accumulating more factual knowledge about biological reality and, above all, about knowing what the physical world requires from men.”¹⁵⁹
- The San (!Kung) Bushman people of the Kalahari Desert have been living in exactly the same place for eleven thousand years! They have very few material belongings but their ritual life is the most sophisticated of any group.¹⁶⁰
- Roy Rappaport has shown that the rituals of the Tsembaga of New Guinea allocate scarce protein for the humans who need it without causing irreversible damage to the land.¹⁶¹

Most indigenous cultures that we are aware of have a series of ceremonies and rituals where the people acknowledge and nourish their interconnectedness with the land and the rest of the Earth community. Naively, our modern Adolescent Culture views these “primitive” peoples and their customs with contempt, forcing them to accept our destructive way of life and beliefs.

Luther Standing Bear wrote in his book *My People the Sioux*, 1928, that the Dakota often went to great lengths to teach children that in nature “there was no complete solitude.” They made sure children knew that wherever they went, they would be greeted by the warm, reassuring presence of local life forms, geological features, and natural forces, which were often as trusted, familiar, and communicative with them as members of their families back home. Through this process Dakota children came to an early understanding that “we are of the soil and soil of us,” that “we love the birds and beasts that grew with us on this soil”, and that a bond existed between all living things because they all “drank the same water and breathed the same air.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, “Cosmology as Ecological Analysis: A view From the Rain Forest” in *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3, (Sept. 1978)

¹⁶⁰ Richard B. Lee, “What Hunters Do for a Living, or, How to Make Out on Scarce Resources,” in *Man the Hunter*, edited by Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968), 30-43

¹⁶¹ Roy Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968)

¹⁶² Luther Standing Bear, *My people, the Sioux*, E. A. Brininstool, ed., (Lincoln

Mature Cultures understood that when we take from the Earth only what we truly need for our survival, we must first ask permission, consider its long term impact, give something back in return, and with thanksgiving. Peoples of Mature Cultures intuitively understood their responsible role in the web of life, because they lived and depended upon the land for generations. They were eco-literate, in the broadest sense.

The Shoshone culture was filled with rituals and rules that were “every bit as complex as those of the Vatican or the Court of Versailles.”¹⁶³ Yet their focus was on the maintenance of their people’s intimate and respectful relationship with the Earth, not on their relationship to a patriarchal power structure of a Adolescent Culture. A particularly elaborate etiquette surrounded Shoshone rites of passage, including marriage, birth, death and puberty.¹⁶⁴ Throughout their lives, they had to be aware of the spirits of nature and the worlds beyond nature that surrounded them, to monitor their interactions with others for appropriateness and propriety, and to keep a mental record of obligations and past interactions with family and other clans. Among Tucanoan tribes, the ritual of allowing rest periods for hunting lands was prompted by the stars. Each game animal is identified with a particular constellation and may not be hunted until its own star group has risen above the horizon. Cree men enjoyed prestige and even political power if they exhibited restraint in their hunting of animals.¹⁶⁵

In Mature Cultures, traditions consistently reinforced an individual’s interrelationship with their environment and their responsibility both to and for their community. A primary ritual for accomplishing this task for adolescent males was the male initiation rite. For adolescent Dakota boys, the personal vision quest was a mandatory rite of passage to manhood and environmental consciousness. During this solitary sojourn into the mountains, a boy spent several days naked, vulnerable, and fasted as he awaited the arrival of animal-spirit allies who might help him to develop and actualize his understanding of the spiritual and ecological unity of nature. It is possible that such knowledge is born only of solitude.

During traditional ceremonial preparations for a boy’s departure, an elder filled a sacred pipe with tobacco, gestured to the cardinal points of the cosmos, and offered a prayer

: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

¹⁶³ Peter Farb, Man’s Rise to Civilization: The Cultural Ascent of the Indians of North America, (Bantam Books, 1978).

¹⁶⁴ Peter Farb, Man’s Rise to Civilization as Shown by the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State, (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1968), p. 16-33

for the boy's successful journey and for new levels of insight into Dakota duties to nature. "O Wakan-Tanka," he prayed, "grant this young man may have relatives; that he may be one with the four winds, the four Powers of the world, and with the light of the dawn. May he understand his relationship with all the winged peoples of the air . . . Our Grandmother and Mother (Earth) . . . this young man wishes to become one with all things . . . For the good of all your peoples, help him!"¹⁶⁶

Consider Malidoma Somé's account of traditional initiation, in which village elders compel youths to experience how "everything that makes a human distinct from things and from other humans was gone."¹⁶⁷ Somé describes initiation as the emergence of a mature male from a complex set of experiences consistent with (even dependent on) submission to the community, nature, and a sense of the sacred that is predicated on the interpenetration of the human and natural worlds. In Somé's culture, the Dagara of Burkina Faso, initiates must jump into an opening in the earth where they encounter a sense of eternity but may (if they are careless) disappear forever; they must sleep alone without food or drink until they experience trees as appearing in feminine form and speaking in women's voices. Somé presents these phenomena not as supernatural or magical, as they might appear in the West, but as examples of how Dagara reality includes a belief in the interpenetration of the human and natural worlds.

Mature Cultures represent the oldest and most successful examples of human adaptation. They evidently solved, or avoided, problems that modern society seems incapable of seriously addressing. Members generally enjoyed a high quality of life characterized by more leisure time, almost free of crime, healthy diets, and, we may speculate, better psychological health. Mature Cultures were egalitarian, community centered and practiced tribal economics where the accumulation of wealth was discouraged and natural resources were utilized in sustainable ways. They have a rich history of viewing the entire natural world as sacred. With few exceptions, they hold as their most foundational concept the belief that we are not

¹⁶⁵ Bierhorst, John *The Way of the Earth: Native America and the Environment*, (New York: Morrow, 1994)

¹⁶⁶ Suzuki & Knudtson, p. 212.

¹⁶⁷ Malidoma Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), p. 277.

different from, separate from, in charge of, superior to, or inferior to the natural world. We are part of it. Whatever we do to nature, we do to ourselves. Whatever we do to ourselves, we do to the world. There is no concept of a separate “nature” or “wilderness.” The nature-centered cosmologies of Mature Cultures have been the most pervasive religious perspective throughout human history. Their eco-literate world view was preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations through mythology, legends, social taboos, ceremonies and rituals. Moreover, the initiation of the young males at puberty was regarded as one of the most indispensable rituals in the culture. What are male initiation rites, what did they accomplish, and why were they so important to the individual and the community?

rites of passage and male initiation

Any affect or emotion which in its raw and unaltered form is too intense to be controlled by will alone may need its ritual. Without ritual, such energies may inundate the ego and force it into acting out or obsessive behavior. Ritual brings about containment and acceptance, control of intensity, and “dosage.”
 —E. C. Whitmont (1982)

The following review of initiation rites is not intended to be comprehensive—the literature is quite extensive in this regard—but focuses on those particular aspects of initiation rites deemed relevant to the current discussion. In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade defines rites of passage as

a category of rituals that mark the passage of a person through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny: birth, reproduction, and death. These ceremonies make the basic distinctions, observed in all groups, between young and old, male and female, living and dead.¹⁶⁸

The term “rite of passage” was first introduced into English in 1960 when Arnold van Gennep’s classic, *Les Rites de Passage* was translated from the 1908 French edition. He points out that the basic patterns of rites of passage have been essentially the same in stable traditional cultures around the world.¹⁶⁹

Anthropologists and social scientists generally agree that human life is composed of critical moments of transition: birth, puberty, sometimes marriage and divorce, mid-life, aging and death. In traditional cultures, these life passages were almost universally marked by ceremony and ritual. Since life may be interpreted as a continuous series of rites of passages during which an individual progresses from one phase to another in the cycle of life, the most important of these transitions is the passage from adolescence to adulthood. Passing from one age group to another bestows new social status and brings about major psychological changes. Traditionally, this process encompassed not only the mere acquisition

¹⁶⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (New York, N.Y. : Macmillan ; London : Collier Macmillan, c1987)

¹⁶⁹ Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

of knowledge, but a physical and spiritual change of being.¹⁷⁰ Along with the incest taboo, the institution of ritualistic initiation is considered among the most primordial and most deeply rooted of all cultural institutions. According to Eliade,

In the eyes of those who perform them, initiations are believed to have been revealed by Divine or Supernatural beings. Hence the initiatory ceremony is an imitation of the Gods; by performing it, one lives the sacred primordial Time again and the neophytes, together with all the initiates, participate in the presence of the Gods or mythical Ancestors. Initiation, then, is a recapitulation of the sacred history of the world and the tribe. On the occasion of the age-grading of adolescents, the entire society is plunged back into the mythical Times of origin and therefore emerges regenerated.¹⁷¹

Thus rites of passage were an indispensable part of the life of religious man and the most outstanding religious rite was represented by the puberty initiation from adolescence to adulthood.¹⁷²

Initiation rites were widespread and are documented for most Mature Cultures, including Australians, Fuegians, Californians, Bushman, Hottentots, and many others.¹⁷³ These ceremonies of passage did not exist because of superstition or ignorance. There is evidence that initiation and rites of passage have been widely practiced throughout human history in small societies because of a deep psychological/social need with a biological foundation, particularly around the time of puberty. According to Victor Turner initiation was a social and cultural event of great, even paramount importance, as a means of tribal survival and self-nurture.¹⁷⁴

John Allen, Ph.D. and Pat Dyck, M. Ed. examined the work of such anthropologists as Van Gennep (1960), Turner (1967), Freed & Freed (1980), Lincoln (1981) to identify some of the key components involved in transition rites.¹⁷⁵ Certain patterns, among others, stood out:

- The moments of transition were occasions for specific and vital learning.

¹⁷⁰ Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage", in Betwixt & Between, Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation, eds. L. Mahdi, S. Foster, & M. Little, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), p. 11.

¹⁷¹ Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, The mysteries of birth and rebirth, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1975, c1958), p. 129.

¹⁷² Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and Profane, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957).

¹⁷³ M. Eliade, 1975, c1958), p. 129.

¹⁷⁴ Turner, (1987) p. 3-19.

¹⁷⁵ John Allan & Pat Dyck, "Transition from childhood to adolescence: developmental curriculum", in Betwixt & Between, Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation, eds. L. Mahdi, S. Foster, & M. Little, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987) p. 25-26.

- The activities were different for each sex. The boys needed the formal break from mothers while girls needed the involvement of the whole community, especially women and men.
- A recognition ceremony, was held. This often provided an experience of renewal for the whole community.
- The psychological effects of the rite seemed to result in the internalization of a positive self-concept for each initiate as a competent and capable young adult, ready for new responsibilities.
- The rites helped the young adolescent become a responsible carrier of the culture.

Special Needs of the Male

Ethnographers often note that although many groups have rituals to honor first menstruation, they think of womanhood as being conferred by the act of menstruation itself. It is assumed that girls will grow up to be women simply by getting older. Since for the girl puberty, especially menarche, is dramatic and unmistakable, there is no reason for her or for anyone else to question her new status as a woman. Menarche constitutes a definite dividing line between childhood and adulthood.¹⁷⁶ In contrast, male initiation rituals seem to reflect not so much certainty about what makes a boy into a man as doubt that manhood can be recognized without initiation ceremonies. For the boy, pubertal changes are many and occur slowly over an extended period of time; there is no one specific developmental event that gives him the assurance to say “I am a man now.”

Boys need something special to become men. Rites of initiation psychologically and socially confirmed a man’s ontology.

The evidence suggests that few cultures regard male initiation as a simple matter. In fact, it seems likely that initiation rituals grew out of a lack of certainty as to whether manhood coincides with biological growth and physical maturation at puberty. Rites of passage were universal and obligatory for all men, but not necessarily for women. In his book *Manhood in the Making*, anthropologist David Gilmore notes a recurring notion:

that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a natural condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win

¹⁷⁶ M. Mead, *Male and female*, (New York: William Morrow, 1950).

against powerful odds. This recurrent notion that manhood is problematic . . . is found among the simplest hunters and fishermen, among peasants and sophisticated urbanized peoples; it is found in all continents and environments.¹⁷⁷

Since man's role in most societies is defined as the more dominating and the one that has more prerogatives, more cultures actually emphasize the initiation ceremony of the adolescent male rather than the female.¹⁷⁸ Most societies have had special rituals, usually difficult and painful, sometimes life threatening, that boys had to go through before they were considered to be worthy of the name of men. The initiate's new social status was made known to the tribe or village and frequently documented by visible body scars as evidence: circumcision, incision, subcision, pierced ears, teeth filing, teeth excision, as well as changed names, special gifts, and tattooing. One personal benefit of these rituals was that once the initiate had navigated his way through them, his manhood could never again be questioned. Others might question his competence or attractiveness, but not his masculinity. At least that much was safe.

Phases of Initiation

Arnold Van Gennep found that most rites of initiation of pre-agricultural societies were comprised of three distinct phases: 1. *Severance*, (separation), 2. *Threshold*, (segregation/transition), and 3. *Reincorporation*. All phases of this pattern were considered essential, without which the rite lacked significant meaning and accomplished little.

In the *severance phase*, the boy was taken away from his boyish environment and stripped of boyish associations. He was separated from his mother and may have been given a new name. This separation usually was an abrupt break, not only from the world of women, but also from the profane world of children—a world of the care free, a world of ignorance and asexuality. This separation represented a symbolic death to the mothers. Even though the mothers knew they would see and touch their sons again, they also knew that their relationship with their sons would never be the same. The maternal universe was seen as the profane world, not for the women, but in terms of the symbiotic mother-son relationship.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, (1990).

¹⁷⁸ R. E. Muus, (1970).

¹⁷⁹ J. Highwater, *The primal mind: Vision and reality in Indian America*, (New York: Harper

Traditional rites of passage into adulthood began with an ending. The child left the haunts of innocence. He said good-bye to his mother, for henceforth he would live as a man among men. Frank Waters relates a father's consoling words to his son in *The Man Who Killed the Deer*:

“Father, Oh father! I hear weeping. Is it my mother I leave in grief?” “Have courage, my son . . . In your mother's womb you were conceived. From an individual human womb you were born to an individual human life. It was necessary, it was good. But *individual human life is not sufficient to itself. It depends upon and is a part of all life.* So now another umbilical cord must be broken—that which binds you to your mother's affections, that which binds you to the individual human life she gave you . . . Now *you belong to your greater mother.* And you return to her womb to emerge once again, as a man who knows himself not as an individual but a unit of his tribe *and a part of all life which ever surrounds him.*” (Emphasis added.)¹⁸⁰

Because the cord that attached him to all he knew as security was cut, the initiate was afraid. He faced an unknown ordeal, some kind of encounter with real or imagined death, at the conclusion of which he was embraced by the larger community and the mantle of manhood was placed upon him. The boy, emerging from the initiation process, experienced the “greater mother” of the natural world as the substitute for his prior attachment to his biological mother. His self-centered ego died and he was reborn within not only the community of the tribe, but also within the larger biotic community. He was taught the responsible role he was to play in both of those communities.

Death of the Ego

Initiation, in the most general sense, is described by Eliade as denoting “a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated.”¹⁸¹ Tribal cultures clearly enforced the idea that youth were to begin their rite of passage as children but would emerge as adults, and their behavior had to change accordingly.¹⁸² Within these rituals, individuals are given the opportunity to

& Row, 1981).

¹⁸⁰ Frank Waters, *The Man Who Killed the Deer* (New York: Ballantine, 1972)

¹⁸¹ M. Eliade, (1958).

¹⁸² Gilmore, (1990).

face their emotional and experiential limitations and to move beyond themselves. They often experience a “second birth,” “dying” to one phase of their lives and the roles associated with that period, leaving it behind, and entering a new stage with a new identity. Mythologist Joseph Campbell says that in the process, “the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage [are] left behind.”¹⁸³ The initiates are honored by their community, and given support and guidance by those who have gone before them. Through the ceremonial form, those in transition are not only accorded a designated position within their community, but also a firm and clear definition of their identity, their social roles, and their personal boundaries. They know where they fit.

Initiation signified a basic change in the existential condition of the initiate, who emerged from the transformational ordeal with a totally different being than the one he possessed prior to the initiation.¹⁸⁴ In order to accomplish this in Greek religion, for example, male initiation rites enacted the death of the ego. The initiate entered the womb of Mother Earth (Terra Mater) as a seed guided by two goddesses, one of whom was Semele, the seed (semen), mother of Dionysus, the grape. After a sojourn in the underworld, the world of the dead, the initiate was thrust back up into the world of light, the world of Apollo. The individual ego, the seed, was dissolved in death and the crest of many seeds burst forth into the sun—the initiate was reborn, manifold, opened to all creation. Death of the ego, death of the self-centered, material life gave birth to the spiritual life. According to Richard Rohr, OFM, effective initiation rituals often taught, either directly through instruction or indirectly through symbolism or a combination of both, the following important ego-transforming lessons:¹⁸⁵

1. “Life is hard.” All uninitiated men who do not know this ahead of time will waste their lives trying to make life easier for themselves.
2. “You are going to die.” The mortality of life must be made real to the initiate by trials, hazing, scarring, facing death and the fear of death. “Suffering,” the Buddha says, “is part of

¹⁸³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949, 1973).

¹⁸⁴ Eliade, M., *Rites and symbols of initiation: The mysteries of birth and rebirth*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1958).

¹⁸⁵ Richard Rohr, OFM, “Boys to Men: Rediscovering rites of passage for our time,” *Sojourners*, 27 (3), (May-June, 1998) pp. 18-19.

the deal.” Without a truthful cosmology, they will be trapped in their pathology. All woundings must become “sacred wounds” preparing them for the final letting go.

3. “You are not that important.” The initiate must be rightly situated in the world that demands respect from him, or he will have either an inflated or deflated sense of himself that will need constant reassurance (modern self-esteem movement). Humility is of central importance for human truth and happiness.

4. “You are not in control.” The initiate must be led to the limits of his own resources and ability to control outcomes, so he will learn to rely upon Another. It is not a world of unlimited progress, but in fact a limited world.

5. “Your life is not about you.” The summary experience. The initiate learns he is but a fragment of something much bigger than himself. His job is to listen, obey, and adore, not calculate. He becomes part of a Great and Holy Mystery.

Thus male initiation rites guided a young male’s psychological context from “His Story” (the ego-centered self), through to “Our Story” (the community), and ultimately to “The Story”, (the natural environment, the sacred cosmos).¹⁸⁶

A man who does not experience the dissolution of his self-centered ego will risk getting lost in the darkness of that ego. This lack of ego transformation can lead the individual to compulsive and addictive behavior. From a Jungian analyst’s point of view, Marion Woodman describes this psychological phenomenon as being consumed by the Devouring Mother, an archetype that

emerges on a general social level in the materialistic ethos of our capitalistic society, the survival of which depends upon ceaseless economic growth and consumption This dark side is embodied in a materialism so pervasive that matter itself, in all its infinite variety, is the divinity we serve. Mater or matter has become Western society’s dark goddess.”¹⁸⁷

I speculate that the self-centered ego has a tendency to use *material* (*mater-*, Latin for mother) possessions to symbolize the self; thus the Jungian archetype of the Devouring

¹⁸⁶ Terms adapted from Rohr, (1994)

¹⁸⁷ Marion Woodman, “From Concrete to Consciousness: The Emergence of the Feminine,” in *Betwixt & Between, Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation*, eds. L. Mahdi, S. Foster, & M. Little, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), p. 203.

Mother merely represents the potentially addictive power of the drive to obtain the prerequisites to reproductive success: material security.

Ideas that become central representations of the self are those in which a person invests the most psychic energy. For the Greek warriors it was honor; for the early Christians it was their religious faith. There were times when Christians, forced to choose between death and rejection of their faith chose death, because annihilation of a self built upon a religious foundation would have been worse. In the thirteenth century the Cathars of southern France let themselves be killed by the thousands rather than surrender their worldview, a view that other Christians believed to be heresy. Of the major religions today, only Islam seems to command this degree of total allegiance, inspiring young men to commit acts of terrorism demanding suicide for their enactment.

People rarely build their egos around religious faith any longer in Western Adolescent Culture. Instead, the ego is allowed free rein to increase its boundaries almost indefinitely by claiming control over greater quantities of material possessions.¹⁸⁸ Mature Cultures recognized this trap and devised various means of counteracting it. Religious and philosophical systems have always been skeptical of material strivings and the accumulation of wealth. They have prescribed instead the development of a self that has a value independent of external accomplishments. Similarly, the enactment of initiation rites for young males was a religious experience, and thus one of the most effective methods of transforming the ego.

The *threshold phase* of initiation typically involved the segregation of the young men into the bush or a special isolated camp where they would be instructed in the religious traditions of the tribe. The elders knew that a change of setting is often necessary to bring about the inner changes they were trying to nurture. During this stage of ego development, the adolescent responds to the ideology of his society. Traditionally, the bonding of age mates was an essential part of youth initiation. Young men became part of a closely related group because of their initiatory status. The initiate was eager to be affirmed by his peers, and was ready to be confirmed by rituals and creeds which at the same time defined what is wrong and harmful. It was a time when young men searched for social values that guided their

¹⁸⁸ Cited in *Jung and Searles: A Comparative Study* by David Sedgwick, (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

identity. They were introduced to a new circle of male elders who would become their mentors. According to Rohr, “Initiation only works when there is a collective spiritual wisdom into which the boy can be introduced and which is agreed upon as rich and valuable by the vast majority of people”.¹⁸⁹

In this transition phase the initiate would undergo trials and tests of courage—such as fasting and enduring pain without crying out—and receive learning which gave him the status of manhood. The philosopher Gustave Thibon states, “The law is inexorable: we lessen our own suffering to the extent that we weaken our inner direct communion with reality.”¹⁹⁰ Stephen Shapiro adds that “Men who remain unable to suffer remain puerile, exiled from the reality of human contact and from concern about the world they inherit”¹⁹¹ For example, the puberty initiation rites of the Australian aborigines known as the Aranda are quite elaborate and last for weeks. The initiate is led from one ordeal to another; he is circumcised, lacerated, and made to suffer terrible pain in many ways. One night he is suddenly thrown spread-eagled on top of a human operating table formed by his kinsmen kneeling on their hands and knees. Other kinsmen stretch him on his back while the ritual surgeon seizes the boy’s penis, inserts a long thin bone deep into the urethra, and slashes at the penis again and again with a small piece of flint used as a scalpel. He cuts through the layers of flesh until he reaches the bone, and the penis splits open like a boiled hot dog. The boy is then led to a fire over which he squats while his blood runs out into the embers. This operation, known technically as subincision, is the final step in his becoming a man in the Aranda band.

What possible use can such a horrible ordeal serve? John Greenway, an anthropologist at the University of Colorado, who has done field work in Australia, interprets subincision and other initiation ordeals as mnemonic devices. He compares the Australian subincision rites to the soap tycoon in *The Hucksters* who disgusted a conference of advertising executives by spitting on the polished mahogany table. But he achieved his aim: The executives remembered what he said to them. Associating information with trauma is an ancient technique in education. If an act is unforgettable, then whatever is associated with that act is unforgettable also. The Australian Aranda youth will never forget what was done to him at his

¹⁸⁹ R. Rohr, (1998), p. 16.

¹⁹⁰ Gustave Thibon, *Notre regard qui manque a la lumiere*, (Paris: Fayard, 1970).

¹⁹¹ Stephen A. Shapiro, *Manhood, a New Definition*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1984)

initiation, nor will he ever forget the lore of the band that he was told at the same time. Nor will you, male reader, probably ever forget what you have just read about subincision. Initiation rites can be very effective in the transmission of cultural values.

Knowledge of tribal myths and secrets was also essential to the initiate's coming of age. According to Mircea Eliade, the initiation of the adolescent into adulthood was mostly the duty of secret societies. In many Mature Cultures, the rite of passage ceremony began with the neophytes experiencing a ceremonial death in which attachment of his family, especially the mother was broken. The rite was then complete with the rebirth of the neophyte as a new member of society with a new name and new identity.¹⁹² As a consequence, Eliade further claims, the youth willingly consented to pass along to the next generation the ancestral laws and customs of his society. These customs were often interpreted and enforced by the secret societies. In addition to being the mechanism of the rite of passage, the secret societies were entities dedicated to the preservation of cultural, religious and ecological values.

Secrecy was also an effective means for the continued satisfaction of the believers in the initiation.¹⁹³ Once the initiate learned the secrets of the tribe, especially those concerning the male social order, he pledged to maintain these secrets which served the purpose of separation. There is no better means of obtaining a sense of individuality than the possession of a secret which the individual is pledged to guard.¹⁹⁴

According to Erikson, forming a new identity is dependent upon harmony between internal and external realities. The failure to establish this balance is what Erikson defined as "identity crisis." Furthermore, gaining an identity is a forerunner to establishing the capacity for adulthood "intimacy".¹⁹⁵ Intimacy is defined as the ability to establish psychological as well as physical relationships with others, and the larger biotic community. Harold F. Searles has described in detail this growth of a conscious and unconscious web of connectedness analogous to the spread of kinship ties in human groups. He sees identity development as not only a honing of personal singularity but a compounding wealth of ever more refined

¹⁹² M. Eliade, (1958), p. 61-80.

¹⁹³ B. Bettelheim, Symbolic wounds: Puberty rites and the envious male, (New York: Collier Books, 1954).

¹⁹⁴ C.G Jung, Memories, dreams, reflections, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961).

¹⁹⁵ M. Nichols, Family therapy concepts and methods, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1984).

relationships between the person and increasingly differentiated parts of the rest of the world—what Johanna Macy would characterize as an “ecological self.” Searles is emphatic that “world” means the non-human (natural) as well as the human.¹⁹⁶ The Native American prayerful recognition of “All my relations” typifies the expansion of this concept of intimacy towards all beings in the natural world, animate and inanimate alike. Failure to achieve this new “ecologically aware” identity leads to what Erikson calls distantiation or distancing behaviors.¹⁹⁷ This distantiation creates a separateness from not only the human community, *but nature as well*. Many religious traditions describe the sensation of coming out of the self and merging with nature, experiencing interdependence with the universe, as the core spiritual emotion.¹⁹⁸ This experience has also been described as “achieving ecstatic consciousness,” “transcendence,” “experience of the Divine,” “numinosity” or “merging with the oceanic” by mystics and shamans of many traditions.

The *reincorporation phase* of the initiatory process involved some physical alteration of the body which signified a change in the physical appearance of the initiate.¹⁹⁹ This physical change also modified the initiate's body so that his body could be physically identified with the bodies of the elders and the bodies of the first mythical members, the founding fathers of the tribe.²⁰⁰ The reborn man had learned the cultural rules and societal behaviors for which he was now responsible. In reincorporation, he was ceremonially accepted by men as a man, and confirmed in that position by his society.

In tribal cultures, the rite of passage into adulthood was irrevocable; the new adults knew their new responsibilities would be permanently expected of them, and that they could not excuse themselves from them simply because they “don’t feel like it today.” Boys were removed from the world of their mothers and incorporated into the world of adults by the initiatory process. Such rituals eliminated any possibility of returning to childhood. The ritual

¹⁹⁶ Harold F. Searles, Paper: “Non-differentiation of ego functioning in the borderline individual and its effect upon his sense of personal identity,” Sixth International Symposium on the Psychotherapy of Schizophrenia, Lausanne, Switzerland, Sept. 28, 1978.

¹⁹⁷ E. Erikson, *Childhood and society*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950).

¹⁹⁸ Marianna Torgovnick, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women and the Quest for Ecstasy*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ M. Eliade, (1957).

²⁰⁰ R. Bly, (1990).

of initiation always contained the element of irreversibility and was sometimes enacted in a mimetic (make believe) performance.²⁰¹ For example, among the Luiseño, a southern California tribe, initiates had to descend into a pit dug in the ground, symbolic of death, and then climb out again, indicating rebirth. Initiation symbolized death and rebirth because the initiate had no other avenue of recourse.

From Profane to Sacred

In male rites of passage, young male initiates confronted transcendent, sacred, and sometimes demonic forces. They relived the primordial events, the mythic history of their tribe, away from the familiar ground of the childhood homes. It was important to root them in their collective history, to show them the archetypal grounds upon which they could live their lives with meaning and honor. Powers greater than the individual needed to be honored, placated, and experienced in the context of a living mythology.²⁰² Eliade believed that initiation recapitulated the sacred history of the world, and thereby the “whole” world, for the initiates and the larger community, was sanctified anew. Initiation rituals usually took place in a “sacred space” which was constructed within the “whole” world but was separated from the outside world by a “threshold.” Crossing over the threshold meant entering the sacred space where one could participate in the initiation process.²⁰³ The threshold concentrated not only on establishing a boundary between the inside sacred world and the outside profane world, but also created the possibility of a passage from one world to another, or from one mode of being to another. According to Rohr, a truly initiated man lived inside a sacred universe of meaning:

For the man who has descended into the drowning waters and come up on the other side, for the initiate who has been in the belly of the whale and spit up on the shore, there is an ultimate new shape to the universe. It is re-enchanted, it now works in a way other than he expected, someone else is on his side, he is not alone, and the young man knows in his very bones that “*my life is not about me.*” The initiate henceforth knows that something always has to die, and until you have lived through that dying, there is something essential that you do not know. It is always the false self that has to die, so that the

²⁰¹ B. Malinowski, Magic, science and religion and other essays, (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1948), p. 21.

²⁰² Eliade, (1958).

²⁰³ J. Campbell, The power of myth, (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

Godself can be born. This is major surgery for the private and imperial ego, a surgery we all avoid if we can.²⁰⁴

Mature Cultures considered the time before adulthood as profane because adolescents were not versed in the “deep” culture of the society. The time after initiation was considered to be sacred because the initiate had been well educated in the rules, laws and myths that determined the cultural and societal structure.²⁰⁵ Initiation was much more about weaving a sacred cosmology—the tribe’s sacred covenant with nature—than it was about specific moral principles. Ritual speaks more to the unconscious and prepares us to receive conscious experiences. Thus, “rites of passage, as opposed to mere lectures on correct behavior, hold together meaning, reconcile opposites, speak to the unconscious, and finally transform more than mere sermons or mandates.”²⁰⁶ Rohr, further elaborates that:

. . . the puberty initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred—and for the primitive world, the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe’s mythological and cultural traditions.²⁰⁷

Thus male initiation rites moved the initiate towards a larger sense of self, perceiving the world as a sacred work, a creation of the gods.²⁰⁸ Initiation for the male “. . . is a fundamental existential experience . . . ”²⁰⁹ The initiate embodied the tribe’s memory of divinity, its connection to the spirit world. And that spirit world was deeply rooted in the natural world. Archeologists, anthropologists and mythologists all agree that nature worship was the wellspring of all early religion and cosmology.

In his book *The Value of Life*, Stephen Kellert states that adolescence is the most favorable time for emphasizing rapid acquisition of factual knowledge, understanding of the natural world and learning about the complexities of ecology and ethical responsibilities for the natural world. His studies also found that the higher a person’s education, the more likely

²⁰⁴ R. Rohr, (1998), p. 18.

²⁰⁵ L. Zoja, Drugs, addiction and initiation: The modern search for ritual, (Boston: Sigo Press, 1989).

²⁰⁶ R. Rohr, (1998), p. 18.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ M. Eliade, (1958).

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 19

that person is to express greater concern, affection, interest and knowledge, and less exploitative and authoritarian attitudes, towards animals and the natural world.²¹⁰

Although the environmental conservation plea to take only what is necessary has an inarguable logic to it, it may also seem wearisome and too familiar. For all but the most dedicated, restraint for restraint's sake makes an easily broken rule. The constraint exerted by inner forms of plants and animals and by other supernaturals (There was no distinction between natural and supernatural worlds to native peoples. It was *all* supernatural.) who demand a morality higher than greed and hold out the necessary threats to enforce it, is more effective than the simple injunction to "save for tomorrow."

The male puberty rite of initiation is among one of the most important and deeply rooted rites of passage practiced by Mature Cultures. Male initiation rites were essentially universal, whereas puberty initiation for women was less common. During three distinct phases the initiate underwent a change of social status and a profound change of consciousness from an egocentric to an allocentric or ecological self image. His ontogeny was culturally confirmed. The education a male experienced during his initiation rite was rich, mystical and unforgettable. Male initiation rites were performed at the most critical and impressionable period of the initiate's life. It was an important opportunity to transmit a culture's most deeply held values—sacred myths, secrets and social rules, the tribe's covenant with nature—that were vital for their long term survival. Why are male rites of initiation, which were so prevalent throughout Mature Cultures, conspicuously absent in Adolescent Cultures, particularly modern Western civilization, and what are the consequences of that absence?

²¹⁰ Stephen R. Kellert, The Value of Life: Biological Diversity and Human Society, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), p. 50.

THE DECLINE OF MALE RITES OF PASSAGE

We live in an age of uninitiated men and we have been bequeathed a sense of loss. We are shaped by what did not pass between the synapses of the generations.

—Sam Keene (1991)

It only takes one generation, and a culture that fails to initiate its young males is doomed to collapse.

—Dolores La Chapelle, (private interview, 1998)

The Failure of Western Society

Western Adolescent Culture differs from Mature Cultures in its lack of clearly defined structures or institutions that enhance and give meaning to life's transitions. Nowhere is this omission more glaring and more harmful than in the transition from childhood to adulthood, marked in many Mature Cultures by ritual initiation at puberty, whereby adolescents become members of the tribe or the community. Malidoma Somé, a medicine man of the Dagara tribe from Upper Volta, West Africa, writes, "Initiation is the bridge between youth and adulthood. In my village, a person who is not initiated is considered a child, no matter how old that person is. Without initiation, we cannot recall our purpose. To not be initiated is to be a non-person."²¹¹ According to Eliade, ". . . it is through initiation that men attain the status of human beings."²¹² Without it, they are condemned to perpetual alienation. The absence of initiation rites is one of the causes of widespread alienation and despair in Western society.²¹³ According to the US Center for Health Statistics, suicide among children in the age group of 15 to 19 doubled between 1979 and 1990. Suicide and homicide currently account for one third of all deaths among American teenagers. In short, Western Adolescent Culture has abandoned its males.

The transmission of a culture's social, religious, and environmental values to its children has traditionally been facilitated through ritualistic initiation ceremonies that pervaded throughout most primal, hunter-gatherer cultures. These rituals are now rare in

²¹¹ Malidoma Somé, "Rights of Passage: Initiation is the Cure", *Utne Reader*, (July-August, 1994).

²¹² M. Eliade, (1958).

²¹³ Zoja, (1989).

“civilized” cultures and practically non-existent in modern Western society.²¹⁴ Although the incest taboo is still observed in modern society, initiation rites appear to have largely disappeared, other than some rudimentary fragments of initiation rites such as fraternity hazings, religious rituals such as confirmations or bar mitzvahs, sports rituals, Boy Scouts, education, work and war.

Carlton Coon, a Harvard anthropologist who devoted fifty years to the study of traditional cultures, concluded that in contemporary America,

. . . unlike the children of [traditional] . . . boys and girls [today] have no adults to guide them through the puberty ordeals that they need in order to maintain social continuity. It is no wonder that they create age-graded micro-societies of their own. The secrecy that once formed a vital part of puberty rites is transferred to their parents, to whom they will not reveal what they have been doing . . .

Saving our planet from human destruction, and from the destruction of life itself, is only half of our problem. The other half is for us to learn how nature intended human beings to live and to reestablish continuity with those who may still be alive after the rest of us are dead.²¹⁵

Teachers, researchers and scholars have recognized that our culture is one of the few in history that does not incorporate rites of passage, and that this has severe psychological and social, and—the primary premise of this thesis—dire environmental consequences. The loss of these rituals has coincided with the emergence of an illusion that people no longer require intimate relationships with the living world to achieve lives full of meaning and value. This is confirmed by therapists and others who work with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual demands of their clients that, in other societies, are addressed through sanctioned rituals.²¹⁶

Gregory Bateson said that without context there is no meaning. Joseph Campbell believed that the psyche of each human being contains a rich array of mythological symbols, archetypal impulses, and initiatory images which must be expressed and affirmed within a ritualistic context. Otherwise, these essential energies remain locked within us or are acted out in inappropriate ways: “there is something in these initiatory images, so necessary to the

²¹⁴ M. Eliade, (1958).

²¹⁵ Carlton Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*, (Boston, Atlantic, Little Brown, 1971), p. 392-3.

²¹⁶ Grof, (1996).

psyche that if they are not supplied from without, through myth and ritual, they will have to be announced again . . . from within.” Campbell further states:

It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward . . . In fact, it may well be that the very high incidence of neuroticism among ourselves follows from the decline among us of such effective spiritual aid.²¹⁷

The well known anthropologist Margaret Mead believed that the fact that modern society has lost sanctioned rites of passage was a critical contributing factor to the increase of various forms of social pathology. Based on her cross-cultural studies, she concluded that we carry intense emotions and impulses (evolutionary mating strategies?) in our personality structure that, if they are not dealt with internally, are projected into our everyday life.

Growing up Western Style

As people grow from infancy to adulthood they progress through various stages. Babies are born totally self-centered, unaware of anything outside their own immediate experience. At certain ages they become increasingly aware of their surroundings and their role. Children eventually become able to care for themselves instead of depending on their parents to take care of them. Teenagers become conscious of social structure among their peers, and assume more and more adult responsibilities. Part of the maturation process is a shift away from a narcissistic orientation towards a social orientation and responsibility for others.

Adolescence, as a distinct stage of development, is a modern concept, barely one hundred years old. Before that time, in pre-industrial society, the family was the primary economic unit. Children shared in the work that was performed in and around the home, and were an integral part of the family unit, assuming apprenticeship roles in childhood and adult roles around the time of puberty.²¹⁸ This notion of adolescence as a stage different from childhood or adulthood was popularized largely as the result of the writings of psychologist G. Stanley Hall, whose book, *Adolescence*, was originally published in 1904.

In modern society, an adolescent is one who is neither child nor adult, but in an “in between” state. This interim life stage has only vaguely defined beginnings. Apparently, it

²¹⁷ J. Campbell, (1949, 1973) p. 11.

²¹⁸ P. Aries, *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life*, (New York: Vintage, 1962)

ends when the adolescent has reached a certain age. The adolescent stage in Western culture appears as a “holding pattern”, a time of waiting that can last up to eight years and beyond. It is a time often marked by chaos and upheaval.

The traditional western psychological paradigm narrowly identifies only two tasks to be completed at the adolescent stage of development for boys in Western Adolescent Culture. The first task is to question the nature of the world and one's place in it. To accomplish this, the boy himself may have to initiate the termination of certain relationships with individuals, groups or institutions. Separation then becomes a challenge at this developmental stage in an adolescent's life. Alternatively, in Mature Cultures this task was required and facilitated by the older males of the society. The novice did not have a choice. It was not a privatized, psychological affair, but the responsibility of the whole community. In most Mature Cultures, boys were separated from their mothers, but they were entrusted to the care of one or more men who guided their development.²¹⁹ Usually the brother of the initiate's father was responsible for this task. There is no such arrangement in Western Adolescent Culture.²²⁰ The second task outlined by modern psychology is to take a preliminary step into the adult world and to imagine oneself as a participant in it. During this time, the young male is on the boundary between adolescence and the adult world. He must complete this difficult transition on his own to consolidate an adult identity.

MacNab, in describing the development of gender identity, suggested that the first phase of development is the establishment of a core gender identity. Identity formation determines how well individuals are able to establish their "roles" within their respective society. Role is the external element that corresponds to identity and is how a society perceives the status and function of one of its members. Men's identities are inextricably linked to their gender role. Mature Culture initiations gave a man a clear identity, a sense of self worth, and an adult role to play in the society.²²¹ Although the child is unaware of its core identity, which is the earliest sense of belonging to one sex or the other, the

²¹⁹ B. Zilbergeld, (1992).

²²⁰ There is much discussion in the modern men's movement of a “father wound” suffered by many men who had an adversarial relationship with their father. In traditional societies, the boy's uncle was responsible for enforcing discipline and the father was thus able to adopt the supportive role of friend and mentor. In our age of the nuclear family, the role of disciplinarian often falls on the father, or worse, the absent father.

²²¹ B. Zilbergeld, (1992).

environment around the child generates a host of associations and images that begin to shape the meaning of the biological facts.²²² For the male child, the core gender identity is most likely to evolve in interactions with his mother and other female figures. This phenomenon is relatively recent and can be attributed primarily to the advent of the industrial revolution, which interfered with male interactions with their fathers. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, Western culture was primarily agricultural or craft oriented and young men spent the day with their fathers. They learned their perceptions of the world through a man's eyes.²²³

The Absent Father

The post-industrial era, in contrast, has seen a continuing rise in the absent father phenomenon. Robert Bly has pointed out how even the minimal father-to-son apprenticeship bonding that used to exist prior to the Industrial Revolution has eroded. It is estimated today that the average American father interacts for only 37 seconds a day with his infant children. Also, only 50% of children from divorced families have any contact with their fathers before adolescence, and, since 53% of all marriages end in divorce, this affects a large number of children.²²⁴ Boys must travel a more torturous and ambiguous route to consolidate their identities than do girls. Boys must give up their first love, their mothers, and identify with a male—but they have generally not been provided with loving and physically and emotionally present male role models. The lack of a loving, respectful relationship with their fathers is one of the greatest tragedies males suffer and in itself accounts for many of the problems men have relating to others and even themselves. In *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons and the Search for Masculinity*, psychiatrist and family therapist Frank Pitman writes,

Masculinity is supposed to be passed on from father to son. Women, no matter how wonderful, no matter how loving, can't teach it to us. If we don't have fathers, we should have grandfathers, uncles, stepfathers to raise us from boys into men. If we don't have men in our family, then our need for mentors begins early. If the males we know are the other teenaged boys or the macho heroes from the movies, we may get a distorted, exaggerated concept of masculinity.²²⁵

²²² T. MacNab, "What do men really want?: Male rituals of initiation in group psychotherapy", *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*. 40 (2), (April, 1990). p. 139-152.

²²³ R. Bly, (1990).

²²⁴ S. Osherson, *Finding our fathers: The unfinished business of manhood*. (New York: Free Press, 1986).

²²⁵ Frank Pitman, *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons and the Search for Masculinity*

The period of adolescence may be long or short, depending on social expectations and on a society's definition as to what constitutes maturity and adulthood. In Mature Cultures adolescence is frequently a relatively short period of time, while in Adolescent Culture, with patterns of prolonged education coupled with laws against child labor, the period of adolescence is much longer, and may include most of the second decade of a man's life. In Mature Cultures this developmental period was typically considered as occurring around the age of 13 and was short lived, usually spanning only the period of time taken for the initiation rite.

In Western Adolescent Culture, puberty rites have lost their formal recognition and symbolic significance and there no longer is consensus as to what constitutes an initiation ritual. The old ways of marking the end of childhood and the beginning of adult life have "devolved" into gestures emptied of their content by the realities of modern experience. Due to the lack of meaningful rites of initiation, adolescence in Western Adolescent Culture has been prolonged into the latter years, even extending throughout adulthood! Many adults are unclear about when their adolescence actually ended. They continue to live as though they had never formally taken on the burdens and responsibilities of maturity. As a result there are many males in our society who remain caught in an extended adolescence.²²⁶ What Paul Shepard describes as a "crippled ontogeny." He states that "men [of Western Adolescent Culture] may now be the possessors of the world's flimsiest identity structure—by Paleolithic standards, childish adults."²²⁷

An extended adolescence, however, is not without some benefits. Compared to simpler Mature Cultures, our post-modern Western Adolescent Culture is infinitely more complex and an extended adolescence allows young men to learn these complexities in order to negotiate successfully through the daunting mazes of our social and economic landscapes.

Conditional Manhood

Because men in Western Adolescent Culture learn from an early age that manhood is conditional rather than absolute, (initiation rites in primitive cultures conferred the status of

²²⁶ R. Bly, (1996).

²²⁷ P. Shepard, (1982), p. 124.

absolute manhood), males are in constant danger of losing their manhood and their identities. Not making the team, not being willing to fight, not performing in bed, losing a job—that's all it takes for a man to no longer believe that he is a man. Women have no experience with and little understanding of this kind of threat

It would appear that Mature Cultures were able to guarantee a man's passage or progress into adulthood by ritualistic initiation, but in Western Adolescent Culture, such a process is not so obvious. Instead of having a prescribed form of initiation, many youths are left to create their own, and are therefore unsure as to whether they've passed the right test. Because there is no ceremonial closure, the test of manhood is open ended, needing to be proven again and again. In traditional cultures, everybody passes the test. There are no older males wandering around the tribe who failed the test. All boys take the test; virtually all of them survive; all who survive are men. In contrast, many of our rites of passage are competitive, and for each batch of winners, there must be losers—men that failed at football, or college, or are crippled in the armed services. Richard Rohr laments that:

. . . [the male] must take personal responsibility for creating all the patterns and making all the connections—if there are any. It is an unwhole, incoherent, and finally unsafe world. No wonder the typical young man in our non-mythic culture spends so much time posturing, climbing, and overcompensating. In his heart he knows it is all not true — and therefore not sacred.²²⁸

Another purpose of initiation was to safeguard the community from male wildness. Initiation was a way of binding male aggressive energy, stopping males from becoming violent outlaws, dangerous to the community. Power without spirituality will be abused.²²⁹

The adolescent male psyche is a dangerous vacuum until it is filled during the initiation process. If a culture does not provide any significant, positive rituals by which all male adolescents may become responsible members of the adult community, they will search for their own means of initiation. Seeking experiential means of “earning” or marking adulthood, adolescent males often generate their own passage ceremonies. Because they lack the wisdom of true manhood, and have little idea of what actually makes a man (thanks to the inadequacy of cultural and media definitions), they invent grotesque parodies, twisted

²²⁸ R. Rohr, (1998), p. 18.

²²⁹ Ibid.

psychodramas, dangerous and self destructive scenarios that sidestep or mock the major issues facing them as boys who are trying to be men.²³⁰ It is important to understand that an initiation rite initiates the male *into* a cultural context, either presenting the male with a positive or negative role model to emulate. It really doesn't matter to the young male, as long as he is initiated into something—that he belongs to something larger than himself—as long as it gives him an identity and his life meaning and purpose.

Western Adolescent Culture lacks any significant rites of initiation into a mature, ecocentric consciousness for men which can serve as a built-in governor limiting their destructive tendencies. Men have been abandoned to their unrestrained, adolescent, mating-strategy-dominated consciousness and led to believe that they are apart from nature. Arrogant in the use of their powerful technologies, these uninitiated men still believe they can ignore those natural limits and deny the dire consequences in pursuit of wealth, power and status—the prerequisites for attracting a desirable female mate—and thereby maximizing their reproductive success.

The evolutionary forces driving the male mating strategies that maximize reproductive success—the biological default foundation of that behavior—will remain in control if the young male fails to undergo a ritual initiation process. He will remain trapped in adolescence, easily swayed by primal, instinctive mating forces. The uninitiated male will forever be ruled by his penis, and subject to the intoxicating lure of beautiful women who command a high price. According to Richard Rohr, he will continue to have a “false sense of grandiosity and entitlement, and thus rise to power through coercion or excessive wealth accumulation”.²³¹ This has ultimately resulted in a world ruled by heavily armed, narcissistic, “high chair tyrants,” encouraged by women with desires for material security. The long term result of the unmitigated, collaborative pursuit of wealth, power and status—the prerequisites to reproductive success—is ultimately the indiscriminate consumption of the Earth's resources and environmental destruction.

²³⁰ Steven Foster, Bunny Bashing into Manhood, (Carus Publishing Co., Illinois, 1996).

²³¹ R. Rohr, Lecture: “A Smaller Self and a Bigger God,” Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM, May 28, 1996.

Abandoned Rites

If male initiation rites were so important, why were they abandoned by some Mature Cultures? The following are a few possible explanations.

- *The Development of Agriculture*

After 100,000 or more years of humans living largely in harmony with nature, there were some cultural eruptions. In a few parts of the world some tribes began to dominate nature, to intervene in restructuring their surroundings, to begin converting huge amounts of land from natural forest into grazing or farming land, thus producing more food for themselves.²³²

About fifteen thousand years ago, farming replaced hunting and gathering as the main form of subsistence for several tribes. Farming tied people down to a specific territory. Whereas hunters could always move on, it was much more difficult for farmers to relocate. They had too much invested in their fields, and any good land in the immediate area was probably settled by someone else. Agriculture, as opposed to hunting and gathering, produced a surplus that could be stored away. This meant that through skill or good luck some people amassed more food than others. This obviously had great advantages for ensuring their reproductive success. At that point, inheritance of wealth became possible, and under the right conditions it could bring about permanent caste or class distinctions. Farming required relatively specialized knowledge and ownership of land and tools. Some individuals were able to acquire more productive land or make better tools, and since they produced more food, they accumulated wealth.

With this ability to create a surplus of food, societies no longer saw the need to maintain old customs which facilitated their survival in times of relative scarcity. If there is a surplus of resources available, why bother with rituals and social customs that, on the surface, appear to be superfluous? Perhaps they substituted control over their environment using these newly developed agricultural technologies for control over their mating strategies and population through social, religious and cultural traditions, including the most vital: male initiation rites.

According to anthropologist John Greenway, initiation rites are most severe in societies where survival is most precarious, and they become less painful (and therefore less

memorable) as life for the group becomes easier.²³³ Australian aborigines, who live along the coast where the environment is less harsh, do not practice subincision; instead they submit their youth to the somewhat milder ordeal of having a tooth pounded out. The rites become steadily less memorable—and consequently less meaningful—in more affluent human societies where they are reduced to fraternity initiations, Catholic confirmation, or the Jewish bar mitzvah.

Using Paleolithic hunter-gatherers as models of ecologically balanced societies, Paul Shepard observed that with the advent of domestication, approximately twelve thousand years ago, civilized humanity began to pervert or lose the developmental practices that had functioned for hundreds of thousands of years. A particularly interesting feature of Shepard's analysis is his discussion of the interplay between neoteny, the extended period of immaturity and dependency of the human child, and the ontogenetic support provided by culture. This long developmental process makes the growing child particularly vulnerable. In the case of a species with such marked neoteny as the human, the failure or disappearance of culturally provided developmental supports would have devastating consequences. Shepard identified two stages in which ancient patterns of development may have become chronically incomplete: infant/caregiver relationships and adolescent transition rites. The distorting process

first began with a slight twist in the life of the child, with events that may only have marred his capacity for elderhood and judgmentThe history of Western man has been a progressive peeling back of the psyche, as if the earliest agriculture may have addressed itself to extenuation of adolescent concerns while the most modern era seeks to evoke in society at large some of the fixations of early natality.²³⁴

Shepard further argues that agriculture increased the distance between the growing child and the non-human or “wild” world of nature:

By aggravating the tensions of separation from the mother and at the same time spatially isolating the individual from the non-humanized world, agriculture made it difficult for the developing person to approach the issues

²³² T. Hartmann, (1998), p115.

²³³ J. Greenway, *The Inevitable Americans*, (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1964)

²³⁴ P. Shepard, (1982), pp. 16, 40.

around which the crucial passages into fully mature adult life had been structured in the course of human existence.²³⁵

- ***Religious Persecution and Colonialism***

The spread of Judeo-Christian religions may have been instrumental in encouraging the wholesale abandonment of Mature Culture's traditional adolescent male initiation rites along with other "pagan" rituals. Animism, which saw the natural world as sharing human qualities and treated things and events in nature as sacred objects of respect or worship, was the dominate attitude among ancient cultures and persisted almost everywhere in the world, but in the Mediterranean, for example, it gradually gave way to other ways of thinking. In Israel, transcendent monotheism replaced animism's "world full of gods." Instead of being divine in itself, nature was seen as a lower order of creation, given as a trust to mankind with accountability to God. In the latter history of that idea, people tended to take the command to have dominion over the Earth as blanket permission to do whatever they wished to the environment, conveniently forgetting the part about accountability to God, or else interpreting most human activities as improvements in nature and therefore pleasing to God.

A much less subtle form of religious colonialism was through campaigns of persecution and missionary fervor, like the Crusades and the Inquisition, to eradicate competing religious beliefs. For centuries, those who practiced nature based religion were either converted or put to death by Jews, Christians, Hindus and other religions. For example, Christianity undertook a grand program of parallel exorcisms: of witches in Europe, of heathenism and superstition abroad. The statistics of these purges are mind boggling. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, for example, at least 250,000 people are thought to have been persecuted or executed as witches, with some estimates putting the figure as high as 2 million.²³⁶ These terrorist campaigns were quite effective in convincing most persecuted peoples to abandon their beliefs and nature-honoring ritual practices. It took the Church only 200 years of terror and death to transform the image of paganism into devil worship and folk culture into heresy.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Anna L. Barstow, Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts, (San Francisco: Harper, 1993)

Christianity was very effective at co-opting pagan ceremonies and rituals throughout the world. Wherever coercion was not used, sometimes Christianity successfully grafted itself onto the structure of a Mature Culture's traditional beliefs, so that, for example, Catholicism and animism coexist side by side within present-day Southwest Indian pueblos.²³⁷ But more often, Christianity irrevocably altered the beliefs and social systems of Mature Cultures. Among many Native Americans, for example, Native languages were suppressed at mission schools, at which attendance was mandatory. Similar procedures were followed in parts of Africa and other colonized countries. Within European cultures animism and pagan rituals were purged or marginalized. In its early days the Catholic church openly tolerated practices it later demonized as witchcraft. The cult of Mary is widely agreed to have originated as an accommodation of pagan Mother cults. But by the fifteenth century, a church bloated with temporal power denounced Mother cults and their fertility rites, persecuting them ruthlessly.²³⁸

The UCLA historian Lynn White, Jr. argued that Christianity had desacralized nature, encouraged its exploitation, and promoted an anthropocentric world view in which humans are superior to, and in charge of, the rest of nature. According to White:

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion that the world has seen . . . Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions . . . not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.

He further argued that Marxism and other so-called "post-Christian" ideologies in the West are Judeo-Christian heresies that are just as destructive and promote the same exploitative attitudes toward nature.²³⁹

However, even within the Christian tradition, though barely tolerated by the Church hierarchy, there were those who expressed awe of a sacred environment, particularly in the nature mysticism of Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen. St. Francis wrote in his great *Canticle of Brother Sun, Sister Moon* that all of creation was a family, and spoke of nature's elements as brothers and sisters. Hildegard of Bingen, a respected theologian, painter,

²³⁷ Jean Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).

²³⁸ Carlos Ginsberg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

²³⁹ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science* 155 (1967), pp. 1203-7.

musician and healer, invented the term *viriditus*, (greening spirit) for the force she saw in nature. The very word of God, for Hildegard, was “all verdant greening, all creativity.” She celebrated Mary as *viridissima virga*.²⁴⁰ Many Christians of the early Church practiced a gift economy and lived in a kind of primitive communism, sharing their property.

- **Cultural Memes**

We exist because organisms who carried our genes in the past were able to pass them on from generation to generation all the way to the present. But not only do genes evolve; so do *memes*, units of cultural instruction that affect human behavior patterns, such as values, language and technologies. The information contained in memes is not passed on through chemical instructions in genomes, but through imitation and learning. This process is referred to as mimetic (imitative) evolution.²⁴¹

The term “meme” was introduced about twenty years ago by the British biologist Richard Dawkins, who used it to describe a unit of cultural information comparable in its effects on society to those of the chemically coded instructions contained in the gene on the human organism. It was derived from the Greek word *mimesis*, or imitation. Dawkins pointed out that cultural instructions are passed from one generation to the next by example and imitation, rather than the shuffling of genes that occurs between sperm and ova. Thus “desk” is a meme, and so is the Beatles’ song *Rocky Raccoon* and Christianity. Memes are created when the human nervous system reacts to an experience and codes it in a form that can be communicated to others.

At the moment of its creation, the meme is part of a consciousness that begins to react with and transform the consciousness of its creator, and that of other humans who come into contact with it. For example, the invention of TV, or capitalism, qualifies as a meme that has a much wider diffusion and greater impact than the name I may give to my pet canary. A collection or set of memes commonly accepted by the majority of members of a society constituting a world view is a cultural paradigm. So even though memes are initially created by the mind, they soon turn around and begin to influence minds. Once a meme is

²⁴⁰ Tom Hayden, *The Lost Gospel of the Earth, A Call for Renewing Nature, Spirit, & Politics*, (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1996),p. 76-7.

²⁴¹ Dawkins, (1976) p. 192.

well established, it tends to generate inertia in the mind, and encourages us to pursue its logical consequences.²⁴² However, memes can also die off due to lack of interest, their dysfunctionality or the invasion of another, more dominant, meme. Such is the case with many languages that are disappearing due to colonialization and eventual eradication by more dominant language memes, such as Spanish and English.

From the moment dualist philosophy (a cultural meme) first made its appearance with the Greeks, and perhaps even before, it imposed a separation between body and mind, object and subject, nature and culture. The rise of the mechanistic world view (a paradigm meme), derived from Descartes and Newton, followed shortly after, and became the model for all further development of European and American culture. Building on Plato, René Descartes in the seventeenth century philosophically justified the dissemination of this world view. Theologian, Thomas Berry traces the origin of Western culture's alienation from nature to Descartes's invention of the mechanistic worldview: "Descartes . . . killed the Earth and all its living beings. For him the natural world was mechanism. There was no possibility of entering into a communion relationship."²⁴³ The emergence of this world view has been held responsible by many scholars for the uprooting of humans from nature. Most ceremonial rituals and rites of passage practiced in Mature Cultures were intimately related to the Earth, which was perceived as sacred. The Cartesian world view "killed" the gods of the Earth, rendering the rituals obsolete.²⁴⁴

A more contemporary snapshot of the destructive process wrought by a virulent cultural meme has been documented in a film production and book by the same title, *Ancient Futures, Learning from Ladakh* (1991), by the eminent sociologist, Helena Norberg-Hodge. She chronicles, in detail, observations of a culture, rich in Buddhist spiritual traditions, with an intricate system of family and social ties, that is disrupted by modern development forces. Ladakh was a peaceful community where ninety percent of the land was evenly distributed amongst families, where people lived ecologically and sustainably off the land, and where almost everyone knew how to build a house and meet all of their basic needs. Then a road to

²⁴² Csikszentmihalyi, (1993), p. 124-126.

²⁴³ Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1988)

²⁴⁴ G. Corneau, *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons*, (London: Shambala Publications, 1991)

India, tourism and the market economy were introduced that ultimately proved disastrous for the culture.²⁴⁵

According to Norberg-Hodge, the weak links in the cultural fabric were the teenage boys. They were easily seduced by the western stereotyped images of sex and violence of Western civilization, characterized as a “teenage boy culture”, and abandoned their traditions in favor of the surface glamour and toys of the modern world. To her knowledge, the Ladakh people did not practice adolescent male initiation rites.²⁴⁶

The absence of male initiation rites is possible in a Mature Culture, such as Ladakh, but this does not automatically predispose that culture to spontaneously developing regressive cultural attributes. Perhaps the introduction of a trigger event is required, such as a famine caused by a radical climate change or the invasion of deceptive and “seductive memes” from a neighboring culture. Ladakh was rich in Buddhist traditions—though Buddhism is similar to Western religion in its secondary regard for nature²⁴⁷—and in kinship practices that historically proved sufficient for maintaining traditional Mature Culture characteristics in this relatively remote society. However, these social customs were incapable of defending their culture from the invasive and overwhelming economic values of modern Western society which eventually enveloped and destroyed their traditional social fabric. In fact, the lack of traditional initiation rites in Ladakh culture was probably responsible for the vulnerability of the teenage boys to these influences. Unless his psychological constitution has been permanently set by the initiation process in a cosmology that is reverent towards nature, Western Adolescent Culture has the power to indulge the male’s evolutionary propensity to accumulate as much wealth as he can—pursuing the prerequisites to his reproductive success—and in so doing, encourage the treatment of traditional customs with contempt.

Western Adolescent Culture has abandoned its responsibility for providing meaningful initiation rites for its males. This has resulted in dire psychological, social, cultural and environmental consequences. Young males are left to their own devices in the struggle of defining their identity as men and their place in society. This task is made even more difficult

²⁴⁵ Helena Norberg-Hodge, Ancient Futures, Learning From Ladakh, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991)

²⁴⁶ Helena Norberg-Hodge, Personal interview, New College of California, Santa Rosa, CA., June 20, 1998.

²⁴⁷ Tom Hayden, The Lost Gospel of the Earth, (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1996), p. 164.

by the demise of the traditional father-son relationship. The lack of formal initiation rites has effectively over-extended the period a man may remain in the adolescent stage of development. As a result, Western Adolescent Culture allows this stage to be dominated by the pursuit of the prerequisites to reproductive success—wealth, status and power—leading ultimately to the indiscriminate, addictive consumption of resources and environmental destruction. Traditional male initiation rites may have been abandoned with the rise of Western civilization as a result of the development of agriculture, the eradication of animistic religious beliefs during the spread of Judaeo-Christian religions, or the invasion of predatory cultural memes. However, when properly implemented, male initiation rites in Mature Cultures played the critical role of ensuring the continuation of a society's cultural integrity and its sustainable covenant with nature by transmitting crucial social and ecological values to subsequent generations. How might the reintroduction of male initiation rites restore long-term ecological values to modern Western culture and what form might these initiation rites assume?

DEEP ECOLOGY AND MALE INITIATION

Now one of the significant historical roles of the primal people of the world is not simply to sustain their own traditions, but to call the entire civilized world back to a more authentic mode of being.

—Eco-theologian Father Thomas Berry

The old gods are dead or dying and people everywhere are searching, asking: What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as one of harmonious being.

—Joseph Campbell

Where will we find the wisdom to make our way through the maze of global overpopulation, industrial toxins, loss of biodiversity, ozone depletion, and countless other unfolding environmental crises that cast a long, uncertain shadow over the Earth's fate? World-renowned Stanford ecologist, Paul Ehrlich suggests we may find it in popular movements that offer a timely blend of the truths of modern science and a complementary spiritual quality of altering our collective behavior:

I am convinced that such a quasi-religious movement, one concerned with the need to change values that now govern much of human activity, is essential to the persistence of our civilization. But agreeing that science, even the science of ecology, cannot answer all questions—that there are “other ways of knowing”—does not diminish the absolutely critical role that good science must play if our overextended civilization is to save itself.²⁴⁸

Ehrlich's comments were directed at the emerging international, nature-centered Deep Ecology movement, which tends to envision a more ecocentric and egalitarian world—one dominated more by interspecies empathy than by scientific rationality.

Dr. Noel Brown of the UN Environment Program said, “The need for establishing a new spiritual and ethical base for human activities on earth has never been greater.” So far, Western Adolescent Culture has found nothing to replace the larger than life meaning that men find in belonging to something larger than themselves. The philosophical movement of Deep Ecology can now provide that meaning we so desperately need.

²⁴⁸ Paul Ehrlich, *The Machinery of Nature*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) pp. 17-18

The term “Deep Ecology” was first introduced by the Norwegian activist and philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970’s, when stressing the need to move beyond superficial responses to the social and ecological problems we face. He proposed that we ask “deeper questions,” looking at the “why and how” of the way we live and seeing how this fits with our deeper beliefs, needs and values. Asking questions like “How can I live in a way that is good for me, other people and our planet?” may lead us to make deep changes in the way we live. In just two decades, Deep Ecology, as a theory, has moved from a proposal in a philosophical journal to a position that is now a bench mark in defining varieties of environmental philosophies.²⁴⁹

The heart of Deep Ecology consists of a number of interrelated claims about humans and their relationship with nature. This platform forms the basis for a larger unity among all those who accept the importance of ecocentrism (non-anthropocentrism) and who understand that this entails radical social change. The platform was formulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions while they were camping in Death Valley in 1984. These principles are stated “in a literal, somewhat neutral way” in the hopes that they will be “understood and accepted by persons coming from different philosophical and religious positions.”²⁵⁰

The platform itself consists of eight basic principles:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

²⁴⁹ Warwick Fox, Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism, (Boston: Shambala, 1990), p. 44-45.

²⁵⁰ Bill Devall & George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, 1988), p. 69-70.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.²⁵¹

Deep Ecology can be seen as part of a much wider process of questioning basic assumptions in our society that is leading to a new way of looking at science, politics, health care, education, spirituality and many other areas. Because this change in the way we see things is so wide ranging, it has been called a new “worldview.” It tends to emphasize the relationships between different areas, bringing together personal and social change, science and spirituality, economics and ecology. George Sessions, a prominent philosophical voice in the Deep Ecology movement states that

the crucial paradigm shift the Deep Ecology movement envisions as necessary to protect the planet from ecological destruction involves the move from an anthropocentric [adolescent] to a spiritual/ecocentric [mature] value orientation. The wild ecosystems and species on the Earth have intrinsic value and the right to exist and flourish, and are also necessary for the ecological health of the planet *and* the ultimate well-being of humans. Humanity must drastically scale down its industrial activities on Earth, change its consumption lifestyles, stabilize and then reduce the size of the human population by humane means, and protect and restore wild ecosystems and the remaining wildlife on the planet. This is a program that will last far into the twenty-first century. The crucial question is how much irreversible global ecological destruction humanity will continue to cause before existing trends can be significantly reversed.²⁵²

Deep Ecology is a new philosophy of nature that provides the most radical critique of the Western ideology of progress and development to date. It challenges the prevailing notion that the environment is simply a storehouse of resources put here for our exclusive use, and

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 70.

²⁵² George Sessions, Ed. Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century, (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1995), p. xxi.

recognizes our fundamental interdependence with *all* of life. It is an ecological consciousness that goes right to the heart of our lives. It represents an ecocentric perspective, which is the opposite of the narcissistic, adolescent individualism of our culture, where seeing ourselves as separate from our world makes it easier not to be concerned by what is happening to it. Deep Ecology is thinking from the point of view of the entire ecosystem rather than from the human-centered point of view. The science of ecology and the traditions of native peoples, as well as the core theme in every major religious faith, (though it has often been hidden and distorted), teach us that the world is not a pyramid with us on the top, but it is more like a web, and we are only one strand in that web, interconnected with all the other strands.²⁵³ Deep Ecology is a spiritual view of nature, one that sees incredible richness and miraculousness everywhere. Deep Ecology is the philosophical exploration and expression of Mature Culture wisdom.

The Deep Ecology platform is more than just a statement of an ecocentric philosophy. It goes far beyond the current popular “band aid” and technofix approaches to solving the environmental problems that plague the Earth. It asserts that accepting the platform involves acting to change economic, technological, and ideological structures. Deep Ecology is an attempt to move environmental activism from a civic duty to a sacred obligation. Paul Taylor calls for an “*inner* change in our moral beliefs and commitments” as “the first, indispensable step” in developing a “harmony between civilization and nature.”²⁵⁴ While I commend Taylor for his willingness to move beyond the language of academic philosophy toward moral advocacy, he falls short of addressing the critical question of how such an inner change in moral belief and commitment happens.

Marie-Louise von Franz suggests where we might begin looking for an answer:

It is increasingly clear that our cultural values have been undermined, so that even among the masses, and especially among today’s youth, there are individuals who are seeking, not so much the destruction of the old, as something new on which to build. And because the destruction has been so widespread and has gone so deep, this new foundation must be located in the

²⁵³ John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Femin & Arne Naess, Thinking Like a Mountain, (Philadelphia, PA, New Society Publishers, 1988)

²⁵⁴ Paul Taylor, Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 312, Emphasis in original.

depths of the most natural, the most primordial, most universally human core of existence.²⁵⁵

Leading ecotheologian Thomas Berry also emphasizes that “

. . . any recovery of the natural world will require . . . a conversion experience deep in the psychic structure of the human. . . . Once we grant that a change from an anthropocentric to a biocentric [ecocentric] sense of reality and value is needed, we must ask how this can be achieved and how it would work. We must begin by accepting the fact that the life community, the community of all living species, is the greater reality and the greater value, and that the primary concern of the human must be the preservation and the enhancement of this larger community.²⁵⁶

I believe it is possible to accomplish this inner change of moral belief and commitment through male initiation rites. The reintroduction into our contemporary culture of male rites of passage structured upon the precepts of the Deep Ecology platform may be just the vehicle we have been searching for.

We cannot today recreate the original “wilderness man” . . . But we can recover him, because he exists in us. He is the foundation spirit and psyche on which we build, and we are not complete until we have recovered him.

—Laurens van der Post (1985)

Rites of Passage to a Sustainable Future

Rites of passage have a very long and venerable history. For millennia, tribal and religious rites have supported and directed youth on their path to adulthood.²⁵⁷ Cultures have almost universally held rituals of transformation for their young. These traditional customs endured for centuries as part of a carefully structured and effective transformation into adulthood, enabling initiates to perpetuate their society in a meaningful and orderly way. They initiated

²⁵⁵ C.G. Jung, *His Myth in Our Time*, (New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975)

²⁵⁶ T. Berry, (1987).

the young men into the sacred heritage of their community, village, tribe, or clan. The “magic” of initiation required cultural consensus. There is no secret formula for manhood unless the members of a society agree. The dilemma we face is that our own culture has no concept of what kind of transformation our children should undergo, except possibly to learn the ropes of our “adult” consumer-credit lifestyle, unwittingly becoming players in the eventual destruction of life on Earth.

As you read these words, all over the planet the forces of death, domination and despair are led by males of our species who are immature—emotionally, spiritually, ethically and ecologically. They are continually seduced by our gender mating strategies and a bulimic consumer economy into relentlessly pursuing the prerequisites to reproductive success. Political and spiritual leaders constantly try to understand why narcissism, sociopathic behavior and political corruption are increasing rather than the reverse. They have sought almost everywhere for the answer—but have not looked in the place where it can be found—in the masculine soul and our dismal failure to help the adolescent males of today become initiated into mature, environmentally conscious and responsible men.

In the face of looming environmental catastrophes due to unchecked human activities, there is a vital need for re-inventing and introducing a contemporary version of male initiation rites that can help resolve the identity and eco-literacy crises suffered by so many males in our society. I believe these rituals can help establish a new covenant with nature for Western culture based upon the ecocentric values of Deep Ecology.

What form might a male initiation rite for a sustainable future take and how might it be implemented? I offer this brief sketch as a one possibility for rediscovery of some initiatory patterns that might help young men reconnect with themselves, with a community of men, and with the sacred in nature:

1. The ritual must take place in a remote wilderness location, separate from the ordinary world. In wilderness the Earth has the best opportunity to provide a numinous experience for the initiate and for the initiate to immerse himself fully in nature.

²⁵⁷ A. Genep, (1960).

2. The traditional Native American inipi ceremony (sweat lodge)—a powerful psychic cleansing and rebirthing ritual—may be incorporated as an effective means of preparing the initiates for subsequent initiation activities.
3. Chanting, drumming and singing can effectively be used to suspend the rational mind and allow the initiate's unconscious to emerge and thus merge with the "oceanic."
4. Exercises, such as a version of Joanna Macy's *Council of All Beings* and having the initiate "run the gauntlet" cradling a globe of the Earth in his arms, might be incorporated as effective means of evoking compassion and empathy with the larger biotic community.
5. Tests of endurance might take the form of the traditional Native American vision fast. This would be the apex of the ritual period where the initiate is given the opportunity to open the door to the soul of nature and discover his unique place within it.
6. The initiation rite must be held by elder men who embrace and live the Deep Ecology ethic, that they may serve as examples and mentors to the initiates.
7. Initiates would learn the arts of primitive living and wilderness survival skills, such as shelter building, mountain climbing, first aid, fire making, cordage making, flint knapping, hide tanning, identifying and gathering wild edibles, tracking animals, and nature observation and awareness. The mastery of these skills fosters self-reliance and self-confidence.
8. The initiate's body would be physically altered, perhaps with a tattoo, signifying his allegiance to Deep Ecology ethics and the protection of the environment.
9. Initiates would be introduced to the precepts of Deep Ecology and this instruction would continue, not only throughout the initiation process, but for years afterwards by the support of a men's service group when the initiate returned to his community.
10. The organizing and performing of such rituals could be responsibility of a new form of fraternal organization, (secret society), that upheld Deep Ecology as their code of ethics and environmental conservation and restoration as their service to the biotic community. To be successful, membership in these organizations would have to confer a high social status to its members and especially be supported by the women of the community.
11. Likewise, female elders of the community might form their own complementary initiation organizations to instruct their young women of the dangers posed by the power of their instinctual mating strategies while imparting the values of Deep Ecology.

We must awaken to the fact that many ancient indigenous cultures did a better job than Western Adolescent Culture in finding ways to limit narcissistic, aggressive masculinity and to harness its energies for the community. The challenge now facing us is to learn from our forebears the importance of male maturation—that mature, responsible men are *made* and not the result of chronological aging. Yet even our ancestors could not see beyond their tribal visions the possibilities of achieving a mature masculinity for our species as a whole. Our work is to help reverse the soul crushing, environmentally suicidal trend of Western Adolescent Culture, to plow those fields of the masculine soul and rediscover that essential, sacred relatedness to all of life. I believe initiation into a Deep Ecology paradigm can provide the foundation—the “mysteries”—so desperately needed for the formation of a mature masculine psyche, an ecological self that can rise to the challenge of creating a sustainable future for the Earth. Time is growing very short.

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