

How to Soar into Adulthood: Live and Love with Passion and Engagement

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(Dedicated to Misha and Natalie)

Are you in your early 20s or early 30s, and feel terrified, furious, jealous, lost? Who wouldn't be? We live in a bizarre age. Never in human history have we been so brutally assaulted by mass media, infecting us like syphilitic spirochetes. Television, web streaming, satellite radio, social media, brands: these parasitically invade us, every minute of every day.

Historical contexts of life radically change one generation to the next, yet your immediate developmental challenges have changed little in generations. Fifty years ago, developmental psychologist Erik Erikson offered the still-modern guidance that the two essential questions of early adulthood are: Who am I, and am I able to love others?

No matter your degree or work, you will inevitably struggle with finding a sense of self. Today "adolescence" extends well into one's 20s, probably a result of relaxed parental authority and economics. Erikson thought adolescents must transcend "identity versus ego diffusion." In brief, are you going to establish your identity around fairly stable self-concepts like "I am artistic" or "I am a math person" or are you going to end up with a poorly-defined or "diffuse" sense of self?

After reading an earlier draft of this article, my 22-year-old friend Rmax sardonically remarked, "Ok, that's all well and good, but how do you find these answers?"

Begin your journey by turning inward. Consider who you *really* are. Via psychotherapy, meditation, spirituality, or other, transcend whatever self-limiting dramas populate your "inner world." If a domineering, narcissistic father oppresses you or an overly gratifying mother makes you feel superior, they've obscured your vision. First try to clean your spectacles to clear your vision and, if that fails, crush your glasses beneath your shoes.

If problematic DNA causes a so-called "mental disorder," seek consultation – in an active, engaged way, not a passive-dependent one. Ask the psychologist what she reads or who his greatest influences are. Find one who best "treats" those problems. If given "a diagnosis," question and discuss!

A recent interpreter of Freud, Jacques Lacan, differentiates between the "ego" and the "subject." The "ego" consists of *who you "think" you are*; it is developed by early social and ongoing cultural influences. The subject is *who you "really" are*. How do you know? Lacan and Freud emphasized dreams, slips-of-the-tongue, etc. Pay attention to choices and themes that characterize your life.

Nietzsche writes in his 1881 notebook:

live your life in such a way that you must wish to live it again... If striving gives you the highest feeling, then strive! If rest gives you the highest feeling, then rest! If fitting in, following and obeying give you

the highest feeling, then obey! Only make sure you come to know what gives you the highest feeling, and then spare no means.

Proclaiming "God is dead," Nietzsche banished 1500 years of ideological dominance by religion, and the subsequent supremacy of science. Nietzsche asserts, "Amor Fati:" *Be who you are.* As Morpheus proclaimed in The Matrix, "Free your mind!" Never mistake what you're "doing," i.e. architecture, from your "being."

Now turning outside, what do you confront? Marketing media, images, noise. Do you want to be a "nice girl," or a "slut?" Is your masculinity defined by ripped guys who chase objectified women? Do you desire intimacy and, if so, with three or ten? Are you interested in marriage or would you rather act European and forget about marriage entirely?

Ascending single-player technology and social media are elements of a breakdown of society's capacity for intimacy. Should all communication be a form of entertainment? How else to get attention? Should we send naked pictures of ourselves via cell or should we "sit down and have a talk." What is more intimate?

Most have stopped talking entirely. As comedian Aziz Ansari says, "Why did you call me with that shit? Are you on fire? Text me that shit!"

I urge you to finish this essay, and aggressively question the internal (psychological) and external (cultural) influences that block your ability to be present, to love with passion and truth. If you have no idea of what you want to do with your life, you are actually ahead of the game. You don't have to waste time becoming a doctor or a lawyer if it is, in fact, your parents' desire, not yours. Pay attention to what excites you; seek out those who appeal to you. Take your sweet time. You will find yourself, and you will find love. But you must do so authentically.