

SUGAR AND SPICE

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This paper was prepared in 1968 by Sarah Spinks who has become increasingly active in the Women's Liberation movement during the last few years in the Toronto area. All that may be said about Sarah is that she exists.

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A little girl learns to be attractive and gentle. "Isn't Stephanie pretty? Say 'pretty', pretty Stephanie." And we lead her off to look in the mirror to see for herself how pretty she is. The girlish tricks of lowering her eyes, and sighing and whining when she wants something.

Coquetry not sexuality is what we encourage. We mystify a small girl's experience of her body by telling her that her sexual organs are for having babies, or that babies grow in mummy's tummy, not in her womb. With most of her sexual organs hidden, her sexuality is diffused and mysterious. But we diffuse it more by talking about her as a mother and not as a woman. When asked what sex means we say, "Sex is about mummies and daddies and having babies."

The little girl follows us around the kitchen, helping to stir a cake, setting the table, or helping with the baby when her mum is busy. Even at this age, the girls are expected to be better helpers, more natural substitutes for the parents than the boys.

The toys help this too. Mothers all do the same thing; fathers do many things. Sitting in a corner of the kitchen, the little girl bakes her cake in her easy-bake oven, puts on a little eye-shadow from her miniature cosmetic set or puts one of her countless dolls to bed. Maybe, since it's 1969, she's a modern kid who plays with a Barbie doll and she puts her in a four-poster bed in a diaphonous yellow nightgown.

Her brothers, on the other hand, are expected to be "men." They play with GI Joes and building sets. Instead of ovens and dolls they have trains and chemistry sets. Their toys orient them up and out. They are moving toys, loud toys, and they take the boys outside the house for action and adventure.

Books contain the message too - books like I Want To Be A Dentist by C. Greene:

"I think I will be a dentist when I grow up," said Johnny.

"Johnny liked to work with his hands. He carved animals out of soap. He made things out of clay. He put together a space-ship model."

"Betsy couldn't read, so Johnny made some signs for her with pictures on them."

"Then one day, Johnny had an idea. He said to Betsy, 'You can be a dentist's nurse.'"

"I'd like that, said Betsy."¹

or this one, entitled Whom Shall I Marry?:

"Primrose was playing house. Just as she finished pouring tea for her dolls she began to think. She thought and thought and she thought some more: 'Whom shall I marry?'"

"Whomever shall I marry?"

"I think I shall marry a mailman. Then I could go to everybody's house and give them their mail."

"or I might marry a policeman. I could help him take the children across the street."

"But if I marry a fireman it will be exciting. I'll ring the bell real loud and everybody will get out of the way. Maybe though I ought to marry a doctor. I would be his nurse and we would help people be strong and healthy."

"Or perhaps a man who owns a bookstore. Then I could find the most wonderful books for my friends to read."

"A gardener is somebody I'd like to marry. I could help him plant flowers - the big ones and the tiny ones. And everybody would smell so sweet!"

"And suppose I marry a boat captain! I would steer the boat and we would sail right over the biggest waves."

"Oh, but wouldn't I like to marry a farmer! We'd have ducks and chickens and cherries and peaches and a cow and a horse and a tiny, squealing pig."

1 C. Greene, I-Want to be A Dentist, Children's Press (Chicago), 1960.

Or turn them into fruits
For the giant to eat them...
When everybody is dead
I will turn into the Princess
And do what I want....

-Cathy Biso, 11

The toys, and the books and television programmes say to a little girl: you have no worth in yourself. A girl-child exists in relation to a boy or a man. She is a dentist's nurse, and ice-cream man's helper, or the woman who gives sleepyhead Flintstone a hand with his shave in the morning.

Now, people aren't born with egos. They get their sense of themselves through analyzing and feeling an experience and trying to imagine and feel another person's experience of the same situation. If we are sensed by others as inessential, as existing only in relation to another, then we do not exist otherwise. We are genuinely unreal. Alone, even fleetingly, we fantasize that we are persons above ourselves, looking down upon us, watching us move mechanically. We become schizophrenic.

On the surface, schools don't seem to teach girls that they're different. But they do. They do it overtly by giving them different subjects like home economics and shop and by dividing them into different classes for gym and health education. But it is the complicated web of many subtler things that is more important: mother is the shopper in arithmetic problems, the cozy town family in the Dick and Jane readers, the cozy inner-city family of the Bank Street Readers, the encouragement of "feminine" qualities of neatness and docility. The point of feminine dependence is made indirectly. As Friedenbergs says in the last issue of This Magazine is About Schools:

"In the schools, more than in most of the other mass media, it is indeed true that the medium is the message, which is one reason that I haven't said a word about curriculum. What is taught isn't as important as learning how you have to act in society, how other people will treat you, how they will respond to you, what the limits of respect that will be accorded to you really are."

The message of the school never seriously questions the sanctity and necessity of the nuclear family; or the 'natural' role of a woman as eternal mother and housewife.

The little girl reacts very sanely to this situation. She begins at the age of 10 or 11 to look for a man. She perceives very clearly that that is what she is supposed to do and so she goes ahead.

She begins to be very attentive to her clothes and hair styles. She begins to fantasize about movie stars, about Pierre Trudeau, and about her future husband. But she's rather dismayed, having made her hair shiny with Londonberry Hair Shiner, to go to the school dance and find that the boys are not the slightest bit interested in dancing with her. The boys are off in a corner, fooling with donuts and orange drinks. They're boisterous as they run up and down the stairs of the school. They're not very aware of what the girls are up to. "The boys," say the girls to each other, "are so immature." They just act stupid; they're not interested, you know, 'cause they're a couple of years behind us." She internalizes a definition of maturity which is the early acceptance of quietness, obedience, and poise. Because these are character traits instilled in her from the time she is one, and because they correspond to the demands of the school system, she often does better at school. Which is why she's called more mature. She also accepts and feels her social position earlier than boys for he will be most seriously oppressed as a producer, and the full force of that oppression hits him later.

But to return to the kids at the dance. There is a subtle game going on which builds on the sexual quality of the little girls as witches and princesses. The game has many names. It is called "You have the control" or "Let's just be friends." On the one hand, the girls are temptresses - they push to have the boys dance with them. On the other hand, they are the princesses - white and pure - they are counselled not to kiss a boy on the first date. Boys are portrayed as sexual and lustful. Girls are the ones that react with reason and logic. When, later on, they are asked to make love, they answer in societal terms, "I can't sleep with you, because we're not married." And the more mystified version, "I'm only going to sleep with the man I love and he'll probably be the man I marry."

Of course, children are becoming freer about sex. The girls are losing their repression, but not their sexual oppression. The sexual hierarchy within the hippy and rock communities is still strong. The language is indicative. People "ball." Girls are "balled." The supreme compliment for a girl is, "she has balls."

Balling is a game, like dating. It is a status game with the target being to ball the man with the most status, usually a musician. If you ball Country Joe then you're a 'chick' with status. If you ball a little fish then you're a little fish yourself. There are many

gradations of this chick status, but it doesn't look much different from the phenomenon of the gang girls who wear "I am Buster's" on their black leather jackets. The hippie girls, at their most sophisticated, those from Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco, call themselves groupies, which means that they hang around the rock groups like the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead or The Doors. The groupie girls are supposed to keep hip. A girl in these circles should know the difference between the bass and lead guitar. She should know the music, but she should know better how to be an outrageously good screw. This way she can get to the top. In The Rolling Stone, a well-written folk-rock magazine, a groupie named Henri says,

"Musicians should pay a lot more attention to the good thing they have going for them - groupies, I mean. After all, a groupie is a non-profit call girl. Like a Japanese Geisha in many ways, and a friend and a housekeeper and pretty much whatever the musician needs."

or Anna:

"It's nice when people come into the store now and mention so-and-so is coming into town and you can just drop a bomb on them, you know. Like you say I'm going to ball so-and-so. And later on, that person comes to town and they go backstage and there you are. It's kind of fun. It's like I told you so. There are games. They are beautiful, beautiful fun games... Some of the limelight is on you, too. You're in the room. You're involved... Spending three or four days with one person, you, uh,... under those circumstances meals are served on carts and photographs are being constantly taken and you can leach off the feeling and it's a gas."

As Dr. David Smith, head of the Haight Ashbury Medical Clinic, says in the same article,

"Within a certain subculture in San Francisco, rock is the basic art form... It's the same as straight culture in a way where bankers are attractive to young girls. They've got the money and power. In this community, rock musicians occupy that role."

Now it is doubtful that many young girls are turned on to bankers. Bankers lack 'bizatte' - they have no element of risk about them, they have no style. In a straight community, a girl is more likely to be turned on to a lawyer who takes on some civil rights cases, one who appears to be beating the system with the system's own tools. But the point that Smith makes about the hierarchy is valid. The high priestess, someone like Janis Joplin, is a lone woman amongst the priests: the Grateful Dead, the Mothers, the Rolling Stones, and Country Joe and the Fish. The models of the rock community are male.

But the girl in the hip community does experience a sense of liberation in the fact that she can not only consummate her sexual relationships but, she can also initiate them. The dating gamesmanship goes. In this way, the hippy culture is less repressive. The ideology of the community does not accept competitive ethics either in work or in play. It is unfortunate that the kids must sell their dope at a high profit to stay alive.

The culture of the rock community is based on sensuality and passivity. It is a culture of music and drugs. Girls can get stoned. They can roll their own joints. They participate in a grand dressing-up, a costuming that blurs sexual differences. The costumes are part of the theatre of the absurd. The kind of extravaganza that the Rochdale-Yorkville kids wear has a duality. It protects them from unreality. It reminds them that they exist. In a visual culture, they are what they dress up as. The young girl in a mountie hat, a studded vest and psychedelic bell-bottoms is responding to and creating a media image.

But despite her feeling of being plastic and consumptive she is also giving a repressive culture a good kick in the face. She outrages the authorities who try to control the length of her skirt and the length of her hair and the neighbours who despise her messiness. Although she assumes her traditional role by dressing up, her new front is a serious affront to the established order.

The experience of The Everdale Place, a free school near Toronto, is interesting in that it combines a hippy fluidity and a solid geographical community.

At the school the students can do pretty much what they want. It is a communal existence - all the students and staff share equally in the decisions. It emphasizes directness and it encourages people to defend their opinions on matters of school policy. Within this freer atmosphere, most children flourish. It is interesting though to note that it is the girls in the school who seem to be the leaders. They are the ones with the most verve, anger and aggressiveness, and I think they are for a number of reasons.

The sexuality that the male staff feel toward the female students is direct and open. It is expressed in touching, dancing, wrestling and cuddling. But it is understood clearly by both students and staff that they do not sleep with each other. This gives the kids the chance to be direct and safe in the understanding that they will not get into a situation they cannot handle. At the same time, the attraction of the young girls for the male staff means that they get a lot more attention than the boys.

The boys, on the other hand, are faced with a rather formidable challenge, for at least half of the eight male staff members are extremely competent in traditionally male pursuits. Three of the men have designed and built two buildings on the property. 3 or 4 of them are good mechanics. All are rugged and physically strong. With the physical aspects of the school being so central to its existence, the boys find themselves competing in a field crowded by experts, and they are forced to form their image of themselves in an area in which there is little chance for initial success. The girls, who are not expected to do the heavy wiring and construction work, can take part with the assurance that any effort on their part will be highly praised... Of course, the mood of Everdale is so fluid and unpredictable that I make these observations with no sense of finality.

But, to get back to the schools and the straighter kids... We have recently witnessed in Ontario a resurgence of sex-segregated classes. The reasons for dividing up the boys and girls vary in the minds of the administrators and teachers. The two that I hear most are these: Since most elementary school teachers are women, the little Canadian boy is getting "a prissy grade school education." Secondly, the girls mature faster than the boys so they have to split them up. This distortion of the meaning of maturity I've already dealt with. As for the prissy education the boys are supposed to be getting - the fact is, though the women are teachers, the men are principals, and the authority patterns are quite clear to the children. If the kids are going to be emasculated, then that will happen because the school sees its duty as being to quantify and to package. Its predisposition to neatness and its destruction of the boy's mind is the enemy, not the female teacher. And the boys will be made impotent when they realize that the promise of a creative and human future is a lie.

But the girls aren't even labouring under the liberal illusion that the society has a place for them apart from their role as a man's wife or a child's mother. They don't get the chance of being undercut for they start out by having their minds colonized. In terms of the black struggle, the problem looks like this:

It is accepted by many that part of the reason why children can't be educated is because they have few successful models with whom to identify. Further, their models of success are white men and they can strive to be like the white men, but they never lose their black skin. In a racist society, that means they can never be successful; in an individualist society, it means they blame their lack of success on themselves. In the same way, women cannot be successful because we live in a society that sees women being inessential to production... Now our oppression is more comfortable. We are allowed more than watermelon and rhythm. We are allowed houses and gadgetry and for many of us, physical comfort. But our minds have been colonized in much the same way.

We cannot conceive of ourselves as childless. The thought of being single at the age of 30 horrifies us. We cannot conceive of ourselves with a project of a future which is important for itself. Most girls when faced with the possibility of pursuing difficult studies and jobs, back down like the girl whom Betty Friedan interviewed:

"I loved it. I got so excited about my work. I could sometimes go into the library at eight in the morning and not come out until ten at night. I even thought I might want to go to graduate school or law school and really use my mind. Suddenly, I was afraid of what would happen. I wanted to lead a rich, full life. I want to marry, have children, have a nice house. Suddenly, I felt, what am I beating my brains out for? So this year I'm trying to lead a well-rounded life. I take courses, but I don't read eight books and still feel like reading the ninth. I stop and go to the movies. The other way was harder and more exciting. I don't know why I stopped. Maybe I just lost courage...

It is the feeling that many young girls experience - that to be excited about their work is to forfeit their femininity. Despite a real passion to learn and to act, there is always the lingering doubt, this implicit disbelief in their own abilities, that makes them drop their commitments when they find a man. They say, like the college girl quoted above,

"Well, I guess I just lost courage...."

It is pretty hard to maintain your courage when you are constantly faced with comments like this - "Well, you know so-and-so, she's a very castrating woman." When girls start to get stronger, they get written off by the rapists as neurotic, too demanding and dominating of the men around them. People say, "be tough, but don't lose your femininity."

The comments about castration are a popularized form of Freudianism. Various child psychologists like Erik Erikson, educational reformers like Edgar Friedenberg and Paul Goodman, and most psychiatrists in America today are Freudian-based. I have two reactions to Freudian psychology. One is an anger over his theories on femininity; the other is more complex. It is a feeling that this is the very time in history that we need a psychology which places its emphasis on the structure of society rather than on the individual apart from that structure. Right now, numerous people in America - students, workers and professional people - feel that there is no place for them in the society. If they work at factories or secretarial jobs, they simply work to live. They earn money and have no time to enjoy the things they spend it on.

And no sense of purpose or creativity about their jobs. And, if they are mothers, their satisfaction lies in the precarious status they get from their kids' marks at school or their child's possibility of a good job.

What I am arguing is that we must go much beyond Freud; indeed we have to change our emphasis. The potential of the technology of the late '60's, the potential of American capitalism to determine our environment and our responses to it makes a different approach to psychology mandatory.

But let's get back to exactly what Freud said - particularly about little girls. He seems to base his theories about human identity on a person's inborn and innate characteristics. His primal estrangements and inner dynamic. A child is born with an individual historical sense of primal man, original sin, and the Eden of the womb. The nature of man - his rationality, his emotions and sexuality is largely determined by childhood experience, particularly sexual experience. For little girls, the central childhood experience involves the castration complex, or penis envy.

"The castration complex of girls is also started by the genitals of the other sex. They at once notice the difference, and it must be admitted, its significance too. They feel seriously wronged, often declare that they want 'to have something like it too' and fall a victim to 'envy for the penis', which will leave ineradicable traces on their development...."

Later on, Freud repeats, this wish for a penis is sublimated into trying to achieve like a man - pursuing a career, deciding not to have children.

"The wish for the longed-for penis, eventually, in spite of everything, may contribute to motives that drive a mature woman to analysis and what she may reasonably expect from analysis - a capacity, for instance, to carry on an intellectual profession - may often be recognized as a sublimated modification of this repressed wish."

According to Freud, when little girls discover their castration, they are lifted out of their closeness to their mother who they blame for their lack of a penis. They also renounce clitoral masturbation in envy of the "boy's superior equipment" and turn to their father as love object. They see their mother as also castrated and start to fantasize about having their father's baby. The wish for the baby begins to replace the wish for the penis which they hope to possess vicariously by having a boy. The girl enters the Oedipal stage. Her true rivalry with her mother, hidden when she was younger, is intensified. But, unlike the boy who transcends or sublimates his libidinous feelings for his mother, the girl, Freud believes, remains in a romance and dependence on her father. The boy must abandon the Oedipal situation

for fear that his mother will castrate him. In transcending and repressing this complex, the boy develops a super-ego which pushes him outward upon the world. The same super-ego does not exist in the girl and for this reason she finds it difficult to play other than a passive or immanent role.

How is one to question this? It seems like such a neat and tidy explanation of feminine passivity. But where the fallacy lies in both the Freudian approach and in the work of behaviorists is that little girls, as I have tried to show in the rest of this paper, learn their roles very young. And there is a reason that they are trained into this role. If a child is brought up to believe that she can be nothing more than a wife and mother, then her admiration may well go to a boy who she perceives to have a more challenging life. If she sees that other people expect more of boys - allow them to be more violent and sloppy and selfish, then boys are treated with envy. If, in fact, childbearing had the same importance in our society as production, then we might well experience the opposite of penis envy. Boys would envy their sisters who could produce the coveted child. Unfortunately, despite the mystification of childbearing and motherhood, having babies does not compare in status to having a job. And despite efforts of womens' rights groups, if the economy of a country cannot operate with more than a certain percentage of its labor force employed, then there is a structural reason that the popular psychology of women's magazines places them in the home.

So when we're trying to discover our identities, we must look primarily at our relation to the rest of society; to production and not search so hard for our "inner selves".

We also have to look closely at the function of the family. Laurel Limpus has already written well on this topic, but I would like to elaborate on a particular point that she makes. It is the rather subtle mechanism by which mothers absorb the personality of their children. The child is all the mother has and she is around most of the time. What happens is that she destroys the child's autonomy by pre-empting his natural curiosity. She seeks to explain things to him before he has experienced them. She shows the child that combs are for running through one's hair, not for dragging along the edge of a table and making a funny noise. Everything that the child does is turned into a "learning experience". The mother in fact becomes a professional mother. She begins to use the withdrawal of her affection, in a benevolent way, to make the child conform to her wishes. She acts always in the best interests of the child. And if the child protests that what she does is not in his interest, he is likely to be termed deviant, or "going through a stage". These are ways of invalidating children. Look at this dialogue between mother and daughter.

Mother: Well, that's how it appeared to us - that you were selfish.

Mary: How was I selfish?

Mother: Well I can't remember now, but I do know that -

Mary: No, you won't tell me now, so I don't know how - so if I get better again I won't know if I'm right or wrong or when I'm going to crack up again, or what I'm going to do.

Mother: Now that's what I call selfishness, thrusting your opinions on me and not listening to mine.

Mary: Well, you were thrusting your opinions on me and not listening to mine. You see it works both ways.

Mother: I know.

Mary: But I always have to take it when I'm at home from you because you're my mother. See - I can't be selfish - but if you're selfish, that's not wrong. You're not ill because you're selfish, you're just my mother and it's all right if you can do it.

Education reformers like Paul Goodman, perpetuate a basically Freudian view of girlhood. Goodman is the most blatant. In the introduction to Growing Up Absurd, he states:

"(I say 'the young men and boys' rather than the 'young people' because the problem I want to discuss in this book belongs primarily in our society, to the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not 'have' to, she is not expected to 'make something' of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act. With this background it is less important, for instance, what job an average young woman works at 'till she is married)"

The mistake Goodman makes is first of all assuming that all women are going to have children and second of all, assuming that it is a natural act which is self-justifying. In fact, there are few natural acts which are not now perverted. Sexuality is exploited to make us consume more. Our children grow up in an isolated family unit which is oppressive to its members. As to the self-justifying nature of procreation, the large numbers of women that are meeting across this country are not doing so because they find their "women's lot" self-justifying.

Friedenberg, at least, is more self-conscious of the problem. Berated by Bettelheim for ignoring the plight of girls in his book the Vanishing Adolescent, he attempts to talk about girls in a later essay. But in the end, Friedenberg is in love with the adolescent boys, "the hot-blooded minority," the Finneys and Holden Caulfields. And as a man with profound respect for a Freudian like Erik Erikson, he ends up wanting to protect gentlemanly virtues. He wants to protect the autonomy of individuals. He wants private and aristocratic men with a fine sense of irony. This view is naive and hurtful. Not only because Finny and Holden don't articulate a feminine sense of outrage, but because the call for autonomy and privacy - the civil libertarian stance - is an immoral and impossible wish on a continent dissolving before our very eyes.

The insanity that is distant, cool and apart is far worse than the madness that makes us act with passion. It is the first insanity that the society applauds. It is the coolness of the Trudeaus. Instead of wishing for privacy and autonomy, we must be public people acting in the world. The more we act politically, the more we will be defined as deviant and neurotic. Bettelheim recently said that the student rebels were acting out of "intense guilt feelings". People look for lesbians in the women's liberation groups. But we can reject those definitions. We can stop looking inside ourselves, for ourselves. We should accept the fact that we are becoming "the people our parents warned us against".

It is said that any person must struggle so hard to do what they want do do. It is a lonely struggle and young girls find it even lonelier and harder for boys. It is a fundamentally alienating experience for both sexes. I understood better when I was in Cuba lastsummer the small but concrete ways this alienation manifests itself.

The buses in Cuba are crowded with people. You are lucky to make it to hhe door for your stop. When I'd ask directions from someone, everyone in the bus would start arguing and gesticulating about the quickest and simplest route. But it wasn't just the spontaneity, the laughing and aggressive pushing and touching. What impressed me more was that women, standing with babies in their arms, could quite freely put their child down in the lap of the person sitting in front of them. They weren't afraid. They didn't have to struggle alone, like we do in Toronto subways, hoping that our child won't cry. In Cuba, the women didn't have to be urban guerrillas - constantly watching for washrooms, seats and tables.

I went into day nurseries, filled with "chiciticos" little ones, brought by their mothers on the way to the field and the office. They were tiny, some of those babies, and they looked not a bit neglected.

And I worked in the fields with some of their mothers. They had a clear sense of working to build a communal society in which everybody could share heavy physical work and tough political decisions. And it was experiencing and seeing how deeply they incorporated the nation's necessity to survive, that I understood emotionally and not intellectually, our oppression. For we have not only been robbed as women of a place in the world, we have been robbed as people of a cultural identity and a national purpose.