real ties of affection between themselves and their employer came through the children.

The children, therefore, provided the ties that bound the women to their employers as well as the mark of their difference. The role of surrogate mother allowed the women to cross these barriers and, for a fleeting moment, express their love and concern for a child without regard to the obstacles that lay ahead. Also, because most young children readily return love that is freely given and are open and accepting of people without regard to status factors that have meaning for their parents, the workers probably felt that they were treated with greater equality and more genuine acceptance by the children of the household.

REFERENCES


READING 13

The Secret Fear That Keeps Us from Raising Free Children

LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN

In the 19th century when women of all races began their drive for the vote, what was the argument most often used against them?

That voting was a masculine concern, and that therefore women who attempted it would become (or already were) "männisch," "unwomanly," and "unnatural." In short, sexually suspect.

In the 20th century when young men objected to the rationale for the American military presence in Vietnam, what was the argument most used to discredit their protest?
That refusing a masculine enterprise like war made them “like a woman,” “soft,” “scared,” and therefore sexually suspect.

It’s time we faced head-on the most powerful argument that authoritarian forces in any society use to keep people—male or female—in line: the idea that you are not born with gender but must earn it, and thus the threat that if you don’t follow orders you will not be a “real man” or “real woman.”

Even those of us who have long since stopped worrying about this conformity for ourselves may find that our own deepest conditioning takes over in the emotional landscape inhabited by our children and our feelings about child-rearing. It is this conditioning that the right wing plays on to prevent change, no matter how life-enhancing. And it is these fears that sometimes inhibit pro-child attitudes in the most well-intentioned parents; the fear

1. that sex roles determine sexuality;
2. that specific ingredients make a child homosexual; and
3. that homosexuality is one of the worst things that can happen.

ASSUMPTION 1: SEX ROLES DETERMINE SEXUALITY

It was inevitable that the cult of sex differences would lead us to the familiar romantic bromide—opposites attract. Most people truly believe that the more “masculine” you are, the more you’ll love and be loved by females, and the more “feminine” you are, the more you’ll love and be loved by males.

If you believe this quid pro quo, you will systematically raise your daughters and sons differently so that they become magnets for their “opposites,” and you will fear that resistance to stereotyped sex roles might distort their behavior in bed as adults.

Clever, this patriarchy. In return for conformity, it promises a “normal” sex life for our children. But it can’t deliver on that promise, because all available evidence proves that sex role does not determine sexual orientation.

During the last decade thousands of homosexual men and women have “come out” from behind their “straight” disguises, and we discovered that except for choice of sex partner, they look and act so much the same as everyone else that as sexologist Dr. Wainwright Churchill put it, “they may not be identified as homosexuals even by experts.” Most female and male homosexuals have tried heterosexual intercourse; many have been married and have children; and sometimes they are remarkable only for being so unlike the “gay” stereotype.

Take a quintessential “man’s man,” David Kopay—six feet one, 205 pounds, 10-year veteran of pro football. “I was the typical jock,” writes Kopay in his autobiography (The David Kopay Story; Bantam). “I was tough. I was successful. And all the time I knew I preferred sex with men.”

And great beauties, such as Maria Schneider, the sex bomb of Last Tango in Paris; “feminine-looking” women, married women, mothers of many children have, for centuries, had lesbian love affairs with one another, disproving the opposites-attract theory with a vengeance, and reminding us again that sex roles do not determine sexuality.

ASSUMPTION 2: SPECIFIC INGREDIENTS MAKE A CHILD HOMOSEXUAL

Although no one knows what causes homosexuality, there is no shortage of theories on the subject. Sociobiologists and other behavioral scientists pursue the idea that “genetic loading” can create a predisposition toward homosexuality, a theory that will remain farfetched until researchers find many sets of identical twins both members of which became homosexual although reared separately.

Proponents of hormone theory have tried to find a definitive connection between testosterone level and homosexual orientation. However, various biochemical studies of the last decade show directly contradictory results, and even when hormonal differences are found, no one knows whether hormones cause the homosexuality, or the homosexual activities cause the hormone production.

The biochemical “explorers,” like the geneticists, perpetuate the idea that homosexuals are a different species with a hormonal disturbance that chemistry might “cure.” So far, attempts to alter sexual orientation with doses of hormones have only succeeded in increasing the amount of sex drive, not in changing its direction.

The conditioned-response theory holds that sexual orientation depends not on biology or “instincts” but on learning from experience, from the same reward-
and-punishment process as any other acquired behavior, and from sexual trigger mechanisms, such as pictures, music, or certain memories, that set off homosexual or heterosexual responses the way the bell set off Pavlov’s dog salivating.

The conditioning theory, logical as far as it goes, leads us down several blind alleys. Why might one child experience a certain kind of stroking as pleasurable when a same-sex friend does it but more pleasurable when a friend of the other sex does it, while another child feels the reverse? Why do some children “learn to” overcome the effects of a frightening early sexual experience, while others may be hurt by it forever, and still others “learn” to merge pain with pleasure?

Doesn’t cultural pressure itself “teach” children to avoid a particular sexual response, no matter what the body has learned to like? Otherwise, how do millions of adolescents move from masturbation to homosexual experimentation—often the only interpersonal sexual pleasure they have known—to heterosexuality?

Perhaps the conditioned-response theory can explain the man who has felt homosexual since childhood, but how does it account for the woman who, after 20 years as an orgasmic, exclusive heterosexual, had a lesbian encounter and found she didn’t have to “learn” to like it?

One research psychiatrist reminds us that we don’t yet understand the basic mechanism of sexual arousal in the human central nervous system, and until we do, questions about homosexual or heterosexual arousal are entirely premature.

Psychoanalytic theory, the most steadfast and intimidating of all the causation theories, is the one that “blames” homosexuality on the family. To challenge it, we must begin at the beginning.

In 1905, Sigmund Freud declared that human beings are innately bisexual at birth and their early psychosexual experiences tip the scales one way or the other.

To ensure a heterosexual outcome, the child is supposed to identify with the same-sex parent, to “kill them off,” so to speak, as an object of sexual interest. For example, a girl’s psychodynamics is “I become like Mother, therefore I no longer desire Mother; I desire Father, but I can’t have him so I desire those who are like him.”

If instead the girl identifies with the other-sex parent (“I become like Father”), he is killed off as object choice (“therefore I do not desire Father”), and the girl will be a lesbian (“I desire Mother or those who are like her”). For the boy, obviously, the same psychodynamics is true in reverse.

According to this theory, female homosexuality derived mainly from too much hostility toward the mother for passing on her inferior genital equipment. The lesbian girl identifies with the Father and compensates for her hatred of the inferior mother by loving women, while rejecting “femininity” (meaning passivity, masochism, inferiority) for herself.

Male homosexuality derives mainly from too much attachment to the mother, i.e., a Momma’s Boy can’t be a woman’s man.

Although many contemporary psychologists now believe otherwise, and despite the fact that Freud’s views are unsupported by objective evidence, it is his ideas that millions of lay people have accepted—the view that human beings grow “healthy” by the Oedipal resolution: fearing and thus respecting one parent (Dad) and disdaining the other (Mom). Since our parents stand as our first models of male and female, this primal fear and disdain tends to form a paradigm for lifelong sexual enmity, suspicion, betrayal, and rejection.

Father is supposed to represent reality and Mother is associated with infant dependency. In order to gain their independence, both girls and boys must form an alliance with Father against Mother. Politically, this translates to male supremacy (“alliance with Father”) and cultural misogyny (“against Mother”). Psychologically, the message is conform or you might turn out “queer.”

The hitch is, as we’ve noted, that sex role and sexual orientation have been shown to be totally unrelated. Modern practitioners may know this, but since they have not loudly and publicly revised psychoanalytic theories on homosexuality, they are in effect supporting the old lies. What’s more, their silence leaves unchallenged these contradictions within psychoanalytic theory itself:

- A human instinct, by definition, should be the same for everyone, everywhere; yet in societies where sex stereotypes do not exist, the supposedly instinctual Oedipal psychodrama doesn’t exist either.
- If the castration complex, the fear of losing the penis, is the founding element of “masculinity,” how is it that Dr. Robert Stoller, professor of psychiatry at U. U. born way?
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at UCLA Medical School, found boys who were born without penises believed themselves boys anyway.

- How do we account for millions of children who become heterosexual though raised in father-absent homes? How do these mothers arouse fear and respect in the boy and the requisite penis envy in the girl?
- Why do batteries of psychological tests fail to show any significant difference between lesbians and heterosexuals on the psychological criteria that are supposed to “cause” female homosexuality?
- How can one say that male homosexuals identify with Mother and take on “feminine” ways, when mothers of homosexuals are supposedly “masculine,” dominant, and aggressive?
- If a woman’s compensation for her missing penis is a baby boy, then of course she’ll overprotect her son as a hedge against a second castration—losing him. It’s a cruel tautology to posit motherhood in these terms and, at the same time, to hold Mother responsible for overprotection of the one treasure she’s supposedly spent her whole life seeking.
- Could it be that girls and women envy the privileges that accrue to people whose distinguishing feature happens to be the penis, without envying the penis?
- Freud declared the “vaginal orgasm” to be the diploma of heterosexual maturity, yet in Human Sexual Response, William Masters and Virginia Johnson have proved the clitoris to be the physiological source of all female orgasms. Why require a girl to unlearn clitoral pleasure when in every other instance Freud believed that “urges dissipate when they become satisfied”? Is it because the clitoral orgasm is active, not receptive; because it doesn’t require a penis and it doesn’t result in procreation? Was the promotion of the “vaginal orgasm” patriarchy’s way of keeping females passive, male-connected, and frequently pregnant?

We could devote pages and pages to poking holes in psychoanalytic theory, but these final points should do the trick: studies show that the classic “homo sexual-inducing” family produces plenty of “straight” children; other kinds of families raise both heterosexual and homosexual siblings under the same roof; and totally “straight” family constellations rear homosexual kids.

And so, all speculations have been found wanting, and we are left with one indisputable fact: no one knows what causes homosexuality.

ASSUMPTION 3: HOMOSEXUALITY IS ONE OF THE WORST THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

Studies show that the majority of American people want homosexuality “cured.” Yet the facts—when this volatile subject can be viewed factually—prove that homosexuality is neither uncommon, abnormal, nor harmful to its practitioners or anyone else. When the “naturalness” of heterosexuality is claimed via examples in the animal kingdom, one can point to recorded observations of homosexuality among seagulls, cows, mares, sows, primates, and many other mammals. But more important, among humans, “there is probably no culture from which homosexuality has not been reported,” according to Drs. Clellan Ford and Frank Beach in Patterns of Sexual Behavior (Harper). And no matter what moral or legal prohibitions have been devised through the ages, none has ever eliminated homosexuality. In fact, the incidence of homosexuality is greater in countries that forbid it than in those that don’t. With all the fluctuations of public morality, many sources confirm that 10 percent of the entire population consider themselves exclusively homosexual at any given place and time.

Aside from choosing to love members of their own sex, lesbians and homosexual males have been found no different from heterosexuals in gender identity or self-esteem, in drinking, drug use, suicide rates, relationships with parents and friends, and general life satisfaction. One study actually found lower rates of depression among lesbians; another study measured higher competence and intellectual efficiency; still another found more lesbians (87 percent) than heterosexual women (18 percent) experienced orgasm “almost always”; and two important recent reports revealed that homosexuals seem clearly far less likely than heterosexuals to commit child abuse or other sexual crimes. In short, many homosexuals “could very well serve as models of social comportment and psychological maturity.” And yet, parents feel obliged to protect their children from it.

Why?

In a word, homophobia—fear and intolerance of homosexuality. Despite the facts just enumerated, millions still believe homosexuality is the worst thing. In one study, nearly half of the college students questioned labeled it more deviant than murder and drug addiction. Others reveal their homophobia by sitting
an average of 10 inches further away from an interviewer of the same sex wearing a "gay and proud" button than from an interviewer wearing no button. Another group said they wouldn't be able to form a close friendship with a gay person.

In a society that works as hard as ours does to convince everyone that Boys are Better, homosexual taunts whether "sissy" or "faggot," say nonboy. In pure form, the worst insult one boy can scream at another is "You girl!" That curse is the coming home to roost of the cult of sex differences. Indeed, sexism and homophobia go hand in hand. The homophobic male needs sharp sex-role boundaries to help him avoid transgressing to the "other side." His terror is that he is not different enough from the "opposite" sex, and that his "masculine" facade may not always protect him from the "femininity" within himself that he learned as a boy to hate and repress. Among men, homophobia is rooted in contempt for everything female.

A homophobic man cannot love a woman with abandon, for he might reveal his vulnerability; he cannot adore and nurture his children because being around babies is "sissy" and child care is "women's work." According to his perverse logic, making women pregnant is "masculine," but making children happy is a betrayal of manhood. One man complained that his child wouldn't shake hands and was getting too old for father-son kissing. How old was "too old"? Three.

Homophobia, the malevolent enforcer of sex-role behavior, is the enemy of children because it doesn't care about children, it cares about conformity, differences, and divisions.

If women seem to be less threatened by homosexuality than men and less obsessed with latent homosexual impulses, it's because the process of "becoming" a woman is considered less arduous for the female and less important to society than the process of "proving" one's manhood. "Masculinity" once won is not to be lost. But a girl needn't guard against losing that which is of little value.

Like male homosexuals, the lesbian doesn't need the other sex for physical gratification. But the lesbian's crime goes beyond sex: she doesn't need men at all. Accordingly, despite the relative unimportance of female sexuality, lesbianism is seen as a hostile alternative to heterosexual marriage, family, and patriarchal survival.

Before children have the vaguest idea about who or what is a homosexual, they learn that homosexuality is something frightening, horrid, and nasty. They become homophobic long before they understand what it is they fear. They learn that "What are you, a sissy?" is the fastest way to coerce a boy into self-destructive exploits.

While homophobia cannot prevent homosexuality, its power to destroy female assertiveness and male sensitivity is boundless. For children who, for whatever reason, would have been homosexual no matter what, homophobia only adds external cruelty to their internal feelings of alienation. And for those who become the taunters, the ones who mock and harass "queers," homophobia is a clue to a disturbed sense of self.

It's all so painful. And so unnecessary. Eliminate sex-role stereotypes and you eliminate homophobia. Eliminate homophobia and you eliminate the power of words to wound and the power of stigma to mold a person into something she or he was never meant to be. So here's my best advice on the subject: Don't worry how to raise a heterosexual child; worry about how not to be a homophobic parent.