

From: Fraiberg, Selma: The Magic Years.

IDENTIFICATION.

THE WISH to replace a father or a mother must be given up and something else must take its place. A little boy cannot *be* his father, but he can be *like* his father. A little girl cannot take her mother's place in her father's affections, but by making herself *like* her mother, she achieves another kind of satisfaction. And so we find that the good solution to this conflict in love of early childhood is the best possible solution for the development of good patterns of sex identification. The healthy outcome of this early disappointment in love is a strengthening of masculinity in the boy and femininity in the girl.

How does this come about? We said earlier that the rivalry with a parent in early childhood is complicated by the fact that the rival is also the object of a child's love. If Jimmy did not love his father so deeply, his conflict over his bad wishes would not be so intense. In the end it is love that wins out, and the little boy gives up his day-dream and his hostile wishes against his father because the love for father is far stronger than the hate. And out of this love for father will come enduring qualities of masculinity. We expect that love of father will cause the child to emulate his father, to take the father as his model of masculinity..

But wait, we're going a bit fast here. Isn't it true that a child takes the parent of his own sex as a model much earlier in childhood? Margie is only thirty months old and she's a perfect small edition of her mama. She can't quite speak a decent sentence, but she has her mama's trick of sprinkling exclamation points throughout the most ordinary chatter. And even mama will admit that when Margie is pushed a little too far she has the same sweet stubbornness that mama herself will show in the same circumstances. When Arthur, not quite three, puts on a tie "just like daddy's" his voice goes down one octave. And keep your face straight when this little man drives his trike down the driveway and mutters curses at imaginary drivers who obstruct the road.

Then, of course, the roots of identification go deep into earliest childhood. These first imitations of a parent precede and lay the groundwork for a solid identification with that parent. In identification certain qualities of another person are taken *over* and made a permanent part of the personality. Identification can include a whole range of personality traits or attributes of another person which are taken over and made part of one's self. Just for the present we'll confine ourselves to one aspect of the process of identification, sex identification, in order to see how this process promotes healthy development in the child.

Integrity in a personality is achieved in a large measure by the acceptance of one's biological self, one's sex. Where the aims of the personality are in harmony with the biological fact of sex, we can expect the highest degree of stability within the whole personality. We need only a moment's reflection to confirm this. If a little girl accepts her girl's body and her feminine destiny, and if her aspirations for herself are in harmony with these biological facts, there will be no motives for those powerful conflicts which can sometimes produce neurosis. But if a little girl despises her girl's body, believes that girls are inferior beings in our culture and aspires to masculine goals for herself, the resulting disharmony between biological fact and ego goals will produce conflict in the personality.

If a little boy feels that masculinity is not valued in his world, or that the attainment of masculine goals is too dangerous, he may choose a course which makes no demands upon his masculinity, but again the disharmony between the biological fact of masculinity and the negation of that fact in the ego's strivings will set up a conflict within the personality. We must remember that the image of the *self* is derived first of all from the image of the body and that the maleness or femaleness of this body is an inescapable fact. Whoever tries to set up an image of himself that denies or negates these facts will find himself opposing his biological self in a struggle that constantly renews itself.

Yet every child, boy or girl, passes through a phase in development in which he or she "plays at being the opposite sex." We are not alarmed when confronted with a delicious and utterly feminine little girl of three in bonnet and pinafore and starched petticoat who totes a Buck Rogers automatic in her innocent handbag. This little woman may also be found in an unguarded moment attempting to urinate like a boy, and in still less guarded moments berating her mama for getting her "borned" before she was finished. And if a little boy of the same age, who is otherwise pleased with himself and wants to grow up to be a truck driver, should announce that he is making a baby in his stomach, we are not horrified and we do not need to make an appointment for him at a child guidance clinic,

We would feel differently, however, if a school-age child should express strong opposition to the way in which he is made. For we expect that sometime before the seventh or eighth year a child will not only accept the biological facts of maleness and femaleness but, through identification with the parent of his own sex, derive pleasure from the fact.

ON BEING A GIRL.

THE little girl of three who berates her mama for getting her 'borned' before she was finished will give up her masculine ambitions quite naturally in the years that come when she discovers that being a girl has special satisfactions for her. It helps, of course, to know that "someday" she will become a mama, too, and that she is made specially so that she can have babies grow inside her body. But that is "someday" and perhaps the greatest satisfaction for the little girl in being a girl is in being "just like mommy." A mother who has found satisfaction herself in being a woman will, of course, communicate this to her daughter without words. A father who is pleased at having a daughter, who values femininity for itself, will give great impetus to the process of feminine identification in his little girl by the fact that he loves his daughter and values her femininity. (The father who consciously or unconsciously is disappointed in having a daughter and who tries to make his daughter into a son, will certainly complicate the little girl's development for she will understand that to be really loved by her father she must behave like a son.)

But when we speak of "femininity" and the development of a feminine attitude in the little girl, let us be sure that we are speaking of attributes that really deserve to be called feminine. While a little girl's attitude toward pretty clothes is usually regarded as "feminine" (and may very well be just that), it is not in itself evidence of a feminine attitude. It may be as true of the nine-year-old girl and the twenty-nine-year-old girl as for the three-year-old girl that these feminine ornaments only conceal a masculine attitude, like the Buck Rogers automatic in the dainty handbag. Feminine attitudes must be adduced from other and more profound evidence. The harmony between a mother and daughter in a school-age child is a favorable sign of the girl's positive attitude toward femininity, that is, the positive feeling toward mother as the representative of femininity will usually indicate a good attitude on the part of the girl toward her own femininity. The absence of strong rivalry with boys, or aggressive attitudes towards boys and men, is a favorable

indication of femininity in a school-age girl. Pleasure in feminine activities and association with other girls must also be counted highly as a sign of acceptance of femininity. The day-dreams and aspirations of the little girl also tell us the degree to which she has accepted her femininity.

But we understand that femininity (or masculinity) is not an absolute quality. Nor is the acceptance of femininity a sudden acquisition at the close of a developmental phase. There are many compromises within the personality between feminine and masculine goals which do not result in neurosis and which need not create conflict. The little girl who leaves her dolls to go out with the boys to chase Indians is not necessarily in danger of abandoning her femininity. (The most casual appraisal of our childhood friends will remind us how many tom-boys grew up to be excellent wives and mothers.) It is only when the personality of a girl is dominated by masculine tendencies and when femininity is repudiated that we need to feel some concern for the future development of the little girl.

I once knew a little girl who hated all things connected with girls and women and was very outspoken in her contempt of femininity. She competed with her little brother and with the boys in the neighborhood and tried to outdo them at their own games. She detested dresses, hair-ribbons, and girls' games and fought with her mother over any attempt to "make a lady" out of her. Her envy of boys and her depreciation of her own sex had originated at the time her own little brother was born. But this was not the decisive factor. A great many little girls will be presented with baby brothers sometime during their early years and they need not on this account repudiate their own femininity. What had happened then?

She had had all the normal feelings of jealousy toward the baby brother when he came into the family. Other little girls do, too. She felt that her parents preferred the baby because he was a boy. This may not have been true, but she felt it was. She then attempted to make herself as much like a boy as possible in the hope that her parents would love her better than the baby. This, too, is a very typical first reaction of little girls to the birth of a baby brother. But most little girls will overcome this disappointment and envy, and this little girl had not. The decisive factor, then, was not the birth of the baby brother but her inability, thereafter, to find satisfactions in being a girl. It was as if she could not believe that she could be loved as a girl. Her parents had seen one aspect of the conflict clearly enough -- the rivalry with the new baby -- and had done all the things that understanding parents do to ease the painful feelings at this time. What they had not seen -- and this is often difficult to detect -- is that jealousy had profoundly disturbed her feelings about being a girl and that her repudiation of femininity did not alter with time but actually grew more extreme. The conflicts with mother, nursery-school teachers, the whole world of women, grew stronger as time went on. She rejected them as she rejected the feminine part of herself. To her father and other men in her family she presented herself as a rather engaging little tom-boy, inviting -- and getting -- the kind of games that men play with little boys, shadow-boxing, fencing, rough-and-tumble games.

So we can see how this child was offering herself as a little boy in the expectation that if she were a boy she might have greater value in the world. What she had needed from her parents was an additional kind of help when she reacted with such passionate envy to the birth of the baby brother. It was not enough to reassure her that she was loved and that the new baby had not taken love away from her. She needed to know, in addition, that she was loved *as a girl*. More than words, of course, she needed to feel that her parents found pleasure in her being a girl, in her femininity. She needed to know that she did not make herself more lovable to her father by behaving like a boy but that she was loved for herself as a little girl and loved for her feminine qualities. She needed her mother's help in finding pleasure in femininity, in discovering the special satisfactions in being a woman.

It is so easy for parents to be drawn into a child's conflicts as these parents were. A mother becomes understandably distressed by the tom-boy's sloppiness, her unkempt hair, her jeans, her cow-boy antics, and the urge to "make a lady out of her" is irresistible and leads repeatedly to conflicts over dress, manners, a hundred details in the ordinary routine of a day. But ladies are not made by wearing down their resistance to femininity. And it is so easy for a father to fall in with the tom-boy's romping and rough play which, after all, brings him closer to his own childhood than the incomprehensible girl games of a daughter. It is understandable that a father might not easily guess the motives behind such behavior and unconsciously fall in with the little girl's game of being a boy. But a little girl who finds that her tom-boy antics do, indeed, bring her closer to her father will have even less incentive to give them up in favor of feminine pursuits.

Obviously, the little tom-boy will not be coerced into "being a lady" by her mother nor will she herself abandon her pose as a boy if it brings satisfactions to her. What we need to do is to strengthen and promote the feminine side of the child, diminish the satisfactions gained through playing boy and eventually, without conflict over jeans, hair-do's and manners, the boy pose may be given up because being a girl has greater satisfactions.

The mother is, of course, the central figure in the girl's feminine development. It is through the mother that the girl acquires her standards of feminine behavior; it is through love of the mother and identification with her that the girl achieves a positive identification with her own sex.

All of this does not mean that a mother must exert herself in building a relationship with her daughter. There is no need for a mother to arrange special mother-daughter jaunts to restaurants, stores, theaters and such places. They are fine as occasional treats (if they really give pleasure to mother and daughter), but these planned recreational projects are not in themselves the things that build relationship and lead to identification. Identification is achieved through love and the wish to emulate a beloved person. This means that without self-conscious effort and planning, identification will take place as naturally as love through the everyday experiences of family living. We encourage and nurture the process, actually educate the child along the lines of identification, but this is not a formal course of instruction.

In recent years we have devoted ourselves to various artificial expedients for the education of the girl toward femininity. Homemaking, baby care, "family relations," "good grooming," even sex education have been moved out of the orbit of the mother-daughter relationship to become fields of study in the elementary school or merit badges in the Girl Scouts. Such formal instruction in the so-called arts of womanhood probably has little effect upon a girl's attitude toward her feminine role, but the alienation of these forms of feminine education from the family and from the central figure in the girl's feminine development, her mother, has the effect of devitalizing these aspects of femininity, creating symbols of femininity which have lost their vital connections with love, intimacy and the deeper motives that bring forth feminine identifications.

It is possible for a girl to cook, to know the correct technique for bathing a baby, to know how to apply make-up and style her hair and to possess a scientific sex education, and yet not be made *more* feminine by this instruction. It is easy to acquire the external signs of femininity. But it is only when the symbols of femininity are united with a genuinely feminine attitude that we can take them as positive signs of feminine development. This kind of femininity will never be achieved through classroom teaching or merit badges. This is the achievement of a mother.

ON BEING A BOY.

LET'S consider the little boy and the establishment of masculine values in his personality. First of all what do we mean by masculinity? I once knew a little boy of six who maintained a reign of terror in his neighborhood beating up the little kids, attacking with sticks and rocks. At home he spent his leisure hours impersonating Superman in acrobatic descents from the top of the piano, or at other times in the role of Roy Rogers galloping wildly over the furniture. He was rough, he was tough, he was the strongest guy in the world. But at night he wet his bed.

His parents brought him to see me because they understood that his bed-wetting was a symptom of an inner conflict. When we got around to discussing the behavior of this child, I discovered that neither parent felt that his behavior was "a problem"! Papa, especially, was indignant at the complaints of neighbors. Little Pete, he said, was just a real boy and if the neighbors wanted to make a sissy out of him, they'd see if they'd get any cooperation from Pete's parents. A boy has to be tough. A boy has to take care of himself. He, papa, had taught Pete how to stand up for himself.

But was this "toughness" of Pete is a sign of masculinity? Were the attacks on other children simply an excess of boyish exuberance? Were his Superman antics at home just a sign of high spirits, a greater amount of masculine drive? The truth of the matter is that Pete, as a frightened little boy who attacked other children because he was afraid of being attacked. He lived in a fantasy world in which he was constantly in danger of attack. His Superman antics, his rough-and-tough cowboy play were part of his elaborate defense against imagined danger. *If* he were Superman, he wouldn't have to be afraid of anyone. *If* he were a tough guy, a cowboy hero, he would be able to fight off attackers; he could make them afraid of *him*. And at night, when he was asleep, the fears that he warded off by day through fighting and through playing Superman, returned to plague him. And in his sleep he was helpless and defenseless, and he wet his bed.

Granted that a boy in our culture needs to be able to "take care of himself" if he is threatened, and granted that "aggressivity" is a masculine trait, raw physical aggression is not in itself an index to masculinity. By the time a boy has reached the age of five or six, physical aggression should play a small part in his system of masculine values (and in ours). Games and play permit sublimated forms of aggression and the healthy child can make use of such activities to discharge his aggressive impulses with modified goals. Language development has reached a point where grievances can be expressed in words, and solutions to problems can be found through ideas and communication of ideas.

A little American boy has a number of other difficulties in acquiring his masculine values. In our culture women are, to a very large extent, the culture bearers. Mother is the educator of conscience, the teacher of standards of conduct, the teacher of moral values. Mother and school teachers take over a heavy share of the education for intellectual values. By tradition, in America, they have the job of teaching appreciation of literature, music, art, "the finer things of life." Now why women should have a mandate in this region of child education I cannot say, but it has an important effect upon the developing boy and serious cultural implications as well. Since the little boy acquires these values largely from women, he regards them as "feminine" and has difficulty in integrating them into his masculine personality. If a little boy has good manners, he is in danger of "being a sissy" in his own estimate and in the opinion of his peers. Why? Because the teaching of good manners is the job of the women in our culture and to acquire good manners is to be "like" a woman, or a girl. If a boy is studious and has intellectual pursuits, he also runs the risk of condemnation from his peers; his masculinity is questioned. If he plays a musical instrument, he must not play it too well or devote himself too arduously to music or he will invite the teasing and ridicule of his friends. If he should acquire a deep

appreciation for literature or (may the Lord help him) poetry , he will do well to keep it to himself, like a secret vice, for if it is discovered he will lose his status as a male. But what is this? Civilized conduct, manners, are not masculine or feminine. Mental activity is not masculine or feminine. Music, art, poetry have no gender. But if these activities and pursuits are fostered almost exclusively by women in a child's education, they acquire "femininity" by identification of the idea with the woman teacher.

But let's not confine ourselves to intellectual values, Our morality, in America, is also acquired through women to a large measure. The portrait of an American boy squirming under the moral tutelage of an American woman is at least as old as Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer. Now all children in all nations and for all times resist moral teaching, but when this education is largely given over to women, the male child acquires a divided attitude toward these teachings. Both Tom and Huck behaved as if their masculine principles were in danger if they submitted to Aunt Polly and the Widow Watson and resisted these teachings as strongly as they resisted a bath. Like the intellectual values which remain uncertainly "feminine" in the boy's personality, a morality that is acquired largely through a woman's teaching becomes "feminine" by identification, So to be "good," that is, reasonably well-behaved, considerate of the feelings of others, able to accept frustration and disappointment. comes darn close to "being a sissy" in our boy culture in America.

But it's not really that simple, either. For when women, the mothers and teachers take over the job of moral teaching, they have difficulty being women, in understanding the nature of the male they are instructing. Having no experience in being a boy, they impose feminine standards of behavior upon the male. The greater energy and activity of the male puts him at a great disadvantage in the eyes of many mothers and female teachers who compare him unfavorably with the more docile and tractable little girl of the same age, Girls are regarded as less troublesome and better behaved -- "good," in other words -- and boys are regarded as restless, mischievous, willful, "not good," by some mamas and many teachers.

The standard for good behavior in the classroom is very often the girl standard. I think unhappily of a little six-year-old boy I know who came to visit me one day completely crushed by the day's events. At school he had been sent up to the principal for disturbing his class. (His high-spirited seat partner had poked him in the ribs and he had returned the poke in the honorable tradition of males.) His teacher, who had never been a boy, regarded this exchange of pokes as a border incident that verged on war and marshalled all the energy required to quell a major revolt to censure these boys for a breach of the classroom code. When my small friend protested and stated his case, she bristled, cracked out a reprimand and sent him off to the principal's office. There he was lectured by a dragon who did not trouble herself about the events that led to this crisis because she knew boys and could assume that they were trouble-makers, noise-makers, shufflers, whisperers, pokers and punchers. She concluded her lecture with a caustic allusion to family honor. The trouble-maker's *sister*, she said significantly, had been one of the very best students, and best *citizens* this school had ever known.

"Girls *never* get into trouble," my young friend said wistfully. "Sometimes I think it would be better to be a girl."

It seems that we are not very sure in our culture just what a boy should be like. On the one hand, we set before him the models of Abe Lincoln and George Washington and on the other hand the model of a gangster. On the one hand, we equate masculinity with toughness and violence and on the other hand we give the major part of his education to women who want him to be docile like a nice little girl. I want to defend the little boy here, for he has a tough job finding his place in our society. But I also think we need to question some of the values that we have called

"masculine." A boy is not more "masculine" because he can beat up every kid on the block. because he is tough, never cries and never shows his feelings about anything. But we need to recognize, too, that a boy is not a girl, that he cannot be bound to the code of women and girls, that his biological make-up disposes him toward greater activity and aggressiveness and that his educators must understand this. We can employ the active, aggressive components in the boy's biological equipment in an educational program that makes suitable allowance for direct discharge of energy in physical activity and indirect discharge through learning and creative activity (which make use of "aggressive" energy too). As part of our education we educate away from raw discharge of aggression, the bullying, the tantrum, the destructive and sadistic acts, but we employ these energies for other activities, sublimated activities, and we should never wish to eradicate these tendencies or reverse them so that a boy needs to become passive and feminine in order to win our approval. As the father regains prestige in the American home we may hope to see less conflict in the American boy regarding his masculinity. For the father who takes an active part in his son's upbringing offers himself as a model that can be integrated into the child's personality. There is less resistance to the incorporation of male-inspired values into the masculine personality of the developing boy than in the case of the female-inspired values, and in the ideal situation there should be a harmony of values in the attitude of both parents. But it is not enough for father to be "a pal" to his son. Perhaps we have overstressed this side of the relationship of son and father altogether too much. There should be shared interests of course. There should be activities together, of course. But a father need not be a play-mate for his son and a father must reserve a good-sized place in his relationship to his son for the exercise of parental authority when the occasion demands it.

We have a hard time in our culture defining the role of the father in a democratic society. Very close to the early days of this republic an astute European observer like de Tocqueville recognized the changing pattern of family life in America which emerged spontaneously in a society that had overthrown the absolute rule of a king and abandoned the European pattern of the state. The American father, like the president and other elected leaders of this republic could be challenged and criticized. The sons of the republic did not bow down to any authority, though they accepted the principle of governmental authority expressing the will of the people. In adapting the principle of democratic government to the family we run into some obvious difficulties. The child does not elect his parents and he is not a responsible and functioning citizen in the society of his family. His father cannot be guided by the popular will of an electorate or a governing body to whom he is responsible. He cannot be guided by the popular will of his children either, unless he is prepared to lose his sanity and his life's savings. If he is an earnest, democratic father, he may go in for family councils and such things, but this is likely to become a hoax in the name of democracy which any five year old can spot in a minute.

We need to rescue the American father from the unreasonable and false situation into which we have put him in the name of democracy. We will have no tyrants either, for authority does not mean tyranny. And authority of the kind I speak does not require physical force or the exercise of power for the sake of power. It is a reasonable and just authority (as authority must be in a democratic society) exercised confidently as the prerogative of a father, deriving its strength from the ties of love that bind a parent and child.