



The Watchful Eye

Newsletter of the Sexualization of Youth Project

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MARY BAILEY, EDITOR



Cinderella Ate My Daughter - A Story for Women of All Ages

By Alicia Jones-McLeod

Let me start by saying I have three wonderful children, two girls, ages 9 and 10, and one 16-year old son. They are the joys of my life. I went through all kinds of stages, Elmo, Barney, Teletubbies, none of which lasted very long (except maybe my son's fascination with Barney). Then came the Princesses—one that we could really get into. My daughters loved the idea of being primped and pampered and I saw nothing wrong with it. Now that they are getting older, I see the issues that have come up in the media and, after reading “Cinderella Ate My Daughter,” understand why Cinderella, Ariel, and Aurora are the problem and not the solution.

The premise of the book is concerned with raising girls—and how the Disney Princesses try to mold them into prima donna princesses who are only pretty pictures in need of rescuing. One of the main dilemmas the book discusses is “what defines a girl.” Of course we all know what defines her anatomically, but what about emotionally and intellectually? How do we define the fuzzy border for young women between being feminine and

being a tomboy? And what constitutes being manly versus being a sissy for boys? What defines them—the games they play, the classes they excel at, or the jobs they chose to hold? Who says that math and science are only territories that boys can excel in while homemaking is for girls? These are some of

the tough issues that “Cinderella Ate My Daughter” deals with in great detail.

Taking aim at everything from Tonka Trucks to Barbie Dolls, author Peggy Orenstein speaks to the differences between the toys for girls and the toys for boys. Girls

are being taught to be soft and sweet, while boys are being taught to not share emotions. Boys' toys are all about war and fighting. Orenstein first assumes that boys may be limited in this way, but then after a little more digging sees how truly limited young girls are. While in a class being asked to chose an item to become and to describe the item by filling in a sentence, the boys chose to be a whole host of things from firemen to spiders to superheroes, while the girls chose between butterflies, princesses, fairies and ballerinas. Orenstein drew the conclusion

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Please forward this monthly newsletter on the sexualization of youth to people and organizations you think will (or should) be concerned with this unprecedented, fast-growing assault on youth.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, change address, query, or comment: send your email to Mary Bailey at thewatchfuleye@rcn.com

Cinderella Ate My Daughter: A Story for Women of All Ages

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which seemed fitting: “The boys seemed to be exploring the world; the girls were exploring (only) femininity.”

With the media and retail stores also defining what is acceptable for our children, a phenomenon called “KGOY” (Kids Getting Older Younger) is brought to light. “This means that ten-year old girls frequently resemble sexually mature women,” imitating the women they see in the media, and that the girls are frequently dressed in clothing to make them look older than the children they are. When is the last time you were in a high school or at the mall and remarked on a young woman (tween or teen) in a skirt that was a little too short or an 8-year old in high heels? I see this regularly and it is becoming more of the rule than the exception.

The book spends most of the chapters dealing with the issues facing mothers and fathers of children today. How do we create a childhood experience that leads to healthy and happy well-adjusted adults? In the end there are two solutions. The first, shield your children from the world around them, keep them sheltered from the narrow-minded people who will try to berate them and discourage them—some of them adults, some children, but most without even being aware of what they are doing. The second choice, prepare our children to live within it, question it, challenge it and succeed in it. We can provide a new and fresh perspective for the children, one which creates an equality in our world, where boys are free to share emotions and cook while girls are free to play soldier and climb trees. Children can embrace their respective genders with pride without preconceived notions of what they are supposed to be. Peggy Orenstein and I chose the latter, though we have both experimented with the former and found it to be unsuitable and unrealistic.

Join Montgomery County NOW for a discussion on this book and the topics discussed within on Monday, October 17, 7 pm, at the Rockville Library. It is sure to be a lively and thought provoking evening. For more information, visit www.mcmandnow.org.

Editor's Mailbag

I **winned** as I read the description of the violent video games [“High Court Ok's Violent Video Games for Kids,” September 2011]; they really scare me. My son's fascination with (not having) them led to his downloading a game he KNEW he was strictly forbidden to play. I revoked his computer privileges for a week. The thing they don't mention is the insidious addiction these games also create in children (in addition to the desensitization to violence of course). The addiction is frightening in itself. Kids will often play at the expense of everything else in their lives, and I believe the games in general play a large role in the ever-increasing ADD [attention deficit disorder] epidemic kids face now. So, depressing, but thank you. I really support what you are trying to do.

— Karen, New Hampshire

I **was both enlightened and discouraged** by a 9/29/11 Anderson Cooper 360 TV show on CNN criticizing a very popular and fast growing web site that sexualizes young girls who all wear at least minimal clothing but pose suggestively or display tee shirts with erotic or evocative messages. The site's header is “Keep a teen off the streets, Put her in your van.” The two commentators on the show did not agree about whether the site is actually illegal. However, they did concur on its poor taste, unclear rules for posting pictures that might be taken from Facebook or other sources without explicit permission of the person depicted, and the lack of control over the site's content shown by an otherwise respectable corporate sponsor (a division of Advance Publications that was recently split off from Conde' Nast, publisher for The New Yorker and Vanity Fair).

More remarkable has been the reactions of the site's loyal viewers who immediately claimed free speech rights and also initiated a campaign to photo-shop Anderson Cooper's head on the bodies of underage girls in provocative poses. I found the comment thread frightening with respect to snide remarks about anyone objecting to this obsessive fascination with pedophilia. Anyone who claims to be 18-years-old can easily log on. I wince at the thought of my grandchildren following this stuff or buying into the values so proudly proclaimed by the faithful browsers.

— Paddy, Maryland

Girl/Boy Differences: Genetics, Environment or Merchandising?

By Jeannette Feldner

GIRLS



BOYS



I made a field trip to JCPenney's, Wheaton mall, to investigate if they had taken their sexist t-shirt about being too cute for homework off the shelves. I found out that indeed they had, but I also found that the girls' clothes predominantly had messages on them of peace, love, hearts, BFF (best friends forever), cuteness, awesome, boys, etc. The only item I found that referenced anything athletic in the girls' department was a shirt that used the terms "athletic" alongside "believe in peace." A dress that had "strong" and "smart" on it also had PEACE on it. The message was clear to me—girls should be pretty, loving, social, while being full of peace—translate "quiet."

This led me to wonder what was happening in the boys' department. There I found logos and images depicting action, game-playing, sports, power (no peace, by the way). One belittled girls by saying "Zombies are after brains, so my sister is safe." Some t-shirts even had toy trucks and/or watches attached, seeming to encourage the young lads to be even more active and adventurous.

On a later trip to Sears, I searched and found the same gender differences in clothing styles. However, I did see pretty dresses for girls that had miniature versions of the dresses for their dolls, so they could do a mother/daughter pretend, I guess.

I invite you to take a walk through the kids' clothes department via the pictures to the left and right and see what you think. Then check out other stores that sell girls' and boys' clothes. It's eye opening.


If merchandisers are going to put messages on kids' clothes, I would like to see more positive messages about being smart, strong, with the world of possibilities open to them. This is already in the boys' department. Now we need it in the girls' department as well. Or how about plain or patterned shirts with no messages at all. Just let girls and boys be children! I'm all for that.


 **Support healthy media for girls**, urges the Girl Scouts of America. Ask your Members of Congress to sponsor the Healthy Media for Youth Act (H.R. 2513 and S.1354). “Kids are surrounded by media. From television to movies to social media and new technologies, kids are consuming up to 10 hours of recreational media each day,” the organization says. Since research shows “girls are very influenced by what



they see” and that it “can have a significant impact on their self-esteem, body image, and leadership

aspirations,” the Girl Scouts has been instrumental in getting the issue before the legislature. The reintroduced bill, to be funded at \$13 million over five years, would 1) Provide media literacy programs, leadership development and competitive grants to organizations, 2) Support research on the impact of media on youth development, and 3) Create a federal task force to develop voluntary recommendations for the media industry.


 **Songs that sexualize.** Popular lyrics that push sexualization climbed steadily during the past half-century, according to a Brigham Young University analysis of Billboard’s Top 100 Hits from 1959 to 2009. Expecting a steady increase, the researchers were surprised to find sexually explicit lyrics “skyrocketed” during the final decade. The amount of songs listened to by those ages 8 to 18 increased by 45 percent, rising with the popularity of MP3 players. The study coded each year’s most popular songs based on the American Psychological Association’s definition of sexualization—for instance, seeing someone as having only sexual value or inappropriately imposing sexuality on a child. Excluded were lyrics expressing a healthy, equitable sexual exchange. “We want people to have great relationships,” said Cougar Hall, lead author and associate professor of health sciences at BTU. These findings, the authors say, raise serious concerns about the promotion of unhealthy sexual messages in music. “Popular music,” they conclude, “can teach young men to be sexually aggressive and treat women as objects while often teaching young women that their value to society is to provide sexual pleasure.” They noted previous research establishing an association between sexualized lyrics and adolescent sexual behavior. (Springer’s *Sexuality & Culture* journal, reported by *Deseret News*, 9-12-2011)


 **Still more of those T-shirts.** The website of Forever 21, a popular teenage clothing chain, advertises young women’s “Allergic to Algebra” and “School Sucks” T-shirts for \$12.80. But, reported ABC News, “there were no shirts that alluded to education in the men’s section of the website.” Another women’s shirt



had a more devious message: “A + = amazing, B = brilliant, C = cool, D = delightful, F = fabulous” — but, says the tagline: “F doesn’t always mean fail.” Forever 21 launched this sales campaign less than two weeks after a change.org petition caused J.C. Penney to withdraw its anti-ed T-shirts for girls. One shopper

posted a photo of a mannequin wearing the Algebra shirt on the social news website Reddit.com. Attached was a neon green note saying, “SMART girls are cool. Don’t buy this shirt.” (ABC News/Nation blog, 9-12-11) It’s now obvious that retailers are using controversial T-shirts as advertising. But let’s keep objecting, time after time. Let it build. Anything else is acquiescence.

 **Inexperienced TV viewers model risky behaviors.** It may not matter whether the consequences of risky sexual behavior are portrayed in a positive or negative light, say Robin L. Nabi and Shannon Clark of the University of California/Santa Barbara. What matters is viewers’ prior experience. In their study of 400 college women viewing various portrayals of risky health behavior (such as one night stands), the researchers found that the women with direct experience were not influenced by the portrayals, while those without such experience were more likely to participate in the depicted unsafe sex in the future. (*Journal of Communication*, Sept. 2008)

 **Maryland legislators fail trafficking test.** Once more, the General Assembly has refused to pass a “relatively modest proposal” permitting sex trafficking victims to sue pimps for restitution and compensatory damages, reports *The Baltimore Sun*. Yet again, authorities can’t confiscate sex traffickers’ cars and cash, tools commonly employed against traffickers in drugs. Even a bill merely allowing victims’ rights groups to post a national hotline number at bus stations, truck stops, highway tollbooths and other places young victims might visit “was approved only over determined opposition from the state’s tourism and hospitality industry.” (*Baltimore Sun*, 6-06-11)