

THE COMMON SENSE OF SEX EDUCATION

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When one mentions Sex Education for children, the average person thinks only of the imparting of biological facts to physically immature individuals. Many emotional controversies thrive as to whether this is helpful or harmful to children. Some say that the "sexual difficulties" of mature life will be avoided by teaching children "sex" at an early age; others feel that this creates a morbid interest in sexuality. It seems, however, that the broader implications of the problem are overlooked in the heat of argument. As a result, the whole problem of sex education gets out of perspective and the most dynamic aspects of our common sex life are disregarded.

Sex is more a social matter than a private preoccupation. Being a male or being a female means vastly more in terms of daily life than the biological facts would indicate. The individual lives in a social context, and the biological function of sex is but a part of his total life. But social living is strongly influenced by the division of human beings into two sexes. Animals take sex for what it is; but human beings exaggerate sex differences through different customs and clothing. Most of the sexual difficulties we wish to avoid arise more from the customs surrounding sexuality and sex-differences than from the differences themselves. In short, sex education for the child ought to be more occupied with imparting an understanding of our cultural conditioning than it is at present--showing the facts in their social connectedness.

One school of psychology makes a great issue of the female envy of the male penis and ascribes most psychic difficulties experienced by women and girls to this factor. This mistake could happen only with people who try to understand sex apart from social customs elaborated for its social functioning! Our social life and folkways are inherited from a patriarchal past when the male was given the dominant role and "owned" the females. All prestige and mundane advantages were given to the male, the female retaining as her "right" those nonpredatory characteristics unacceptable or useless to the predatory male. Even today the word "masculine" symbolizes all that is dominant, and "feminine" signifies the passive and submissive human characteristics.

In such a world, who would not rather be a male than a female? The female role in modern culture is still undervalued and looked down on. And as long as greater privileges are given the male because of the biological accident of birth, females will be envious. No one cares to accept a position of permanent inferiority throughout life--one that can never be fully compensated while the condition of being "female" is considered less valuable than being a male.

The first "sex" education girls and boys get is the understanding that there are differences of privilege in favor of the male. We don't tell them--but they see that the father has greater freedom and more self-determi-

nation than the mother. Social pressure arises early to persuade girls to be "nice" (passive) and even greater pressure is put on boys to be aggressive and competitive (predatory). A boy with a dirty face is taken for granted, but a girl who is dirty is "slamed" into over-valuing cleanliness. By such tricks, we subdue in girls the activity which is natural to both girls and boys. A girl who has to remain clean at all times must overcome aggressive tendencies and cultivate only the passive traits which are considered "unmanly." These subtle pressures exerted on children from the first days of life soon result in what is called "masculine" and "feminine" behavior. The female is artificially held back by the customs of our patriarchal civilization and kept from competing with the male. And while these customs remain unchanged, there will be enmity between the sexes regardless of age or condition.

Social customs rather than the biological sex function determine the manner and time in which sex will be experienced and expressed by the individual. Parents and teachers must decide whether they want to continue this inequality between the sexes. If they believe that the future of the race is best served by artificially limiting the powers of each female, then we ought to continue trying to make boys "more manly" (masculine) and girls "less manly" (more feminine). "Masculine" and "feminine" are artifacts of our culture, limiting the behavior of individuals, and must no longer be confused with male and female! But if we believe that the future of mankind is served better by a greater equality and identity of interest between the sexes, we must dis-

card the fictions of masculinity and femininity.

Sex education for the young ought to be a conscious evaluation of these factors and fictions as they apply to the daily lives of our children. The life attitudes are being solidified during childhood, and it is for us to determine the direction of the trends to be expressed in later life. When we call a boy a "sisst", we do more than shame him--we defame and dishonor all human females with the same breath! The real damage done the boy is small in comparison to the harm inflicted on females by using their sex as a symbol of worthlessness for evaluating the boy. The whole pessimism with which our culture still regards women and girls is expressed in the word "sisst":

The little business of imparting biological facts of sex is inconsiderable in its effect on individual children in comparison to the dynamic effect of what it means to be a boy or girl in our culture. It might be far more useful for us to teach boys and girls how to regard each other with some degree of equality, and to worry less about what is commonly called sex-instruction. An arrogant male child who is trained to "conquer" others in his environment will--as a man--try to conquer women sexually. And the woman who is envious of the arrogant male will try to make him "fall" for her in an effort to dominate him. In both cases, sex is used as a weapon instead of as a common bond. Sex difficulties do not arise from ignorance of biology as often (if at all) as they stem from the mutual antagonism and fear engendered by over-valuing the male role and under-valuing the female role in

our culture. No real fellowship is possible between males and females in our civilization because of this mistake.

Women themselves contribute much toward keeping up this mistaken traditional attitude. Their resentment against being "under-valued females" is so strong that they do not enjoy the society of each other. Witness the term "hen party" and the scornful tone of the average woman toward such gatherings. This attitude only contributes to the general scorn heaped upon the female. It is unfortunate that women assist in their own degradation by failing to understand the results of such thinking.

Nature has made the sexual urge so compelling that men and women marry in spite of the antagonism and fear which exists between them. But little happiness exists in marriage for most people. Much is blamed on "sexual incompatibility" and "female frigidity"; but such words explain nothing. Marriage is a job for two equal partners, and it can not succeed when rivalry exists. And in spite of this, we continue to train our children so that the rivalry will be present by nature. The fear of being "conquered" and continually depreciated keeps many women from marriage. Or if they marry, this factor induces nagging, whining, and frigidity and all the ills too

common to the married state. Training for fellowship and a feeling of equality between the sexes is the only kind of sex education which will not fail its mark. We must remove or minimize the effect of our patriarchal inheritance on our children. The boy who "looks down on" girls or the girl who fears or envies boys will grow up to be a dissatisfied marriage partner. Our program of sex education ought to be the correction of such mistaken attitudes before puberty.

The sex function will be used in human relationships exactly as the attitude toward the other sex determines --it has no autonomous life of its own! Imparting the biological facts of sex will neither help nor harm (per se), for the knowledge will be used only according to the character of the individual who receives the instruction. All life demands cooperation, and cooperation can exist only when there is a feeling of equality present. Our "sex education" then is more rightly accomplished when we remove obstacles to cooperation among children. To the degree we can remove the injurious fictions of the so-called masculine and feminine character differences, we promote a feeling of mutual regard between males and females. This "identity of interest" will guarantee proper use of the sexual function, and the biology of sex can be superimposed without fear of damage to anyone..