

powerful men of today can't stop him, who is going to? It's like water on high grass: first one drop comes and then another, and then it begins to have an effect and it flows through the fields and woods, leaving traces. Haider, too, leaves his traces.

Were that man not in this country, and were people not to make comments like "Germany belongs to the Germans," then things would surely be different for the gypsies. Where did the Germans themselves come from originally, anyway? Why don't they ask themselves that or look it up?

KR: Do you feel that there is a generation of Rom coming up that will defend their civil rights vocally?

CS: Yes, it is already there. When I speak to my children and the children of my friends, I feel that they would like to enter the public sphere—to talk, to sing, to take part in all aspects of life. But then I also sense their fear that when they give away their secret, they'll be helpless, they won't be able to keep their jobs. Many Austrian Rom are public employees—bus-drivers, conductors—and caution tells them, "Better not say anything, hide out." Only the state can take that fear away, by giving people a sense of security that they have the right to live in this country.

Living down to expectations

by Joanne M. Braxton and Julia K. Brazelton

SchoolGirls, by Peggy Orenstein. New York: Doubleday, 1994, 335 pp., \$23.50 hardcover.
Falling at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls, by Myra and David Sadker. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994, 347 pp., \$22.00 hardcover.

"Trick or treat, trick or treat
 Give me something good to eat,
 If you don't, I don't care,
 I'll pull down your underwear."

ATAN EXCLUSIVE VIRGINIA preschool we know of, the boys' soccer team used this rhyme to taunt their four- and five-year-old female peers. The teachers present excused the inextinguishable with the tired and outworn cliché, "Oh they're just children. Boys will be boys." And by so saying, they did their part to make it so, without thinking of those preschool girls, terrified of having their underwear pulled down by a group of rowdy boys who received the loyal support, if not the encouragement, of their smiling teachers.

SchoolGirls and *Falling at Fairness* make clear that this seemingly "harmless" episode fits into a system where girl children are

taught to accommodate sexual intimidation and gender discrimination from the earliest preschool years. That accommodation translates into many forms of pedagogical discrimination, including less classroom attention and affirmation for even the most gifted girls. "If the cure for cancer is forming in the mind of one of our daughters," write Myra and David Sadker in *Falling at Fairness*, "it is less likely to become a reality than if it is forming in the mind of one of our sons. Until this changes, everybody loses."

These books are must reads for educators at all levels, from kindergarten through graduate and professional school; for parents of school-age children and adolescents; especially for girls, and for any woman who has ever wondered "Am I just imagining things?"

Both books were inspired by the 1993 report *How Schools Shortchange Girls: A Study of Major Findings on Girls and Education*, which was funded by the AALW Educational Foundation and researched by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. The new material in *SchoolGirls* is largely anecdotal, based on Peggy Orenstein's observations in two California middle schools. *Falling at Fairness* compiles research from many studies and covers everything from teacher attention to sexual harassment. Yet different as they are, both bolster the AALW report's findings.

SchoolGirls relies heavily on *How Schools Shortchange Girls* as background. Peggy Orenstein writes:

The results confirmed something that many women already knew too well. For a girl, the passage into adolescence is not just marked by menarche or a few new curves. It is marked by a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities, especially in math and science. It is marked by a scathingly critical attitude toward her body and a blossoming sense of personal inadequacy. (p.xvi)

Deeply troubled by the AALW's findings, Orenstein began observing gender relations in two Northern California middle schools: Weston, an overwhelmingly white school "with a reputation for excellence"; and Audubon, a school serving a beleaguered, mostly non-white urban community. Working with a list of names submitted by principals, counselors and teachers, she interviewed small groups of girls before narrowing the field to nine subjects whom she followed during the 1992-1993 school year. It is eye-opening to read about the lives of these self-avowed feminist participants, whose self-esteem was decimated over the course of the study.

All of the girls saw their gender as a liability. When questioned about what they thought were positive aspects of being female, they responded with answers such as, "Nothing, really. All kinds of bad things happen to girls, like getting your period. Or getting pregnant."

According to Orenstein, "Notions of 'femininity' and 'body' are deeply entwined with sexuality; and, indeed, the militaristic control exerted over hunger is inextricable

from that which they [girls] exert over sexual desire." She traces a year in the life of a new student, Lisa, who is indeed overweight. Lisa felt like she had a contagious disease because everyone seemed afraid to talk to her. Her standardized test scores placed her in the top quartile, yet her grades were below average. Orenstein writes: "Lisa equates thinness with success and intelligence; as a fat girl, she sees failure as inevitable." Lisa sought acceptance and received rejection at every turn. By the middle of the year, she had settled into a clique she herself classified as the "losers."

An eighth-grade girl at Weston, Jeanie, endured endless taunts about the size of her breasts. Until one of the boys in her gym class grabbed her breasts, she remained silent. The principal was outraged that this and similar instances of heckling and grabbing of breasts, buttocks and crotches went unreported and unpunished. But when she tried to enforce sexual harassment laws and policies in her own school, she was attacked by parents for "failing to protect the boys" and ultimately reprimanded by the school board superintendent. Forced to retreat, she no longer enforces sexual harassment policy. In her words, she feels "burned and gun-shy"; "There's just the law, no way to carry it out.... And I guess, looking back, I wouldn't try something like this again."

When Orenstein discussed the sexual harassment allegations with the boy who fondled Jeanie's breasts, he commented: "I don't remember doing it, but maybe I did. All the guys do that stuff, it's no big deal. The girls don't mind. I mean, they don't do anything about it. I'd beat the crap out of someone if they touched me like that. But girls are different, they don't really do anything, so I guess it's okay to do." Orenstein writes:

Middle-class and affluent girls tend to accept sexual harassment as inevitable. And why not? The sexual teasing, stalking, and grabbing merely reinforces other, more subtle lessons. It reminds them that they are defined by their bodies; it underscores their lack of entitlement in the classroom (in fact, the harassment frequently happens in the classroom); it confirms their belief that boys' sexuality is uncontrollable while their own must remain in check. (pp.116-117)

While most of the stories Orenstein recounts are unsettling and even disturbing, others are positively horrifying. For instance, Latinas, whose self-esteem is reportedly lowest of all girls, accept rape as the inevitable first sexual encounter—and in some cases, the only kind of sexual encounter imaginable:

"Guys get in the mood and they want to have sex," [Marta] explains. "For girls, it's more if the guy wants it and she wants to let him. And you don't know, you can think you love a guy, but then he forces you to do it. Men stink."

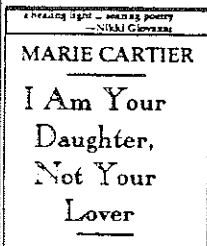
I ask her why, if the men she knows are so disreputable, she wants to be with them at all.

"Because guys protect you from the other guys," she says simply.

"Guys may protect you from other guys," I respond, "but who protects you from the protector?" (p.209)

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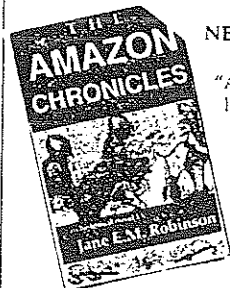
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... a just society; her sexual-what she called in *Children* nightmare repetition" (the as mirrored in the past as her upheld, paradoxically, with: is no "use of ever saying, ne this, should have done nothing else could have my nature and circum-

... her mother, at 75, than she ate the early *Martha Quest* see her as a tragic figure, disappointing years with (sh dignity), and more r body and sexuality than st or *Anna Wolf*. This *Lesson* as a young woman her li-shaped legs" filled her by," and writes rhapsodical-adise of physical pleasure" with a lover when she was pregnant with *Godfried* the is crotchety about femin-lys (1949) mothers took it voked and got up when their low women may leave their for themselves until they . Autre temps, very much ;)) and more cynical than k

... of saying Communists s Fascists, heaven for-ed in the infinite perfec-kind, the imminent adness and love—our yame as the religious uld we be the same as and oppressors? When of *Accoutains in the skies* , in fact the atrocities, nd the destruction Communists were much se of the Nazis and Fas-ty put on our side of the ght engraved Good Inten-estating little debate.... (p.286)

... me most about *Under My* upes it affords of a writer's rk. Some of my pleasure is, a Trivial Pursuit variety. Al-ays that only Athen Gou-ck Communist character in lence, is "unchanged from in the novels under his own identifies real-life persons mal characters are, however l. It is great fun to see how not only interpenetrate but h other. For example, Mrs. air of the Labour Party ex-tee in *A Ripple from the d* on Gladys Masadorp, the of Salisbury. How irritated -usband, a respectable civil ve been at the name she floral left-wing politician; second wife was Dolly Van

... al is the abundant evidence of a densely-peopled thury that, as Lessing reflects *Under My Skin*, "the whole e is a setting at a distance, of it—to the writer, and to read the results of this kes the raw, the individual, the unexamined, into the al." It is self-reflexive com-hat make reading *Under My* ng enterprise it is. ♦♦

... ed, "Postmodernism and the al Subject: Reconstructing *Autobiography and Post-* ed by Kathleen Ashley, and Gerald Peters (Amherst, of Massachusetts Press,

... , *Counterpoints* (New York: ister, 1964), p.424.

The sexual double standard is apparent in stories told by white schoolgirls as well. "The girls themselves participate in the dynamic, shunning sexually active girls, but excusing male behavior by saying, 'Boys only think with their dicks.'" This duality holds that a boy cannot be expected to stop when he wants sex; instead, it's up to the girl to ignore her own sexual desires, listen to her mind and say "no." Sexually active boys are "studs," while the girls are "sluts" or "whores."

Reading page after page of *SchoolGirls*, the female reader feels powerless: stories of real children outrage us. In stunned disbelief, we wonder how dedicated educators, particularly women, continue to treat our girl children and students with standards and expectations that ultimately lead to second-class citizenship. While Orenstein does not present an action agenda for changing the treatment of girls, her book provides a resounding confirmation of "something that many women already knew too well."

FAILING AT FAIRNESS contains its own share of disturbing stories. But it also includes vast references to academic research conducted by its authors and others over the last thirty years. The statistics cited are often shocking; so shocking, in fact, that many commentators have questioned them. Yet the sheer number and variety of studies discussed in *Failing at Fairness* are persuasive. For that reason alone, we find it a more useful book than *SchoolGirls*—especially when it comes to the nitty-gritty specifics of classroom interaction.

Myra and David Sadker have conducted school studies lasting as long as three years; they have observed and placed trained "raters" in classrooms of fourth-, fifth-, sixth- and eighth-graders. The classroom populations ranged from all black to all white and racially mixed, from rural to urban and decidedly suburban and upper-middle-class. The Sadkers conclude that "for every girl who succeeds, too many fail or live down to expectations or settle for second best." They note, too, that while sexism harms girls in schools, it is a double-edged sword that damages boys as well. Yet male children are vested in the status quo; there are few incentives for boys to challenge the existing order; they may be punished for playing with girls, for crying, or even for wearing a pastel shirt. "Schools that fail at fairness," according to the Sadkers, "deny boys a wide range of options and prepare girls for poverty."

Because it covers so much ground, *Failing at Fairness* may appear overly anecdotal at first glance. Yet as one continues reading, its many threads come together and take on power. In the first chapter, "Hidden Lessons," the Sadkers describe a "terrifying...curriculum of sexist school lessons be-

coming secret mind games played against female children...." After two decades of research grants and thousands of hours of classroom observations, they remain "amazed at the stubborn persistence of these hidden sexist lessons," which are often embedded in teacher-student interactions in the classroom.

At all grade levels, male students have more interaction with teachers than female students. Whether the teacher is black or white, male or female, the pattern is the same. The Sadkers identify four types of teacher reactions: praise (positive reactions to a student's comment or work); criticism (explicit statements that an answer is incorrect); remediation (helping students to correct or improve their responses); and acceptance (brief acknowledgments that an answer is correct, such as "uh-huh" and "okay"). They found that praise constituted only ten percent and criticism five percent of teacher reactions in their studies; indeed, boys received much more of the far commoner teacher response, remediation, as well as more praise than girls. Finally, girls generally received the commonest response of all, acceptance—or what the Sadkers call "the more superficial 'Okay' reaction, one that packs far less educational punch." Sex segregation contributes to this problem: most classrooms are sex-segregated, and teachers gravitate to the more talkative, more disruptive male sections, where they spend more of their time and attention.

When teachers criticize students, they treat boys and girls differently. In the case of boys, they often include suggestions that soften the blow, while affirming their belief in the child's ability: "I know you can get it if you just turn off that TV and study a little more." But when girls'

academic performance is inadequate, they are told, "I'm afraid you didn't do too well on that math test." Missing is [that] voice of confidence, the attribution to effort, the suggestion that girls have the brain power and can do it if they try a little more....

Children pick up on these subtle cues and internalize the attitudes of adults.... [When the boys] receive a low test grade, they don't think it's because they're stupid: "I can't believe it," they say. "I guess I studied the wrong stuff. I should have done better than this." (p.96)

"Short-circuiting," another classroom problem, begins early, as early as preschool. Teachers tend to give "boys extended directions on how to accomplish tasks for themselves." Yet in some studies they were "less likely to offer explanations and directions as to how to do things" to girls. Instead they do things for girls.

The logical remedy is that teachers need to spend more time showing girls how to perform physical tasks in the classroom, encouraging their active participation in hands-on experiments, as well as on the more technical aspects of housekeeping frequently assigned to boys—such as loading and unloading the VCR.

Unfortunately, the unconscious behavior of teachers is reflected and reinforced by children. What the Sadkers call "gender intensifiers" include "attack play," in which boys invade the area assigned to girls, all the while excluding girls from the play areas assigned to boys, thereby sending the message that girls aren't good enough to play with them. Boys who sit next to girls in informally segregated classrooms and lunchrooms, they observe, "are the ones most likely to be rejected by their male classmates." A student at American University remembers his Brooklyn school lunchroom: "There was no greater social embarrassment for a boy in the very hierarchical system we had set up in our class than to have to sit on the girls' side at lunch.... To this day, twenty years later, I remember that lunch. It was horrible."

THESE PROBLEMS CONTINUE in the high school years. In a later chapter, "High School: In Search of Herself," the Sadkers describe how they challenged students in an honors history class "in a competitive high school" to name "twenty famous U.S. women from the past or present" in a five-minute period. The list couldn't include sports figures, entertainers, or presidents' wives who weren't famous in their own right. At first, the students (both girls and boys) were insulted by the Sadkers' challenge, confident in their individual abilities to complete a list of twenty names. But not one child could name twenty women, or nineteen women, or seventeen women, for that matter. A single Asian American completed a list of sixteen names. After this girl finished reading her list, the Sadkers asked, "Why do you think you had so much trouble naming women?"

"Women didn't do anything," a boy says.

"Nothing?" we probe.
"Cooking." "Cleaning." "Having babies." Boys call out from around the room. One male student offers the following definitive statement: "From the dawn of human times to almost the present day women have been irrelevant in history. They have been on the sidelines. Except for the suffrage movement they haven't done anything. I don't mean to upset people, it just happens to be the truth." (p.129)

Looking around the classroom, the Sadkers asked the students to count the figures represented in pictures on the walls around them: Here they found more than three hundred men but only eleven women. Pocahontas, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth were marginally displayed as "Multicultural Heroes."

The Sadkers then displayed books about girls and women, including outstanding scientists like Barbara McClintock. After class, one girl said, "I'm very glad to know this.... I hardly know any famous women, and it makes me feel bad, as though I can't do anything. I like science, but this is the first time I've seen books about women scientists." She borrowed the book about McClintock.

The most biased teaching of all takes place "where the instructors are the most credentialed and the students the most capable." "When we analyzed the data," the Sadkers write, "we discovered how hidden lessons, rooted in elementary school and exacerbated in high school, emerged full-blown in the college classroom." Women in college classrooms "neutralized the power of their own speech" by qualifying their responses to teachers with phrases such as, "I'm not sure if this is what you want but..." or "This probably isn't right but..." In a series of studies beginning in 1973 and lasting over a period of twenty years, the Sadkers observed these "self-put-downs" in class after class. An awareness of this phenomenon has led many teachers to discourage their students from apologizing for their responses in advance and to make a deliberate attempt to create a classroom atmosphere where students know that every answer doesn't have to be perfect.

As the Sadkers write, "While boys stand out, girls blend in, do their work, wait their turn, and become the supporting cast"; they succumb to what might be called the cheerleader syndrome. Boys know they are the entitled gender when they arrive at school, and they take advantage of their status by deciding which is the best lunchroom table and taking it, by claiming the school yard as their own during recess, by verbally and physically harassing girls—behavior boys uniformly agree they would not tolerate if they were on the receiving end. Perhaps most disturbing is the predictable response to the question, "What if you were born the other sex?" Boys are repulsed, while girls see only advantages.

Read these books. Give them to your academic colleagues, your children's teachers and principals, to anyone you want to expose to feminist views on education. The child you empower might be the one to discover a cure for cancer; in a very real sense, the life you save could be your own. ♦♦

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