model, constructed with the aid of facts from the past, like a second source, and redescend toward the present, modifying the naive image we had of it at the beginning. The history of the idea of the family has just begun; it is just now beginning to stimulate research. Let us hope that the scholarly energy devoted to the search is expended wisely, opening new areas of inquiry rather than burying itself under an endless sifting of old ideas.

A TYRANNY OF EXPERTS

by Valerie Polakow Suransky

We take it for granted today that childhood is a distinct and even delicate stage of life, though it was not always viewed that way. As Philippe Ariès contends, what we call childhood is largely an invention that has gradually taken shape since the 17th century. Childhood is an *idea* as much as it is a developmental decree of nature. And our treatment of children has varied with our ideas about it.

Today, we view children as having such unique status that we have largely cordoned them off from the rest of life. We now separate children from the world of work, strictly divide work and play, and exclude (or "shelter") children from many aspects of everyday existence. The young have their own institutions: day care centers, nursery schools, elementary schools. They are studied by childhood specialists; no group, indeed, has been so overanalyzed. Theories abound explaining children's psychosexual and cognitive development, their early education, their learning and motivation, their creativity, their capacity for moral reasoning. Anxious parents look to "experts" for guidance on everything from the dos and don'ts of toilet training to encouraging "creative play." "Becoming at home in the world," may be, as educational philosopher Donald Vandenberg be-

lieves, a young child's chief project, but it has not been made any easier by the legions of social scientists who vie for theoretical ascendancy and prescriptive power over parents and teachers. The cult of expertise is now entrenched everywhere—from hospital maternity wards to schools.

Most of today's "experts" view childhood from above: Looking at children in the abstract, they develop theories that are detached from the actual worlds children inhabit.

A Fight is a Fight is "Aggression"

Who are the new "childhood scientists"? They are, variously, the intellectual descendants of Vienna's Sigmund Freud, or of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, or of Harvard behaviorist B. F. Skinner, or of lesser lights. On the subject of childhood, we hear from neo-Freudians, Freudian-behaviorists, cognitive developmentalists, neo-Piagetians, stage theorists, and many others.

Psychoanalysis, like other worldviews, embodies a particular vision of social reality, which the experiences of children are made to fit. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud for the first time gave aggression a status equal to libido as a basic human drive. "Civilization," writes British psychoanalyst W. H. Gillespie, commenting on this shift of emphasis in Freud's work, "depended on the taming of aggression, rather than the sublimation of sexuality." The new emphasis led many psychoanalysts to a preoccupation with children's manifestations of the aggressive drive.

The more sensible analysts, such as Anna Freud, advocate direct, sensitive observation of children as a necessary prerequisite for understanding their inner world. In a 1972 essay, she cautioned her colleagues against "preconceived ideas which handicap an investigation," pointing out that analysts' conception of the aggressive drive is still overshadowed by the much better developed theory of the sex drives, leading many to put clinical findings into the framework of the latter.

The psychoanalytic perspective on aggression has shaped our cultural assumptions about childhood. Aggression among

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children, for example, is simply considered part of everyday life in other cultures, including lower-class subcultures in this country, and not necessarily the result of "ego resistance" or the "direct discharge of aggressive fantasies," as some middle-class analysts would have it.

As Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles once remarked, "children are not allowed simply to play anymore, to develop an occasional grudge, or even to just happen to get into a fight." Simple, natural aggressive acts in school or at home are seized upon and analyzed out of all proportion to their context. As a result, the chief socialization function of the schools becomes the channeling of so-called disruptive impulses into socially benign activities—play, schoolwork, gardening.

Imagining Reality

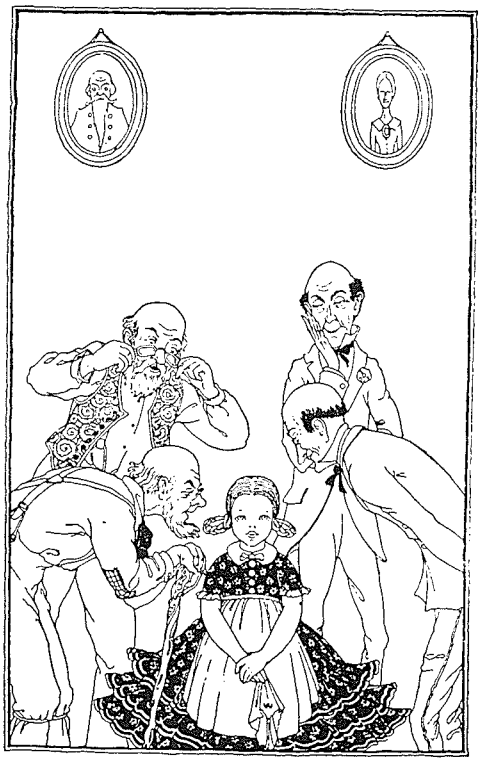
Social learning theorists, such as psychologists Albert Bandura of Stanford and the University of Waterloo's Richard Walters, view socialization primarily as a process whereby children are made to conform to established social norms and rules. Concerned more with how children behave in groups than with children as individuals, the social learning theorists focus on how children learn social roles from "role models" and on the parts patterns of reinforcement and reward play in the development of socially acceptable and socially deviant behavior.

The social learning theorists believe that imaginary models are often more effective than real-but-"inconsistent" parents and teachers. For the very young, television's *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is probably one of the best examples of a consistent "pro-social" model. Mild-mannered and middle-aged, Mr. Rogers is often too good to be true. He carefully wipes his feet before entering a home, is unfailingly polite, and gently encourages a "let's talk about it" approach. Mr. Rogers' neighborhood is small, perfect, and unreal—as unreal as the laboratory experiments in which social learning theorists develop strategies to shape the learning processes of captive children.

Behaviorism is the most pragmatic and functional of the modern psychological ideologies. Developed during the 1920s by Columbia's John Watson and Edward Thorndike of the University of Chicago, and later by B. F. Skinner, behaviorism is the most distinctively American contribution to psychology. The behaviorists based their theories on laboratory experiments with animals. Learning quickly became one of their chief concerns. They found, for example, that rats could be taught to run a maze with the proper rewards and punishments—a bit of

cheese, a small electric shock. Why not teach children in much the same way?

Studying behavior—what could be seen, observed, measured—was enough in the behaviorists' view. That which could not be observed and measured was assumed to be insignificant. The child was regarded as little more than an extension of the animal, without a will of its own, or an active consciousness. Learning and other "behaviors" were triggered by simple stimuli. Watson described language as "mere motor sounds in the larynx." The entire "science of behavior" was founded on the measurable manifestations of human action: feeling behavior; imagination behavior; learning behavior; linguistic behavior. All were believed to be linked in rigid stimulus-response associative chains. The trick, in the behaviorists' view, was to provide children with the right set of stimuli and reinforcements. To assess the results, one needed only to test: Can the rat run the maze; can the child read the book?



From Rootabaga Stories *by Carl Sandburg, illustrated by Maud and Miska Petersham. © 1922, 1923 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.*

The distinctions between knowing and saying, being and acting, competence and performance were overlooked in an orgy of experimentation and testing that began around the turn of the century and has continued largely unabated to the present.

Prepackaged Hypotheses

The current popularity of "child management" programs and the curriculum standards that pervade the schools reflect (and reinforce) the widespread and uncritical acceptance of behavioral engineering: Often this operates under the guise of egalitarian decision-making, such as we find in Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) and Teacher Effectiveness Training (T.E.T.), both expounded in best-selling books during the 1970s. P.E.T. and T.E.T. are typical recipes for instant interpersonal success, involving such strategies as "active listening" and "no-lose methods" for resolving conflicts among children. But behaviorism has enjoyed its greatest success in institutions with helpless populations—juvenile detention centers, homes for the autistic and retarded—where the image of the child is most debased.

Stage theorists constitute the fourth major school of thinking on childhood. Jean Piaget (1896–1980) in his work observing children (including his own) in real-life settings contributed many valuable insights into the unique world of childhood. He recognized that young children do see the world differently from adults and think about their experiences accordingly. Piaget's invariant stage theory—that children progress through four fixed stages of mental and physical development, from "sensory motor" to "preoperational" to "concrete operational" to "formal operational"—is, as some critics have pointed out, culture-bound and rigidly hierarchical. But his work is important because he allowed his subjects, the children, to define their world, and it is their perceptions of reality that informed his epistemology of children's cognition.

Unfortunately, it is the rigid, measurable facets of Piaget's theory that have most attracted educators and psychologists, particularly in the United States. The "experts" have retailed these ideas as prepackaged hypotheses about cognitive developmental stages, moral development, moral reasoning, and even moral education. Piaget's "invariant" stages actually overlap a great deal, but this has not stopped teachers and administrators from using Piaget's scheme in school curricula. Thus, children are often given Piaget's "conservation" test to determine what stage they are in: Water is poured from one of two

FEMINISTS AND CHILD-REARING

In America, feminists' ideas about childhood range from the extreme to the temperate. Ironically, the radical feminists complement today's academic "experts." The latter portray childhood in splendid isolation; on occasion, the former have advocated its complete extinction. Shulamit Firestone's manifesto in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), for example, is simple and startling: "Down with childhood."

Firestone contends that childhood is an invention of the postfeudal bourgeoisie. Taking a page from Friedrich Engels, she claims that the capitalist division of labor made husbands the "owners" within the family, wives the "means of production," and children the "laborers." The dawning of the "age of childhood" merely reinforced the "tyranny of woman's reproductive biology." Firestone's solution: "cybernetic socialism," ultimately leading to the artificial reproduction of children and the dissolution of the nuclear family. "As long as we use natural childbirth methods," she warns, "the household can never be a totally liberating social force."

Few feminists go as far as Firestone, but many come close. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millet proposes that childhood be "taken over" entirely by efficient professionals. Germaine Greer suggests a rather more exotic solution in *The Female Eunuch* (1971): the founding of a baby farm in Italy where children would be housed and visited from time to time by their mothers and fathers, taking time off from their busy schedules in North America to jet into Calabria. The "oppressive" role of child-rearing would be delegated to a "local family" where, no doubt, the old sexual division of labor would be reproduced not among the Greer elite but in the peasant family

broad containers to a narrow one, and the child is asked to assess the new water level: Is there more, less, or the same amount of water in the narrow container? A child who realizes that the water was "conserved" is at a higher stage of development.

American educators, typically, always asked Piaget how they could accelerate children's progress through the four stages. The Swiss psychologist, no advocate of "hurrying along" children, ruefully called this "the American question."

Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg has applied Piaget's stage model to children's capacity for moral reasoning. He seems to have the last expert word at present on the matter of moral education. He has constructed an elaborate hierarchy of moral stages, from the premoral orientation of "punishment and obedience" followed by "naive instrumental hedonism" to the sixth and highest stage, "morality of individual principles of

employed to run the farm.

In recent years, a number of feminists have taken a more sensible perspective. Sociologist Alice Rossi, writing in *Daedalus* in 1977, criticized the new wave of antichild feminism as a mirror image of male patterns of oppression: encouraging narcissistic self-fulfillment, the pursuit of personal ambition and profit, and distant parent-child relationships. The feminists' "parenting script," she argues, is "modelled on what has been a male pattern of relating to children, in which men turn their fathering on and off to suit themselves or their appointments for business or sexual pleasure."

In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), sociologist Nancy Chodorow asks how the role of woman-as-mother, with primary responsibility for child-rearing, is transmitted from generation to generation. Rebutting arguments that "mothering" is biologically determined or learned through role training in childhood, she examines the social organization of "parenting" from a psychoanalytic perspective. She concludes that children absorb sex roles and thus later re-create their parents' family structure and sexual division of labor.

Chodorow's theory is original and provocative, but ultimately unsatisfying. Like most theories concerning childhood, it is abstract. The experiences and perspectives of real children are missing, and the complex relationship between parents and their children is not fully captured.

What feminists must realize is that their struggle for the transformation of the family and the elimination of sexual inequality will be successful only when children are not allowed to become its victims.

—V.P.S.

conscience." In some schools, special "moral education" courses have been set up to guide children to "higher" states of moral development through group discussions of hypothetical moral conundrums led by so-called specialists in moral education.

The authority from which Kohlberg claims to have derived this universal scheme is a battery of tests posing hypothetical dilemmas that he presented to children of all ages during the 1960s. But the questions Kohlberg asked (e.g., should a husband steal a drug to save his dying wife?) are unrelated to anything children are likely to have faced. Moreover, the "objective" cognitive-developmental standards used to categorize children's judgments merely reflect prevailing upper-middle-class views, often bearing no relation to the different cultural and class backgrounds and upbringing of his subjects or to the issue at stake: How do children react in real life to difficult situations and make ethical judgments?

It is the children in Robert Coles's five-volume *Children of Crisis* who really show us the nature of childhood thinking. The Rubys of the deep South, the Peters of the migrant camps, and even the Larrys of the very wealthy reveal the true moral sensibilities of the child. These children are not inferior to, or in a lower stage of moral "development" than, many adults. Their sense of morality is born of concrete involvement in the world, of confronting true-to-life situations, not abstract dilemmas posed by social scientists. Ruby, a black girl who was among the first to integrate a New Orleans elementary school during the early 1960s, drew pictures of black people with missing limbs, but often colored them in with only a little dark crayon. "I try to give the colored as even a chance as I can," she explained, "even if that's not the way it will end up being."

"Do we really need," Coles asks, "a so-called 'expert' parading his years of 'research' with various American children of different sorts—to tell us what has been appreciated over and over again by parents and grandparents and older brothers and sisters and school teachers and Scout leaders and athletic coaches and ministers and doctors and nurses—by anyone who has occasion to have a talk or two with a child?" If the children of old were seen but not heard, today's children are *studied* but neither seen *nor* heard. Their consciousness is typologized, stages of development are imposed upon them, and grant proposals are funded in their name.

The idea of childhood has been transformed and reconstituted in every historical era. Today, having circumscribed the lives of children in schools where their experiences, intellects, and states of being are constantly measured, quantified, and evaluated, and having founded a burgeoning industry devoted to promoting their "growth," we may have elevated the idea of childhood to its highest status ever. But we have also stripped this unique phase of life of its special character.