Growing Up Free: Raising Your Child in the 80's
Letty Cottin Pogrebin

The blurb tells us that Pogrebin "is a founder, editor, and writer for Ms Magazine," and the back of the dust-jacket has rave remarks by Benjamin Spock, Ashley Montagu, and other liberals/feminists. This book is the Bible of "nonsexist childrearing." There is a whole chapter devoted to us: "Homosexuality, Hysteria, and Children: How Not to be a Homophobic Parent" (pp. 274-301). Pogrebin is married and has several children, and is a moderate feminist compared with the radical man-haters. She is presumably heterosexual. The whole book is devoted to teaching children to avoid being sexists or the victims of sexism. In a way, the gay chapter is not really about homosexuality as such, but is rather about homophobia as a symptom of sexism, based on the theory that gay men are hated because they are effeminate, and effeminacy is abhorred because women are despised. The gay chapter begins with a survey of theories of the "cause" of homosexuality, the conclusion being that we still don't know what "causes" it, but we can be sure that it is not the result of childrearing methods of any sort, feminist or otherwise. The rest of the chapter is devoted to telling parents to avoid homophobia and to teach their children to avoid it also. This section ought to be assigned reading for every parent who otherwise might belong to the "where did I fail and why is God punishing me" school of parental thought. So much for the good news. Now for the bad.

There are two great subjects which Pogrebin fails to deal with adequately, if at all. On pp. 272-3 and 528-9, she briefly discusses the question of child molestation and statutory rape. She says that most molesters are heterosexual men, and that most statutory rape laws only deny girls the right to consent to sex, but not boys. She feels that these laws ought to extend protection to boys. Although she does not quite confront the subject of boy-love, nor quite spell out her ideas on the subject of sex between adults and minors, it appears that she takes it for granted that no young person is sexually interested in adults, and therefore all paedophiles are rapists, who should be imprisoned for sex with boys or girls. Her definition of "child" is identical with the legal definition, i.e., anyone less than eighteen. Thus, the second subject which she fails to deal with is the subject of the whole relationship between adults and "children," i.e., the
question of whether or not parents ought to be allowed to control their adolescent children past the age of, say, fourteen or sixteen. It is only recently that parents have been denied control of their children between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Thus, the idea of lowering the age of adulthood even below eighteen is not a radical one in terms of the general concept, but is merely an extension of the idea that led to the lowering of adulthood to eighteen, which took place without the fabric of the family and society being destroyed. Nevertheless, Pogrebin does not question the basic assumption that parents are supposed to control (i.e., own) their children until the end of adolescence. By the same token, it could be said that Pogrebin also fails to deal with the question of what to do with those parents who refuse to follow her advice. This question of parental control is a vital one for homosexuals, because a homophobic parent can at least inhibit a gay child, and can at most throw the child out of the house, or even beat up or kill the child in a fit of homophobic passion. Pogrebin says that parents ought to be free from homophobia, but she doesn't suggest that gay adolescents ought to be legally free to leave home to escape from a homophobic parent, or that there ought to be some legal limit on the control that a homophobic parent can exercise over a gay child. But this question cannot be resolved outside of the context of the general question of parental power in the case of all children, gay or straight. Pogrebin seems to dwell in some ivory tower, too high up to hear the screams of the victims of child-abuse. If the reader is not quite sure what I mean, let me say that if Pogrebin had been a Southerner before the Civil War, she might have written a book suggesting a nonsexist approach to slavery -- but having nothing to say about the question of abolition. From our vantage point, we could see how grotesque it would be to suggest improvements in slavery instead of seeing that slavery itself was an evil beyond improvement. In the same way, a century from now, it may be seen that parental ownership of children is inherently an abomination, and to suggest improvements in childrearing is like suggesting a band-aid to cure cancer. Homosexuals have always been among the chief victims of parental control, and yet we still have twaddle about "nonsexist childrearing" and "lesbian mothers" and all that, as if "nonsexist slaveholding" and "lesbian slave-owners" would be ideas other than grotesque. Feminists want to be equal with men, but they do not want their daughters (younger than eighteen) to be equal to adults. Joan Didion said that the rhetoric of feminism was communist rhetoric. Do children in Russia have freedom from parents? No.
Why is it that women are so prone to be ageists? In this context, "ageism" may be defined as a low opinion, or outright hate, aimed at members of another age-group, usually the young. Ageism is to the young as homophobia is to homosexuals. Women, including feminists, tend to be ageist, although men are not free from ageism either. This is why the seventeen-year-old valedictorian of a high-school class is "too immature" to vote, but every beer-guzzling slob in his underwear who sits all evening looking at wrestling contests on the TV is "mature enough" to vote. It is also why gay teens must live with their homophobic parents who try every night to beat "the devil" out of their son with belt-buckles. It is why a lesbian girl cannot visit her girlfriend after their parents found out about them. It is why many gay teens resort to suicide, because eighteen and freedom seem a long way off when you're sixteen and trapped in a rural town. But there is no real hint of this in Pogrebin. To her, parents are childreres, the law is the law, and a "child" is a child even if he is six feet tall and two hundred pounds.

I need hardly say that Pogrebin's ageism is the cause of her total failure to understand paedophilia. She actually believes that the statutory rape laws don't apply to sex between men (or women) and boys. Tell that to every boy-lover who was ever arrested, and see what his reaction is. Anyway, she wants all the boylovers locked up, even though she doesn't believe that seduction causes homosexuality, or, if it did, that there is anything wrong with being gay. She seems to say that the statutory rape laws should dispense with the absurd idea of an age of consent, because no child would consent even if they could, so let's just lock up all the molesters without asking how old the child was, and turn the statutory rape laws into real rape laws, because every act of paedophilia is real rape, period. If the "child" was taller and weighed more than the "rapist", so what? A seventeen-year-old football player is a "child" because the law says so, and that's that. This is the wisdom of the wise and the maturity of the mature, and must be obeyed.

But I have not answered my question yet. Women are ageists because adolescents pose a threat to their position. Girls might lure their husbands away, or take their jobs away for lower pay. Boys might lure their husbands away too. Women enjoy the power of the parent over the child, and the privileges reserved for "adults only" must be kept from the young. Rank hath its privileges, and the feminists want equal rank as adults, at the expense of the young, the lower caste.

Stephen Wayne Foster