



EMPATHIC PARENTING

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 24

Issue 4

Autumn 2001



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September 11

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Alice Miller
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WHAT IS EMPATHIC PARENTING?

Being willing and able to put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and

Being willing and able to behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.

Empathic Parenting takes an enormous amount of time and energy and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.

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Volume 24 Issue 4 Autumn 2001
(Date of Issue -- October 2001)

Editor: E.T.Barker M.D., D.Psych., F.R.C.P.(C)
Editorial Assistant: Jan Hunt M.Sc.
Printed by Midland Printers, Midland, Ontario
on recycled paper

With Vol. 7, Issue 3, Summer '84, EMPATHIC PARENTING became the official title of what was formerly the Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISSN 0705-6591)

EMPATHIC PARENTING, official publication of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, is published four times a year (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall) and is mailed without charge to all CSPCC members.

Single copy	\$3.00
Annual Subscription (four issues)	\$12.00
Annual CSPCC Supporting Membership	\$25.00
Annual CSPCC Sustaining Membership	\$100.00
Annual CSPCC Endowing Membership	\$250.00

Membership fees and donations in excess of the cost of the journal are income tax deductible. Registration No. 11921 9962 RR0001.

The Editor welcomes letters, suggestions for content, articles, photos, drawings, etc. for consideration. Opinions expressed in EMPATHIC PARENTING are not necessarily those of the CSPCC or the Editor.

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Subscription orders, undeliverable copies, and change of address notices should be sent to CSPCC, 356 First Street, Box 700, Midland, Ontario, L4R 4P4. **Phone: (705) 526-5647 Fax: (705) 526-0214 Email: cspcc@look.ca**

Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, the Canadian Magazine Index, and available on-line and on CD ROM through Canadian Business and Current Affairs.



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Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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There you will find links to all our sites:

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- The Fastest Growing Religion
- Physical Punishment in the
Home
- A Certificate for Parenting

The Wellsprings of Horror in the Cradle

Alice Miller

To protect the world we definitely need a world-wide prohibition against hitting, hurting and other acts of cruelty against children by parents and others who have power over them.

Whoever they are and however dreadful their crimes, deep down inside every dictator, mass murderer, terrorist cowers the humiliated child they once were, a child that has only survived through the complete and utter denial of its feelings of helplessness. But this complete denial of suffering once borne creates an inner void. Very many of these people will never develop a capacity for normal human compassion. Thus they have few if any qualms about destroying human life, neither that of others nor the void they carry around inside themselves.

In my view, and on the basis of the research I have done into the childhood histories of the most ruthless dictators, like Hitler, Stalin, Mao or Ceaucescu, terrorism in general and the recent horrifying attacks on the United States are a macabre but precise demonstration of what happens to millions and millions of children

the world over in the name of good parenting. And unfortunately, society turns a blind eye. The horrors of terrorist violence are something we can all watch on our television screens; the horrors in which children grow up are very rarely shown in the media. Thus, most people are not informed about the main source of hatred. They speculate about political, religious, economic or cultural reasons but the speculations are turning in darkness because the true reason must remain obscured: the suppression and subsequent denial of early rage that often ends up in hatred with an endless number of ideologies.

Hatred is hatred and rage is rage, all over the world and at any time the same, in Serbia, Ruanda or Afghanistan. They are always the fruits of very strong emotions, reactions to injuries to their dignity endured in childhood, normal reactions of the body that were not allowed to express

*Alice Miller has achieved worldwide recognition for her work on the causes and effects of childhood traumas. Her books include, **The Drama of the Gifted Child, Banished Knowledge, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware, and For Your Own Good.** She hosts a website where her readers, many of whom credit her books with freeing them from the shackles of their childhood suffering, can share their experiences and feelings with others (www.alice-miller.com). In 1986, Alice Miller was awarded the Janusz Korczak Literary Award by the Anti-Defamation League. She lives in Switzerland.*

*Alice Miller's latest book (August 2001) **The Truth Will Set You Free: Overcoming Emotional Blindness** Basic Books; ISBN: 0465045847 will be reviewed in the next issue of *Empathic Parenting*.*

themselves in a safe way. Nobody comes to the world with the wish to destroy. Every newborn, independently from the culture, religion or ethnic origins needs to love, be loved, protected, and respected. This is his biological design. If he is maltreated by the cruel upbringing he will develop the very strong wish to take revenge. He will be driven to destroy others or himself but only by his history and never by inborn genes. The idea of destructive genes is a modern version of the fairy tale talking about the "devil's children" who need to be chastised to become obedient and nice.

In these dreadful weeks, all of us have experienced as adults what many children go through every single day. They stand helpless, speechless, and trembling before the unpredictable, incomprehensible, brutal, indescribable violence of their parents, who thus avenge themselves unconsciously for the sufferings of their own childhood, sufferings they have never come to terms with because they too have denied their very existence. We only need to recall our feelings on September 11 to have some idea of the intensity of those sufferings. All of us were gripped by horror, dread, and fear. But the connections between terrorism and childhood are still hardly recognized. It is time to take the facts seriously.

The statistics (Olivier Maurel, La Fessée, Editions La Plage 2001) tell us

In early childhood we have learned to suppress the pain, ignore the truth, and deny the feeling of infinite helplessness and humiliation inflicted on small children by power-seeking adults.

that over 90% of the people living in this world are firmly convinced that beating children is for their own good. As almost all of us have endured the humiliation inflicted on us by this mentality, the cruelty of it is something we have learned to consider as normal. But like the Holocaust and other forms of supreme contempt for human life and dignity, these latest terrorist attacks show the effects of the system in which we have all grown up. In early

childhood we have learned to suppress the pain, ignore the truth, and deny the feeling of infinite helplessness and humiliation inflicted on small children by power-seeking adults.

Contrary to former belief, we do not arrive into this world with a brain fully formed. The brain only develops fully in the first few

years of life. The things done to the child in that period leave lifelong traces, good and bad. For our brain contains the complete physical and emotional - though unfortunately not the mental - memory of everything that has happened to us. Today, we can actually see the lesions in the brains of beaten or badly neglected children on the screen of a computer. Numerous articles by brain specialists, notably Bruce D. Perry, have indicated these facts. If the child has no helping witness to turn to, it will learn to glorify what has been inflicted on it: cruelty, sadism, hypocrisy, ignorance. The simple reason is that chil-

dren learn by imitation, not from the well-meant words addressed to them in the later stages of life. The mass murderers, serial killers, Mafia bosses, and dictators who grew up without helping witnesses will inflict, or connive in inflicting, the same terror on whole nations once they have the power to do so. And they will be doing nothing other than putting into practice what they learned by experience when they were small children.

Unfortunately, most of us prefer not to see the connections because accepting this knowledge would force us to feel the pain we had no choice but to suppress so long ago. And so we stay with the strategy we resorted to in childhood, the strategy of denial. But these latest events have shown that the time has come to stop turning a blind eye.

We must grow out of the old traditional system geared to punishment and retaliation, we must refrain from reactions born of blind rage. Naturally, we must not neglect our own protection. But the video cameras at schools will not protect anybody as long as they only pretend but actually refuse to look at the facts and to know where the violence comes from.

According to an inquiry I have ordered in France in 2001, 89% of 100 mothers asked about the age of their children when they "had to hit them" for the first time, responded in the average: 1,8. 11%

could not remember the exact age, but not one of the mothers said that she had never hit her children. These figures inform us with a disturbing clarity where and when children learn the violence they display in schools and later also on the political stage. Many of the big and expensive conferences dealing with violence and its sources would not at all be necessary if we stopped denying this truth. The facts are available to us if only we decide to look at them.

We must go in active search of different forms of communication from the ones imprinted on us in childhood, forms based on respect rather than the desire to inflict new humiliation by punishment. People who grew up in families where punishment-enforced totalitarianism reigned know only the language of war, and they will impose this language on others

forcing them to defend themselves however they can. But this story is endless. As we know, we are easily able to exterminate thousands of people, indeed whole nations, but we cannot exterminate the disastrous effects of humiliations done to small children by their parents. Those humiliations will return to affect the whole of society as is happening today.

It is high time we awoke from our long sleep. As adults we are no longer threatened by the same danger of destruction that many of us really were confronted with in our infancy and that paralyzed us

We need to spread this new knowledge through every available means—the knowledge that by humiliating small children we inevitably create fertile breeding-grounds of violence.

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with fear and drove us to denial. Only in childhood did we have to deny in order to survive. As adults we can learn not to ignore the knowledge stored in our bodies so that we can become able to grasp and genuinely understand the true motives behind our acts. And true knowledge of our own histories can free us from the urge to revert to futile strategies and remain emotionally blind. Today, we have the chance to look around, to learn from experience, and to seek new, creative solutions for settling conflicts. Even if we have never learned to trust respectful communication, it is never too late to overcome that deficiency and to free ourselves from self-deception.

Today, the technical means of venting hatred, discharging long-ago accumulated, bottled-up rage, and directing it at innocent people continues to grow very fast. Many of these techniques for destruction are available to power-crazed dictators who are driven to take vengeance on whole nations for the humiliation inflicted on them in early childhood. To protect the world we definitely need a world-wide

prohibition against hitting, hurting and other acts of cruelty against children by parents and others who have power over them. Children absolutely must be protected while their brains are developing, malleable and so easily damaged. We need to gather the courage to look deeply within ourselves and confront the wellsprings of horror. We need to spread this new knowledge through every available means—the knowledge that by humiliating small children we inevitably create fertile breeding-grounds of violence.

A new law, protecting toddlers from domestic violence, like the one which largely decreased criminality in Sweden, will doubtlessly bring about essential changes in society, if not immediately, then surely in 20 years when the never-beaten children will become adults and will not be interested in provoking wars. ☺

This article was first seen on Jordan Riak's superb Web Site: "Project NoSpank" at www.nospank.org Jordan Riak is the Executive Director of Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (PTAVE), P.O. Box 1033, Alamo CA 94507-7033, Tel.: 925-831-1661; FAX: 925-838-8914.

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Small Bundles of Convenience

Carole Ulanowsky

Increasingly...children are slotted into arrangements
put together for adults.

Increasingly, from careers to cross-channel ferries, children are slotted into arrangements put together for adults. We are a product-orientated society, and now, as with meals and holidays, we have packages of pregnancy and packages of care alongside the other product choices of our lives. Thus we are in danger of making commodities of our children too. This has much to do with parents' role perceptions. It was in the 1970s when the notion of parenthood as a life-defining activity was challenged and mothers in particular were reminded that, even as parents, they were persons too. Now, when less of women's time is spent in the home, and men have not made up the deficit, many babies and preschool children are left in the care of paid others.

What self-perceptions will some of them have if, for as long as they can remember, they have been slotted into their parents' career preferences? Thirty years ago, mothers, with an eye to the future, focused on their children's needs — as Plato would have it, to be "part of posterity" — now it seems that posterity must take care of itself as parents' lifestyle choices root them firmly in the now. We accept, without question, adults' rights and choices to become parents when the time and commitment to care for children will

not be forthcoming.

In today's individualistic society, the old commitments to shared enterprise, and the deferment of personal needs and preferences are not much in evidence; for now, service within the home is likely to be interpreted as servility. How is the younger generation to learn to deal with the pressures for instant gratification if parents do not show them by example? Surely it is in the home where children first witness the moral exchange.

Unskilled and unemployed young mothers have been given a hard time of late. While it is reasonable to argue that parenthood should be an option when people can afford it, it is also the case that these young women are choosing to be parents as primary role. And the spotlight on their deprived and disaffected youngsters masks a need to look elsewhere, at the middle-classes, at professionals as parents and at the children they have. The most talented and well-endowed members of society are failing to commit themselves to caring for their own children in their most critically formative years.

Today's young middle-class mum understands the penalties for taking time out from work. She knows that scant recognition will be paid to experience achieved unpaid, at home, managing children. With

Reprinted from *THE TIMES HIGHER*, February 17 1995. Carole Ulanowsky is regional education and training manager for the East Midlands region of the Open University. Special thanks to Saskia Barker for drawing this article to the attention of the editor.

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some justification, she feels that women have waited too long for change to catch up with their needs, so, no longer prepared to lose out while her thirty something partner makes the grade, she is hanging in there for a part of the action, even when the babies do come along. Put simply, many women have rejected the option of taking more time off to care for children than the minimum pregnancy leave allows. Not to do so can mean that when eventually a woman does return to the workplace, an uncertain climb up the career path will face her and maybe just at that time when teenagers, elderly parents and the menopause are all in the frame. Her frustration will be complete if she is then required to work under some incompetent, grey-suited male who has reached the top just by being there, while she has been homebound, juggling the needs of her youngsters, a partner, and the local playgroup at the same time as achieving her Open University degree.

How we define ourselves depends a good deal on what we spend the larger part of our time doing: role definition depends a good deal on time definition. The development of parenting skills requires time and energy over and above the de-

mands of career. Confident parenting will help to nurture contented and confident children. And the knowledge accrued in these early years will stand parents in good stead when they are required to cope with their children in the tricky teenage period, for it is certain that no childminder, however well paid, will be interested in fulfilling this task.

"But how do they know where to come? How do they know the best place?" asked the interviewer on a recent radio broadcast watching a flight of swans settling on the Solway Estuary. "Their parents show them," replied the naturalist. "They train them in the early years and the young never forget." So many parents in western society appear to operate on a belief that home is an unattractive place to be and caring for their babies is an unattractive thing to do. Women have spoken out and opted out and, in the absence of men making up the deficit they have found "packages of care and nurture" for their children.

Surely some sanity is needed. Perhaps a traveller on the Clapham omnibus or the swans on the Solway might tell these parents that the greatest gift they can give to their children is themselves. ☺

The most talented and well-endowed members of society are failing to commit themselves to caring for their own children in their most critically formative years.

Creativity, Women and Parenting

Jenny M. Cullen

I began to feel that a Ph.D. might not be as important as a well launched child. Society of course, does not, at the moment agree with me ... Even more unfashionable I began to feel that while not all men have the opportunity of doing something of great importance, almost all women who become mothers and do a halfway reasonable job of looking after their children do.

Anne Manne, *A reflection upon re-entering the world.*
Quadrant Magazine, Australia, June 1995.

For most of the 20th Century concepts of intelligence have been dominated by the attributes which psychologists chose to identify and measure in tests. However this view ignored the very different and crucial qualities involved in interpersonal intelligence (Gardner 1983) or emotional intelligence (Coleman 1994). The insight and skills required for managing emotions and relationships are increasingly valued in the workplace. Such interpersonal intelligence is important in parenting and can be actively developed by the parenting experience.

The dormant creativity of many adults is awakened through imaginative interaction with their children. Many characteristics typical of creative people are readily evoked by parenting - for example humour, playfulness, curiosity, flexibility, high energy level, high intrinsic motivation, sensitivity, spontaneity, tolerance of incongruity and experiencing deep emotion. Life with young children provides continuous opportunities for identifying problems and solving them creatively. Since young children are often unable to indicate their purposes or problems clearly, the parent's challenge is often to clarify the problems experienced by the child and then negotiate solutions.

The value of love and dedication in parenting are universally recognized. If we also placed a high value on the interpersonal intelligence and creativity involved in effective parenting, the social status accorded to this role would rise. At present men and women who use their interpersonal skills in fields such as politics or the "people professions" are applauded. Yet those who use such skills in the private world of parenting are so lacking in status that they may wonder how to explain this period of their lives in their CV's.

Parenting is currently in a state of flux in which, more than ever before, each individual chooses whether to become a parent, and then what sort of parent to become. It is a special opportunity for personal development where you can become a creative artist, choreographing your own dance in partnership with your child. ☺

As printed in Cook, P.S. (1997). *Early Child Care — Infants and Nations at Risk*. Abstracted from Jenny M. Cullen (1994) *Creativity, Women and Parenting*, unpublished manuscript. PO Box 88, Church Point, NSW, Australia 2105.

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Can Yuppies Bear Children?

Paul Sullivan

It turns out I'm dealing with my two kids the way I've dealt with everything else in my life — me first, justifications and rationalizations to follow.

As the baby boom generation trudges along its inexorable path to the grave, everything it does is good copy. The reason is simple: baby boomers are the largest single demographic phenomenon in the world today, and they're endlessly fascinated by themselves.

So they reach adolescence, and society gets a bad case of acne; the Youth Culture of the 60's. They reach adulthood, find out they have to work for a living, and Yippie turns to Yuppie.

Now they've all discovered breeding, and the shock waves are being felt from the maternity wards to the psychiatrist's couch. The psychiatrists' couches are busy because modern baby boomers are having a tough time throwing themselves into a successful career and family with equal measures of customary gusto.

When baby boomers have babies themselves, they discover that children, unlike jogging, racquetball, and other trivial pursuits, aren't as easily abandoned as a pair of \$60 running shoes.

In fact, children require a lifetime of commitment, and, unlike most other baby-boom pursuits, return few immediate tangible rewards. Now and then, children stimulate in their jaded parents the recognition that life itself is gratifying enough. But we're all so busy running ahead that we rarely have time for such vague, exis-

tential stuff.

As a card-carrying baby boomer, it turns out I'm dealing with my two kids the way I've dealt with everything else in my life — me first, justifications and rationalizations to follow. And so they will.

The Busy Dad-Syndrome

First, let me say there is nothing new about the conflict between career and kids. I suspect that every guy reading this remembers a dad who wasn't around as often as he should have been. We heard he was pulling down late duty at the office, or he had to go to a meeting, or to some exotic, faraway place like Toronto. Dad was a busy guy. He worked all the time.

It wasn't until we got old enough to be dads ourselves, after our mothers got a snootful of screwdrivers at some family function, that we learned Dad's absences often had as much to do with his propensity for sport as for work. But when we were six, it was enough to know that dads were rare and precious, and to be coveted.

Of course, when he was around, Dad was not always worth the wait. How many of us had dads who would drop the 5:15 martini for a session of catch or electric train? How many had dads who would give us a swell new game for Christmas: Parcheesi or Steeplechase, and then offer

Paul Sullivan is a Winnipeg-based television producer. Reprinted with permission from Influence Magazine. Actually, re-reprinted from Empathic Parenting Winter 1986, so it's a little dated, but...



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to play it with us "someday", even though we would stand there, clutching our wonderful new thing, all tousled hair and young boy smell, eyes beseeching a boon from the whimsical god of paternity?

Mom, of course, was around all the time. That was before the era of female emancipation. But Mom was in the same boat as us. She had to haggle for time. And when the old boy got home, he would just as soon go golfing with the boys, and he was no more likely to take her along than us.

He was slippery, the old man. And the broken promises grew like piles of oily rags in the basements of our minds. "Next weekend" became his two favourite words. But no matter how tortured or dejected we became, we were never disillusioned. We kept coming back for more. Because we knew that those 11 minutes a week when we were actually, gloriously, the sole thing on his mind (not counting the times we were in trouble, which came to more than 11 minutes) were the best 11 minutes in the whole universe.

So I made a vow. When I got to be a dad, I'd have a lot more than 11 minutes a week for my very best boy. And now that I am a dad, I've kept it. My kids get as many as 13 minutes. Each.

The six-year old boy with the tousled hair and the boy smell, standing there with

the Parcheesi game, looks enough like me to remind me of that poignant ache. He's bad enough. But complicating the situation is a four-year old girl who has the habit of wrapping her skinny little arms around her dad and pleading for him to stay home from work for the morning.

There's something terribly wrong about the way we live that we even have to make the choice. But we make it every day, and willingly, sometimes eagerly, abandon our children to the nursery school, the day care, the baby-sitter, and finally, to themselves.

Do We Dislike Kids?

As Germaine Greer says in her newest polemic, *Sex and Destiny*, we in the West simply do not like kids. The birthrate is falling, and the kids we do have are born into a hostile world to the idea that children are an asset, a blessing, fun to have around. We men have always

known what to do when asked to choose between children and ourselves; now women, as they stride purposefully into the marketplace, power-dressed to the nines, are beginning to find that self-realization, North American style, doesn't mix with nurturing a family.

"The individuals whom we have painstakingly inducted into child-free society and established there, with a lifestyle centred entirely upon achievement and

We men have always known what to do when asked to choose between children and ourselves; now women, as they stride purposefully into the marketplace, power-dressed to the nines, are beginning to find that self-realization, North American style, doesn't mix with nurturing a family.

...a life-style centred entirely upon achievement and self-gratification...

self-gratification, have now to disrupt the pattern," says Germaine about the mere decision to have a child. "The sacrifice is enough, and they are to expect no reward or recompense. If the management of child-bearing in our society had actually been intended to maximize stress, it could have hardly succeeded better. The child bearers embark upon their struggle alone; the rest of us wash our hands of them."

Greer, for all her stridency, is not telling us anything we haven't seen with our own eyes, but *Sex and Destiny* puts the whole dirty secret out for public view. She contrasts our child-hostile world to many places on earth where kids are still thought of as the strength of the family, not bloody inconveniences. Today in Canada, children are confined to McDonald's, Saturday-afternoon matinees, amusement parks, and schools. Before we had our children, I hadn't had a conversation with a kid since I was one. Occasionally, I'd run into one in the supermarket or on the street, but wherever I went, the environment had been carefully scrubbed of kids. That's okay until you have children; but when you have time, you descend into the subculture and become lost along with them.

I don't want this to read as nothing but a lament. Because one of the things you discover is that the subculture is as much fun as it was when you were a kid, I get to go to summer fairs and skating rinks, see all the Walt Disney movies over again, and watch *Sesame Street*, which they didn't have when I was a kid. *Sesame Street* alone makes being a kid worth it.

Now and then I get a sneaky feeling that at this level, life is more meaningful

and fun than it is at the level of busy executive and concerned citizen. But it's a feeling that strikes only in the depths of the weekend, while I'm lounging on the river bank with my best boy after a bike ride and a soda. By Sunday afternoon, the adrenalin begins to pump in anticipation of tomorrow and the titanic struggle to get ahead, and the poor little things are reduced to tiny shadows of annoyance, inconsequential things that must be put to bed.

Management vs. Kids

There is no place more incompatible with children than one's place of work, especially if you see advancement as *Something You'd Like to Go For*. Those dewy-eyed, cowed devotees to their families must rush home every day at precisely 5 p.m. leaving the store to those of us who are prepared to toll on into the night for the greater glory of the firm and ourselves. It doesn't matter what the business, the cardinal rule is invariably the same. You must be prepared to put your job before God, Queen, Country, and above all, family.

Family is viewed by management, no matter how enlightened, as a personality flaw. Management is only reflecting the Germaine Greer contention that the whole of society views breeding as something faintly Third-World and unhygienic; and unless you're willing to go along ... you're dogmeat career-wise. Look at Dustin Hoffman in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. To hang on to one snotty-nosed five-year old, he had to abandon his job as a big time art director at a major New York agency, and

go "back to the board" at another, smaller concern, where it was tacitly understood that he would remain until he could get over this obsession with his kid.

The poor sap taught to achieve since he was a little kid is faced with the prospect of turning his back on everything he loves to attain the respect of his peers, job satisfaction, and a big enough salary to keep his family in the manner to which he thinks they are accustomed.

He looks at the inside postal workers of the world with disdain and a little pity. He has vice-presidents to conquer, and nothing, nobody, is going to stand in the way. Now and then, he feels a little guilty, but that's a guilt that can be easily as-

suaged by the occasional ball game or bedtime story.

So far, this could be Gary Cooper's dilemma in *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit*. But there are a few twists and turns that bring this story into the 1980's, For instance, the emancipation of women.

At least, that's what it's called. Although virtually any man can testify that working your ass off for 50 years is hardly emancipation. But we hardly have a right to speak on the matter. Women have to cross the road to get to the other side, so they're abandoning the nest in unprecedented numbers in pursuit of the same kinds of objectives I referred to above.

Female emancipation sets off a chain



**In this respect, Yuppie is just a new word for fool.
Because the Yuppie will find out that children cannot
be solved like other consumer dilemmas.**

of events. Men can no longer depend on free home care for their children, and as we're not about to pick up the slack, we grumble, dig a little deeper, and pay professionals to look after our children, although many of them are professionals only in that they take money. No one, at this point, is really sure what a childcare professional is. They're busy finding out, and they're finding out on our kids.

Mashed Food and Duckies

Equally catastrophic is what it does to the relationship. For one thing, more and more wives are inclined to put off child rearing until their careers are well underway. Which means that you're likely to be too old to be a young father, and she's even less capable of coping with the lost sleep, the stretch marks, and the descent into the subculture. She and her sisters have fought the good fight for more than 100 years, only to be stuck back in a world littered with baby faeces, mashed food and duckies.

If the 20-year old male is disinclined to cope with this stuff, the 30 and 35-year old males are even less inclined. We're right in the middle of the race for vice-president, and while we'll go to the Lamaze classes and attend the blessed event, there's no way we're going to take on the added burden of looking after the fruit of our loins.

This can lead to disenchantment on the part of the wife.

And, although you hate to say it, wives lose some of their allure when they get pregnant. Not necessarily because they

walk and look like plastic inflatable penguins, but because they've become somebody's mother, somebody else's mother.

It's a phenomenon that psychologists have already well documented. Men are more likely to fool around after their first child is born than at any time other than their mid-life crisis. Your partner and lover turns into a baby maintenance specialist, and all that stuff she used to tolerate - working late at the office, getting up early to run, golfing on the weekends - that's over now, as you're expected to at least dabble in the arts of diaper changing, feeding, and kootchie-kooing.

It's the kind of behaviour that can turn a guy right off, and more than one formerly faithful husband goes looking for that pre-infant allure someplace else, leaving mom at home with the apple of their eye. But who do they think we are anyway? It's us or them.

I thought I might be able to get through this without mentioning the word "yuppie" once. But I find that here is a perfect place for it.

The Yuppie couple believes the secret to life is buying quality. Not ordinary quality, but exotic quality. Yuppies have children the same way they have cars, the smart way.

In this respect, Yuppie is just a new word for fool. Because the Yuppie will find out that children cannot be solved like other consumer dilemmas. It doesn't matter how many books you read, or how much money you have, or what kind of baby car seat you buy, or what Montessori school you send them to, children are not like all the other commodities they encoun-

ter. Children, unlike contentment, cannot be bought. Children are the Yuppie Achilles heel. They disturb the unruffled calm. They shatter the illusion of competency. Children are the worm of guilt in the apple of complacency.

Not that they get any thanks for it. Yuppie children are certainly better dressed than the offspring of ordinary schmos. They look healthier. They know how to read when they're four. They play with creative, non-sexist, attention-grabbing toys. But they're not any more loved or respected. Abandoned by both Mommy and Daddy, the average Canadian kid is becoming more and more a creature of TV, of the toys he plays with, his little pals, and society at large. They're not Our kids any more, they're theirs. When we have them, which is rare in itself, we let them slip away.

I can see the signs, day after day. My boy will sit with the only adult friend he has who will talk to him for hours - his Speak and Spell - learning to spell frantically so the machine will tell him nice things such as: You are Correct. Perfect Score.

My daughter would like to know just about everything, and is not above asking all the questions, all day long. How are teddy bears made? How do you make windows? Who is the Sandman? I don't have time for these questions, so I buy her another Barbie Doll, even though I swore I'd never get one of those things. After I buy her off, it's the feeling of complacency that wells up inside like flatulence that disturbs me the most.

Who do I blame? Myself? Poor vessel that I am, I'm not capable of making such bold choices in isolation from my peers. The fundamentalists blame feminism for the breakdown of the family, but as Germaine acidly points out, no room was made for children long before the feminists got into the act. Feminism, like Yuppiedom, is just another inappropriate response to the puzzle of misery in the midst of plenty.

I suppose I could blame Rene Descartes, who's been held responsible for the illusion that we are rational beings the moment he uttered the phrase, "I think, therefore I am." Poor Rene.

I usually end up blaming my kids. For being too noisy, for getting up and going to bed at the wrong times. For wanting me to be with them. For wanting me to love them at least as much as I love myself. For being alive.

At least I count myself more fortunate than those sad mortals who are still trying to decide if children fit into their life-style. The answer is, of course not, dummy. But have them anyway. They're our last link, to Mother Earth. If you don't have them, the state will have to go into the business of having kids. As the state does most everything for us now, child-bearing is a natural extension. People spawned in stainless-steel wombs are not likely to get involved in hand-wringing about anything.

Oh Brave New World, indeed. ☹

People spawned in stainless-steel wombs are not likely to get involved in hand-wringing about anything.

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The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

The CSPCC is working to change those things in Canadian society that are making it difficult for parents to give their children the care they need to grow into healthy, confident, non-violent, loving adults.

In general we are working for:

- ◆ a shift from arbitrary male dominance to no-one's arbitrary dominance
- ◆ a shift from the essential beliefs of our society's consumer religion -- envy, selfishness and greed -- to trust, empathy and affection in a community-centred, sustainable society
- ◆ a shift from violence and sexism as the warp and woof of entertainment
- ◆ a shift from treating children as sinful or stupid to empathizing with them and fulfilling their expanding and particular needs

In particular we are working to:

- ◆ raise the status of parenting
- ◆ implement universal parenting education from kindergarten to grade eight
- ◆ encourage parents to make their children's emotional needs their highest priority during the critical first three years
- ◆ facilitate a positive birthing experience for every father, mother and baby
- ◆ promote extended breastfeeding with child-led weaning
- ◆ make it easier for parents to meet the emotional needs of each child by encouraging a minimum three year spacing between siblings
- ◆ increase awareness of the potential long term hazards of separations between children under three and their mothers.



Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

CREDO



WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.