

# Inaloosiak's Dilemma - - -

## Every Woman's Heritage

by Maryann Ayim

Once upon a time there was a woman named Inaloosiak, and she had a husband whose name was Inanggao. One day Inanggao and Inaloosiak had run out of food but instead of going hunting, Inanggao lay in bed and shouted at his wife. "Inaloosiak," he cried, "go out and get some scrub willow twigs and build a fire." Inaloosiak knew that there was no reason to build a fire since they didn't have any food to cook but she was afraid of her husband, so without saying a word she went out to look for scrub willow. Her husband stayed in bed.

Inaloosiak was walking across the tundra, looking for willow twigs, when all of a sudden she looked in the direc-

tion where the wind was blowing and there she saw a big grizzly bear charging at her. Inaloosiak was really scared. She grabbed the bear around the neck and held on and squeezed as hard as she could. The bear struggled and fought and clawed at her but Inaloosiak held on. Just as she thought she couldn't hold on any longer the bear stopped struggling and began to relax. When it was limp, Inaloosiak let go. The grizzly bear was dead. Inaloosiak stared at the bear; she couldn't believe she really had killed it.

She was afraid that the bear would get up again at any moment so she hurried away and started home but she kept looking back. The bear never moved.

Finally she couldn't see it any longer but as she walked she kept thinking about the bear. Had she really killed it? She decided to go back and have another look. When she got back to the place where she fought the bear, sure enough, it was still there. The bear was dead. Then Inaloosiak knew for sure that she had killed it and she rushed home to tell her husband.



Inaloosiak was all out of breath when she got back to camp, but she was so scared of her husband that instead of going into the tent she stood outside and called to him. "Inanggao, I got a grizzly bear. Get up and go and skin it." But Inanggao just rolled over in bed and never said a thing. After a while Inaloosiak called again. "Inanggao, get up, I killed a grizzly bear. Go and skin it." Still her husband said nothing. Finally Inaloosiak called really loudly. "Inanggao get up and go and skin the grizzly bear!"

As soon as she said this she could hear her husband getting up. He was grumbling to himself, "If Inaloosiak is telling me a lie I'm going to break her head open and kill her and eat her." All the time he was getting dressed he kept saying this, "If Inaloosiak is lying to me I'm going to bust her skull in and kill her and eat her." When he finished dressing, he came outside and as he walked with her he said over and over, "If Inaloosiak is telling me a lie I'm going to break her head and eat her."

Inaloosiak was really scared. What if the grizzly bear wasn't there! But when they got near the place she saw that the bear was where she had left it, and she was so happy she stopped walking. "Where is it?" Inanggao demanded. Inaloosiak pointed to the dead bear. Inanggao looked, and sure

enough there was a bear! He couldn't believe his eyes. "Inaloosiak must be a magician!" he cried, and he hurried over to look at the bear.

"Inaloosiak must be a witch," he murmured to himself as he examined the dead bear. And all the time he was skinning the bear he kept saying over and over, "Inaloosiak must be a magician, she must be a witch."(1)

Inaloosiak's plight is a full-fledged logical dilemma(2) insofar as the two conditions necessary to her well-being are mutually exclusive; Inaloosiak must lose either the battle with the bear or the label "good woman," and either of these entails the loss of her well-being. The impossibility of her attaining a state of well-being is thus guaranteed by logic.

I want to suggest in this paper that Inaloosiak's dilemma is characteristic of all women, at least, those in mainstream North American society.(3) As an illustration of this claim and as a starting point for discussion, I will describe a sex stereotype study conducted in 1968 by the Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts.(4) The purpose of this study was to determine (a) whether the criteria of health, maturity and social competence held by practicing clinical psychologists were sexually stereotypic and (b) whether the ideal in terms of health, maturity and social competence was

considered to be masculine rather than feminine by these psychologists.

It is important to emphasize that the concept of mental health is but one drop(5) in the sex roles bucket. Social perceptions of appropriate male and female characteristics are not peculiar to clinical psychologists or to any other particular group of persons defined by class, educational level, age, sex, religion or marital status. The traditional male/female classification is highly pervasive and cuts across all these categories.(6) These perceptions of appropriate female and male characteristics also appear to have remained constant over time; the popular view that present-day society has relaxed the rigid differentiation between male-valued and female-valued features is controverted by research.(7) Not even among college students, where we would perhaps expect it most, have the conventional characterizations of male and female been rejected.(8) Thus the mental health study must not be interpreted as an isolated datum; it exhibits and typifies the over-all pattern of sex role stereotyping in our society.

The authors of the mental health study describe its structure as follows:

A sex-role stereotype questionnaire consisting of 122 bipolar items [e.g., "very aggressive," "not at all aggressive," "very

gentle," "very rough"] was given to actively functioning clinicians with one of three sets of instructions: To describe a healthy, mature, socially competent (a) adult, sex unspecified, (b) a man, or (c) a woman.(9)

Of these 122 items, 38 were clearly used by the lay public in a sexually stereotypic way, i.e., the public attributed one pole of these characteristics to females and the other to males. The authors established this point via a separate study(10) in which a similar questionnaire was given to college students who were asked to identify male and female traits on the list. The authors report that there was 70 per cent or better agreement among the students as to whether the sexually stereotypic descriptions were appropriate for males or females.(11)

The following two results issued from this study: (a) The description of the healthy, mature, socially competent man and woman paralleled the male and female stereotypes, respectively, as seen by laypeople; (b) The description of the healthy, mature, socially competent adult was both very similar to the description of the healthy, mature, socially competent man and at the same time very dissimilar to that of the healthy, mature, socially competent woman. The authors conclude that the characteristics associated with the male stereotype have greater

social value in that they approach much closer to the psychologists' version of the socially competent adult than do the characteristics associated with the female stereotype. This conclusion will be referred to as "the strong thesis" hereafter. An important assumption in the strong thesis is that the description of the healthy, mature, socially competent adult (no sex specified) which emerged indicated an assessment of ideals in health, maturity and social competence, for all people, regardless of sex. The implications of this strong thesis for the plight of women are devastating. If this strong thesis were correct, a socially competent woman would be a socially incompetent adult and, furthermore, her incompetence as an adult would vary directly with her competence as a woman. The force of the dilemma is that her well-being is precluded in either case; it is impossible for her to avoid both the dumb broad and the evil witch syndrome.

If this strong thesis were true it would not be possible for a mature adult to be a mature woman. Notice that on the strong thesis there is no analogous dilemma for men. This obviously follows from the extreme similarity in the description of the man and that of the adult.

It is possible, however, to attack the assumption made by the strong thesis--namely that the description

of the healthy, mature, socially competent adult emerging from this study is an ideal for both the male and female sex. Such an objector might argue that the similarity of the socially competent male and the socially competent adult in the eyes of the psychologist is a function of the term "adult" carrying with it the masculine set(12) in the same way that the terms "doctor," "mechanic," "principal," "coordinator," and "God" all suggest the notion of a male. If this were true, then the two profiles (man and adult) would naturally be similar, since the psychologists asked to draw the adult profile would, in fact, be drawing that of the man. It could then follow that psychologists as well as the general public operate with no general standard of social competence without regard to sex; rather they operate with two distinct standards of social competence, one for the adult man and one for the adult woman. This claim will be referred to as "the weak thesis" hereafter.

On the weak thesis the notion of a socially competent woman no longer seems to be fraught with logical difficulties. Women and men seem to become equally likely candidates for the socially competent adult, attainable in both cases by acquiring the respective set of suitable characteristics. I wish to urge that the dilemma has not in fact disappeared,

that it has merely "submerged" to entrap women at another level.

One implication of strictly dichotomizing between socially competent men and women is that sex role stereotyping can now be defended as a means to producing a maximum of socially competent adults. Universities, professional schools and trades would be justified in refusing admission to females on the grounds that such skills are not in keeping with the description of the socially competent woman sanctioned by both professional psychologists and laypeople, namely, "not at all aggressive," (13) "not at all independent," "very emotional," "very subjective," dislikes math and science very much," "very excitable in a minor crisis," "not at all competitive," "very illogical," "almost never acts as a leader," "not at all ambitious," to mention only a few "feminine" character traits. The socially competent woman is one who obeys her husband but decidedly refrains from strangling grizzly bears. Nor would the socially competent woman be capable of self-determination in Christine Garside's sense of one who "actively affirm(s) a life goal for oneself and . . . actively engage(s) in achieving that goal." (14) Since people incapable of affirming and pursuing their own goals could not operate as moral agents in the ordinary sense of the word, women would be

automatically precluded from the category of moral persons.

Such a restrictive notion of social competence entails correspondingly restrictive avenues to excellence for women. I suggest that only three types of role are consistent with this confining view of the socially competent woman, that these roles permeate the lifestyles of mainstream North American women and that each of the roles is self-defeating in a peculiar way. The three roles are wife, mother and what I call, for lack of a better term, bait. Ideally, a healthy, mature, socially competent woman plays all three roles simultaneously. The mother role is particularly problematic in this respect as we shall see later.

Of the three available roles the bait role is the most clearly and insidiously self-defeating. A woman who plays the bait role competently is sexually alluring, one to whom men are prone to make advances chiefly by virtue of her appearance or physical decorativeness. What stultifies this role is that the woman who plays it competently must not welcome, actively solicit or reciprocate these advances in any way. She must not want the very behaviour which her role performance elicits from males. The price of welcoming, actively soliciting and reciprocating is to earn the label "slut" or

"whore," and we all know that sluts and whores are not generally admitted to the category of healthy, mature, socially competent women.(15) Expressed by Simone de Beauvoir, "If a woman offers herself too boldly, the man departs, for he is intent on conquering. Woman, therefore, can take only when she makes herself prey: she must become a passive thing, a promise of submission."(16) It is interesting that the bait role, while stultifying to females, is not necessarily gratifying to males either. For this role is consistent, to quote a vulgar expression, with the refusal to dole out any cream till the cow has been bought and paid for. In other words, playing the bait role competently may be a viable means of easing one's way into the two other female roles. This is not to claim, however, that the bait role ends at the altar. A host of women's magazines whose authors advise readers on how to dress and act seductively "even after twenty years of marriage" quickly end any inclination to believe that the bait role is only a means to the more substantial roles of wife and mother.

The competent wife works towards producing an environment most conducive to autonomy and freedom for her husband. If his food is prepared, his clothes laundered, his house cleaned and his friends entertained for him, a man can devote his time to determining and actualizing his own goals. The

attainment of these goals, however, puts him in a position of power where he may well oppress less powerful people, particularly women who are without power themselves precisely because they have directed all of their own energies towards supporting their men. In other words, in mothering, nurturing, educating(17) and supporting their men, women make it possible for these same men to attain enviable career positions from which they can actively and effectively discriminate against women.

It is important to notice that the competent wife role does not of necessity lead to oppression on an individual level. That is, there may be women who play the role well and are fairly recompensed for this by their husbands. Notice, though, that such compensation is largely not self-determined; it depends more on the goodwill of the person receiving the benefits of the wife's labours than it does on the efforts of the wife herself. Thus, the sacrifice of one's own means to independence in support of someone else at least leaves one open to (and with few defences against) the possibility of inadequate returns for investment.

Supporting others in their quest for autonomy and freedom of choice is not a bad thing provided that such support does not preclude one's own autonomy and freedom of choice. If the marriage relationship promoted a

mutual support system, such support would in fact be a very good thing. The problem is that the traditional husband-wife relationship actually discourages such reciprocity, leaving the wife ultimately vulnerable to injustice. Margaret Atwood metaphorically captured the nature of this vulnerability when she compared a woman to a cake(18)--the better each is the more quickly and thoroughly it will be devoured.

If the bait role may lead to the wife role, the wife role may equally lead to the mother role. Unlike the bait and wife roles, the mother role is not, taken alone, self-defeating. No one would dispute that the care and energy which the nurturant parent devotes to infants and young children is necessary to the very survival of that child, not to mention its physical, mental and emotional development. Given this, it is unreasonable to deny the importance of the work done by this parent. One does wonder, however, why its importance is not recognized by our social institutions. There are no standard educational programs ministering to it, no monetary compensation (short of family allowance, which is not even minimum wage) associated with it and no special recognition or status available for those who achieve excellence in it.(19) A serious difficulty of the role springs from its traditional conjunction with the wife role. For the qualities required of a

socially competent mother tend to be undermined by the wife role. How can a woman be for her children a model of a responsible, independent, moral human being when she has traded in her autonomy on a marriage license? One might argue, at least on these grounds, that the mother role would be much more viable for and in the interests of women and children if it were segregated from the wife role.

A second but less serious difficulty springs from its conjunction with the bait role.(20) A woman's bait qualifications tend to vary inversely with the number of children she has borne. My claim that this difficulty is less serious is based on the view that the bait role is insidiously self-defeating and hence ought not to be pursued anyway. This will probably not diminish the agony of a woman who has been socialized to the belief that a large part of her identity, worth and attractiveness is tied to her ability to appear provocative to men and who sees that bearing children has robbed her of that ability. In other words, although it is not a serious theoretical difficulty it may well be a very serious consideration for very large numbers of women.

A yet further difficulty with the mother role, to quote Greta Nemiroff, is that it "is a role which atrophies when done best,"(21) in the sense that the best mother is the one who encourages and assists

her children to become independent of her. The mother who does the best job does herself out of a job soonest. A related problem is that a woman may, not untypically, find her role as a mother completed when she herself is 30 to 45 years old. She now has anywhere from 15 to 30 years to invest in the marketplace and a complete dearth of skill, training or professional background with which to compete in that marketplace. So even though this particular role may be defensible, its termination is very likely to mark a period of trauma in the life of a woman in that it leaves her poorly equipped to "get on with" other things.

To summarize, if a woman can be healthy, mature and socially competent in only the female sense and a man in only the male sense, then the price of social competence is much higher and the rewards much more meagre for a woman than for a man. Consistent with this restrictive female sense of social competence are only three routes, all of which are problematic, the first beyond repair, the second almost so, but the third offering some hope if it were not required to complement the first and second.

In brief, then, selecting either the strong or weak hypothesis discussed

above as a basis for how things ought to be only introduces a new level of the dilemma--on the one hand it is not logically possible for a socially competent woman to be a socially competent adult; on the other hand, social competence is logically possible, but is of an order which precludes moral autonomy(22) for example. Both alternatives are destructive and oppressive as far as woman are concerned.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the options for extrication from this dilemma may themselves be dilemmatic. Radical feminists on the one hand are saying that women ought not to be confined and smothered by the oppressive structure of capitalist society and its institutions of marriage and the nuclear family.(23) Disciples of the "fascinating womanhood"(24) movement on the other hand, advise us to relish our oppression, to make a virtue of it. One wonders if this dilemma is soluble. Is there an escape between the horns, a middle way between no nuclear family at all and nuclear families which are built from the slavish servitude of women? If there is a middle way, we had better set to work to make it viable, self-respecting, and available to our Inaloosiaks. We can ill afford to enslave or to exile those who have already done battle with the grizzly bear.

NOTES

1. Melanie Anatiak, "Inaloosiak and the Grizzly Bear," trans. Theresa Qauqujuk (The Woman's Kit; Toronto: O.I.S.E., 1972).

2. Following Lionel Ruby's account, the Inaloosiak case would be an example of a simple (as opposed to complex) dilemma. The form of a simple dilemma is this:

p implies r  
q implies r  
either p or q

Therefore r

Lionel Ruby, Logic: An Introduction (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1960), p. 294.

Inaloosiak's situation might appear on the surface to be logically paradoxical in so far as her winning implies losing and losing implies winning. There is a certain similarity with the paradox of the liar, for example, in which the truth of a given statement implies its falsehood, and its falsehood implies its truth. A closer analysis, however, reveals a discrepancy in this description of Inaloosiak's situation. While her winning implies losing, that which is lost is different from that which is won; i.e., her winning the fight with the grizzly bear implies losing the status of "good woman" rather than losing the fight with the grizzly bear. It is this second consequent which would be required by a strict logical paradox.

For a discussion of the paradox of the liar, see Irving M. Copi, Symbolic Logic, Second ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 190.

3. I suspect that the dilemma is really much broader, however, and true of women in just about every culture in the world today.
4. The results of this study are published in Inge K. Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 34 (No. 1, 1970), pp. 1-7.
5. This is by no means to deny the importance of the claim that mental health standards tend to be sexually stereotypic. Given the power of clinical psychologists to commit people to mental institutions, the prospect of stereotyped standards is more than a little frightening.
6. Inge K. Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," Journal of Social Issues, 28 (No. 2, 1972), pp. 64-65.
7. Ibid., p. 64.
8. Ibid., p. 69.
9. Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health," p. 1.
10. P. Rosenkrantz et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Self-Concepts in College Students," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 32 (No. 3, 1968), pp. 287-295.
11. Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health," p. 2.
12. This idea was suggested to me by a colleague, Dr. Jim Sanders.
13. These character traits were all included among those specifically attributable to women with a 70% or higher agreement in the Worcester Hospital study. See Broverman et al., "Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health," p. 3.
14. Christine Garside, "Woman and Persons," Mother Was Not a Person, ed. M. Andersen (Montreal: Black Rose Books Ltd., 1972), p. 192.
15. The woman who best measures up to the standards associated with the female sex role is competent bait in exactly the sense described above. According to Jerome Kagan, important among the female sex role behaviour patterns are both "elicit (ing) sexual arousal in a male" and at the same time inhibiting in herself any "overt signs of sexual desire." Jerome Kagan, "Acquisition and Significance of Sex Typing and Sex Role Identity," Review of Child Development Research, ed. Martin Hoffman and Lois Hoffman Vol. 1 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), pp. 142, 141.

16. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 689.
17. Women, remember, constitute the vast majority of educators in the elementary schools.
18. Margaret Atwood, The Edible Woman (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).
19. This is not to deny that there is Mother's Day, but is to deny that such social niceties should be an alternative to social justice.
20. Greta Nemiroff, "Women and Education," McGill Journal of Education, X (Spring, 1975), p. 9.
21. Kagan, pp. 151-152.
22. Autonomy and free choice are pre-conditions of morality; insofar as the female stereotype rules these out, the female role cannot be said to be morally good. The socialization process undergone by females in this society makes the possibility of not "choosing" stereotypic roles very slim. It is thus inappropriate to attach moral goodness to the self-sacrifice and self-effacement that characterize the typical female roles, given that these have not been engaged in as a matter of choice.
23. See, for example, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey (New York: Links Books, 1974).
24. E.g., the "total woman" philosophy of Marable Morgan, in Anne Lewis, "Are You a 'Total Woman'?" Lady's Circle (July, 1976), p. 22.

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