
Youth Truth



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Young Minds to Heal

Lisa Freeman

As the old expression goes: when you've got a hammer, everything looks like a nail. People don't want their special training and problem-solving abilities to go to waste; they want to believe that they can be useful and helpful in any situation.

To some psychologists, any thought or behavior can be interpreted as abnormal, in need of the treatment they can provide. To some crisis counselors, every tragedy cries out for their trained intervention.

The phenomenon of crisis counselors appearing in disaster-stricken communities was noticed years before September 11, 2001, even in the professional literature. Psychologist Martin Deahl, in an article a year earlier, pointed out that employers "faced with the threat of litigation" try to protect themselves by making counselors available, but warns that the "single, stand-alone intervention ... popular with employers anxious to discharge their 'duty of care' as inexpensively as possible" is of questionable value in aiding recovery from stressful or traumatic experiences.¹ Schools with tight budgets often utilize these same techniques.

Deahl also worried that the "training, competence and qualifications" of the counselors can be "highly variable," but noted that they "have powerful vested interests" in public acceptance of their methods. "Some of these groups," he goes on, "have uncritically promoted ... techniques in order to establish a role for themselves following traumatic events."

Certification as a "School Specialist" in crisis intervention can be obtained by attending a program lasting six days.²

After the destruction of the World Trade Center, New York City was reportedly invaded by more than 9000 crisis counselors "advocating intervention for any person even remotely connected to the tragedy."³ Nevertheless, a survey showed that nearly 10% of Manhattan residents—as many as 20% of those who lived closest to the World Trade Center—were experiencing *debilitating* symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress two months after the event.⁴ (Such symptoms are expected in the first month following a disaster). The study, however, did not ask respondents if they had received any counseling, or what kind.

The few controlled scientific studies that compare the most popular therapy, the immediate, single-session therapy called *psychological debriefing*, with other therapies—or no therapy at all—have found the debriefing technique ineffective in helping people cope. Sometimes it can actually hurt. Some long-term follow-ups found persistence of severe symptoms more prevalent in victims who *received* debriefing therapy than in those who got no treatment at all.^{6,7}

To understand why, we must understand something about the reactions of people to disaster and loss. Some people in the community will experience no ill effects;

although some people may see this as a sign of callousness, this is normal and expected. The effects of psychological trauma are worst in those whose lives were personally affected, who lost homes or workplaces, who were injured or lost loved ones. Symptoms may also be felt by people reminded by the event of their own past traumas, or others not directly affected by the tragedy. No one should expect to feel or react like anyone else.

Immediately following a trauma, victims often experience recurrent, vivid recollections or "replays" of the moments they found most distressing during the event. These are called "intrusive thoughts" since they seem to show up "uninvited" and interfere with ordinary activities. Sleeplessness, nightmares, memory loss, and aggression are also common. On the other hand, victims may also experience a feeling of detachment called "emotional numbness," losing interest in and withdrawing from people and activities they previously cared about and enjoyed. In this state, a person is likely to believe that his or her life has been forever ruined.⁸

All of these symptoms are to be expected shortly after a tragedy, and some linger long afterward. As long as they do not seriously interfere with the ability to carry out regular activities, many psychologists would not recommend any treatment, and allow the person to recover on his or her own (as most people do, eventually).

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Letters

Desire for Sex Abnormal for Teens?

Among the many messages about the two Wisconsin 14-year-olds arrested after declaring, when caught together by the girl's mother, that they planned to have sex, reported at <<http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/aug03/163688.asp>>, were the following:

I can't help thinking that the biggest problem in that family is the mother who is so willing to have her own daughter arrested.

Laurence

I think a parent/guardian has a right to make the house rules as long as the son/daughter is under their guardianship. I also think the police were the wrong ones to call I would hope that the judge would suggest that the woman get some therapy for her daughter, the boyfriend, and perhaps a little for herself. Case dismissed.

Ken

It wouldn't be out of the question ... to pass a law requiring parents to allow children to have sex in the house as a counter-balance to the fact they can't leave The current laws force the children to stay, but they don't force parents to deal.

Jesse

Someone who thinks that teens should be in therapy for wanting to have sex and freely admitting it, that's the person who should be in therapy.

AC

Alert

When the Shays-Meehan campaign finance bill passed in early 2002, it seemed nobody was aware of its prohibition against campaign contributions by minors. Now that a federal court has struck down and enjoined enforcement of that portion of the bill—reported at <<http://www.citizen.org/congress/campaign/legislation/articles.cfm?ID=8521>>—candidates' campaigns all seem to know about it, and believe it's still in force! Web sites and phone banks of candidates are requiring donors to state that they are at least 18 years of age, unnecessarily declining donations from those who don't affirm this. If you're involved in a political campaign that still imposes this unnecessary restriction, tell the campaign manager to look up the decision in *McConnell v FEC*. The Supreme Court may eventually reinstate this provision of the law, but for now, there is no need for campaigns to observe it.

Redirect

A November 2 editorial ridicules a bill expanding England's age of consent law to include all forms of "petting," at <<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,1075746,00.html>>.

A petition urging our nation's leaders to stop supporting "abstinence-only" sex education can be signed at <<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/petition/>>.

Announcement

Youth Truth to Change Frequency

Beginning with the first issue of 2004 (volume 5, issue 1), *Youth Truth* will be published quarterly instead of bimonthly. The intention is to reduce our costs by decreasing the number of mailings each year from 6 to 4. We hope to increase the minimum number of pages of each issue from 8 to 12 so that the amount of content published over the year remains the same.

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News Links

Ecstasy Results Bogus

The study that may have prompted the draconian “RAVE” act, which harshly punishes owners of businesses where the drug Ecstasy is used by patrons, and bans toys and other harmless paraphernalia believed to be associated with Ecstasy use, has been retracted by the scientists who published it. According to <http://mdma.net/toxicity/retract.html>, the extremely high mortality rate reported in the study was due to researchers accidentally giving the wrong drug to laboratory monkeys.

Judge Rules Out School Speech Restriction

“The mere fact that someone might take offense at the content of speech is not sufficient justification for prohibiting it,” wrote U.S. District Court Judge David Lawson in overturning, on October 3, a Michigan law requiring students to be suspended for “verbal assault.” The law, <http://www.detnews.com/2003/schools/0311/04/b01-316002.htm> tells us, came to the attention of the courts after high school student Alexander Smith was suspended for criticizing school policy and officials.

High Court Asked to Reconsider COPA

Twice found unconstitutionally vague by lower courts, the Child Online Protection Act (COPA) attempts its last appeal. COPA, says <http://dc.internet.com/news/article.php/2248171>, uses “community standards” to ban explicit material online where it can be seen by minors; lower courts refused to limit online speech to what is okay with “the most puritanical communities,” excluding “a wide range of protected expression.”

Cops Storm School, Find Nothing

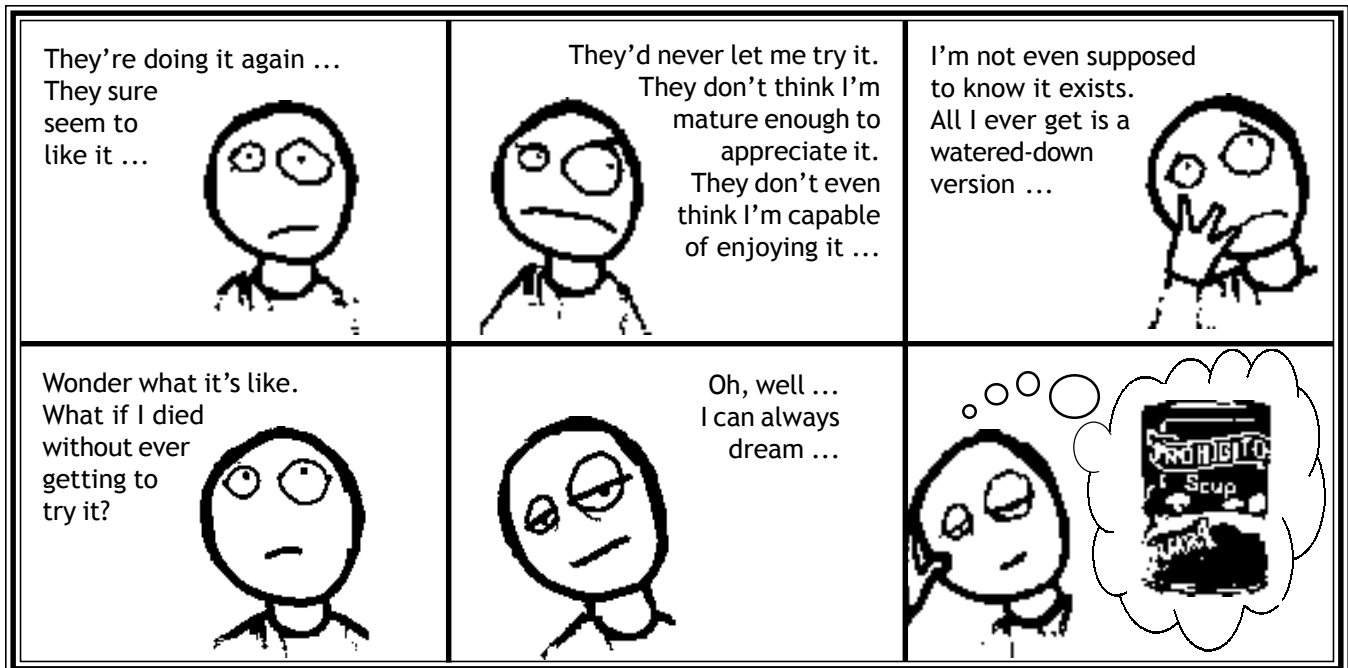
On November 5, police raided a high school in Goose Creek, South Carolina searching for drugs they were sure they’d find. Stories at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/11/07/national/main582492.shtml>, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/990598.asp?0cv=CB10&cp1=1>, and <http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/news/local/7209040.htm> tell of police waving guns as they ordered all students flat on the ground; those who didn’t immediately comply were handcuffed. Police dogs sniffed students and lockers, but no drugs were found.

Oops! We Forgot to Mention CIPA

In our last issue, we missed an important news item. On June 23, overturning an earlier decision by a federal panel of judges, the Supreme Court upheld the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), denying federal funds to any public library failing to install web blocking software on all public workstations. Six of the nine justices felt, since librarians may disable the filtering system (for adults only!), the law didn’t violate the First Amendment, says <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A22519-2003 Jun23.html>. But if the software runs on a server filtering all workstations simultaneously, turning it off for one patron might not be easy, explains a library “toolkit” at http://libraryjournal.reviewsnews.com/esec/Article_315151.htm.

Adult Pleasure

Toon



News Links

Police Handling School Discipline

The arrest of a 10-year-old with a toy gun has some Alabama residents questioning the increased presence of police officers in and around Shelby County schools. The boy was held in a juvenile detention facility for two days. A high school girl accused of stealing \$20 from a classmate spent five days in the lockup. According to <http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/news/index.ssf?/base/news/106846838187020.xml>, some parents are pretty upset about the officers' heavy-handed treatment of minor violations. The article doesn't say a word about whether any due process procedures are being followed before imposing these punishments.

Benign Bracelet Given Sinister Significance

To teens, even those "in the know", the colorful plastic rings were just inexpensive jewelry. But because of media publicity over a "secret code" attached to "jelly bracelets" in *one* school district, parents panicked and schools banned the bracelets nationwide. *Time* magazine recently reported that by snapping or pulling off a particular color bracelet on a girl's wrist, a boy could win a sexual favor indicated by the color of the bracelet. According to <http://www.nbc4.com/family/2634926/detail.html>, a recent study found 54% of girls aged 13-19 admit to having sex, without any bracelet game telling them what to do.

Adults Confuse Fantasy and Reality Again

Another work of fiction, another expulsion. In October, Georgia high-school student Rachel Boim was removed from class by an armed guard and expelled, after school officials read a short story in her personal journal which had been confiscated by a teacher the previous day. The story described a student falling asleep and dreaming about killing a teacher. According to <http://www.cnn.com/2003/EDUCATION/10/30/student.diary/index.html>, even though school officials reconsidered and allowed her to return, Rachel will switch to another school.

Zero Tolerance for Untidiness

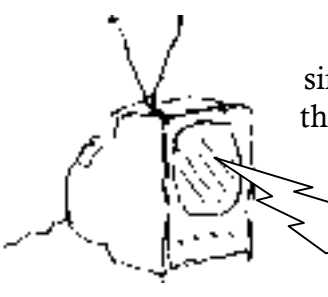



In Duncanville, Texas, with about 3500 students in its high school, over 700 suspensions for dress code violations were issued by the beginning of October. Some of those violations, described at http://abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/US/GMA031004Zero_tolerance_dresscode.html, involved shirts accidentally becoming untucked.

Students Breathe Easier Away From School

Brandon Kivi, 15, was expelled September 24 for violating his Texas school's drug policy when, in an emergency, he let his girlfriend Andra Ferguson use his asthma inhaler (knowing she used the same kind). According to <http://www.click2houston.com/news/2547143/detail.html>, Kivi is relieved that no criminal charges will be lodged against him, and although the school decided to allow him to return after Christmas, both students are leaving the school to become homeschoolers.

Toon

Secret Codes of the Schoolyard

 <p>Jelly bracelets are out, since parents found out their sinister meaning. Kids are now using subtler signals to convey their sex messages ...</p>	 <p>We don't know all the exact meanings yet, but we do know that unpierced ears convey something improper!</p>
<p>Watch out for religious pendants. Our young sources say they're just another secret message.</p> 	 <p>By not wearing makeup, a girl tells boys she'll go all the way ... and if she wears glasses, she'll try anything!</p>

Pledge Case Reaches Top Court

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed on October 14 to take up the appeal of an earlier ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, affecting schools and kids in nine western states, which found the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional. From the article at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/10/14/national/main577944.shtml>, it sounds like the high court will overturn the earlier ruling and the religious avowal will return to the patriotic recitation. But an item at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,100104,00.html> tells us that Justice Antonin Scalia recused himself from the case the very next day, making the outcome less certain.

Story-Writer to Get New Trial

On November 19, the Ohio Supreme court said no to prosecutors who wanted the conviction of Brian Dalton, thrown out by a lower court, to stand. Dalton is charged with possession of child pornography because of personal fantasies of imprisonment and torture that he wrote in a private journal. According to <http://www.nbc4columbus.com/news/2649508/detail.html>, Dalton is the first person in the United States to be imprisoned for child pornography for writings instead of images.

Viewing Just As Bad As Doing

Arizona judges and lawyers are objecting to their state’s mandatory sentences for child pornography, which require 10-24 years in prison for each image bought, sold, traded, downloaded or possessed. An article at <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/0519sexlaw.html> points out that the penalty for a single count can be as harsh as the sentence for second degree murder—or for actually molesting a child.

Student Suspended for Safe-Sex Shirt

Lanessa Riobe, a Florida sixteen-year-old whose mother is HIV-positive, wore a shirt covered with condoms to school as a costume on Halloween and allowed her fellow students to help themselves. According to <http://www.cnn.com/2003/EDUCATION/11/03/costume.suspension.ap/>, she went home early that day—when school administrators suspended her. The principal was quoted by <http://www.centredaily.com/ml/centredaily/news/7154693.htm> as saying Lanessa “tried to make a statement to the school that I personally find offensive.”

Benign and Patriotic? or Violent and Disturbed?

The interpretation of art is in the eye of the beholder. But when the beholders are school officials, we learn at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,101569,00.html>, the artist is likely to get suspended. Scott Switzer of New Jersey, 14, was kicked out for five days after a teacher saw his stick figures of a U.S. Marine shooting a member of the Taliban. Administrators said the drawing was “not the work of a normal mind.” Scott and his mother are rather offended by the comment.

“Voluntary” Gets New Meaning

Proponents of a Massachusetts school district’s drug testing proposal are sure their plan can overcome any legal challenge based on student privacy concerns—because it’s *voluntary and confidential*. Not surprisingly, this means that *parents* get to decide whether or not to register their kids for the random drug tests, and only parents will be notified of positive test results. One article about the plan is at http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2003/10/20/new_bedford_may_offer_drug_tests_for_students/. Giving parents the choice to enroll may protect the program from legal challenges, but calling it “voluntary” testing is quite a semantic stretch.

School Officials Misinterpret Message

Wyoming high school students, to show their team spirit, made t-shirts to be worn by students during football season. But Principal Bill Peters and other school officials felt their slogan “We Can Take A Hit” was a pro-marijuana message; according to <http://www.billingsgazette.com/index.php?id=1&display=rednews/2003/10/14/build/wyoming/38-tshirts.inc>, they promptly banned the shirts from the school and sports events. Put away those old Quicksilver Messenger Service records, Mr. Peters; they’re distorting your perceptions.

Student “Narc” Endangered

Alabama assistant principal Greg Gober recruited a 14-year-old student to participate in drug stings as an “undercover safety patrol.” According to <http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/news/index.ssf?/base/news/1068729339236970.xml>, the boy’s role as an informant was revealed to suspects after his second drug buy on September 19. His safety compromised, his father now pays \$425 a month for private school, and is disappointed that the assistant principal is likely to receive only a reprimand.

Public Act of Protest Punished

Two female Maryland students who kissed on a cafeteria table to promote gay tolerance got their message across—and also got two-day suspensions for disruptive behavior, <http://www.thewbalchannel.com/education/2651338/detail.html> tells us. However, the school, despite occasional anti-gay remarks made by students, was probably already far more tolerant than most.

School Board Lets Athlete Play

Even though he missed a mandatory drug test (he was home sick with the flu), Alabama student Adam Faulk will be allowed to participate in extracurricular athletics. But now that the school has okayed one exception to their rule, wonders <http://www.whnt19.com/Global/story.asp?S=1514992&nav=1VPtIyJB>, what’s to stop the slippery slope to perdition?

News Links

Wisconsin Bill Scoffs At Kids' Privacy

A bill to make public libraries tell parents what books their kids have checked out is reportedly flying through the Wisconsin legislature. The bill was prompted by the complaints of a few shocked parents who thought they already had a right to this information, until librarians refused to supply it. The library community has been fighting the bill, and from the article at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/state/nov03/184863.asp?format=print>, it sounds like Governor Jim Doyle has some reservations about signing it into law.

Parents Can Get Student Data Online

An article at <http://www.twincities.com/mld/pioneerpress/living/education/7295331.htm> describes St. Paul schools new web site which gives parents online access to their children's attendance and conduct records as well as other information. Parents are already entitled to this information, so the new system only streamlines the process of obtaining it. Worrisome, however, is the inclusion of "library checkouts and due dates"—does this mean parents can see the titles of books their kids have checked out? The site is at www.splearns.org. Parents with user names and passwords can use the "parent portal."

Book Traumatizes Two Florida Students

Two black students, upset by the "N" word in a novel about Florida history, are now in counseling. Now, says <http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/state/7287531.htm>, the school board is considering taking *A Land Remembered* out of its curriculum. The author, three-time Pulitzer Prize nominee Patrick D. Smith, says he's gotten "several thousand letters from students, including black students, who enjoyed the book, and no one complained about the use of the word."

Drug Test for Student Parking Permit

The Shelby County (Alabama) School System is considering requiring random drug testing for students who want parking permits, as reported at <http://www.al.com/news/huntsvilletimes/index.ssf?base/news/106822538792200.xml>.

ID Tags Tell All

Students at a Buffalo, New York charter school are all wearing picture IDs with embedded microchips that automatically record their comings and goings, lunch purchases, library loans, and other data in the school's computer system, reports http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,60898,00.html?tw=wn_tophead_1. Gary Stillman, the director of the school, is enamored with the technology, and wants to collect even more information with it, assuring everyone with privacy concerns that the system is password-protected!

Church/State Barrier Challenged by Governor

Georgia's Governor Sonny Perdue wants to amend his state's constitution to eliminate its prohibition of "direct or indirect" use of taxpayer money to benefit any "church, sect, cult or religious denomination." The amendment, says http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/1003/08_faith.html, would allow the state to contract with religious organizations to provide a variety of social services, and could also pave the way for the state to provide vouchers for religious schools.

Voucher Plan to Pass in Larger Bill

People interested in the workings of Congress should take a look at articles at <http://www.ajc.com/news/content/news/1103/16vouchers.html> and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A63693-2003Nov19.html> describing House and Senate wrangling over a five-year plan to provide federal money for poor families in the District of Columbia to send their kids to private schools. First, the House vote on the plan was scheduled for the same time as an event attended by 38 black lawmakers (assuring its passage). Senate democrats then blocked the bill with a filibuster. Finally, the voucher plan was added to an omnibus spending bill (which cannot be amended), the defeat of which would shut down the government—which Democrats aren't willing to do. Opponents, who say the plan will deprive the public school system of up to \$25 million, will likely appeal to the courts to overrule it.

Minnesota Truants May Lose Licenses

A package of education proposals introduced by Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty on October 14 included the denial or loss of driver's licenses to students with 80% or lower school attendance rates. The article at <http://www.twincities.com/mld/pioneerpress/news/politics/7014423.htm> said Pawlenty also proposed mandatory summer school for students who don't pass state proficiency tests and ending "social promotion."

Texas Texts Approved Despite Evolution Concerns

On November 13, the fifteen-member State Board of Education rapidly approved all 11 high school biology textbooks, despite the concerns of some that they gave no "equal time" to alternatives to evolution, says http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/dispatch/2003-11-14/pols_feature8.html.

Note to Teachers: Don't Make Kids Vomit

An Alabama science teacher, discussing body chemistry, gave students the chance to learn first-hand what would happen if they tried to drink a gallon of milk, and now could be fired for the experiment. According to <http://rdu.news14.com/content/headlines/?ArID=39084&SecID=2>, the teacher warned volunteers that they'd throw up, and didn't require any students to participate, but some students felt that volunteers would get extra credit. The teacher was suspended.

Four Removed From Family, Given Food

New Jersey adoptive parents Raymond and Vanessa Jackson were charged with child endangerment this fall after four of their twelve children were found to be seriously emaciated and underweight. Nine New Jersey social workers who handled the boys' cases have been fired. When removed from the home, 19-year-old Bruce weighed 45 pounds, 14-year-old Keith weighed 40, 10-year-old Tyrone, 28 pounds, and 9-year-old Michael, 23 pounds; none was over 4 feet tall. The parents claimed that the children were given all the food they wanted, but starved themselves because they were disturbed. One version of this widely reported story at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/10/29/malnourished.children/> reports that although the family received an annual state subsidy of up to \$28,000 from the state (and \$1900 from a local church to help them pay their bills), the house had been without electricity for three months when the parents were arrested.

Florida Grandmother Sues State

Rachelle Keesler, the paternal grandmother of a 3-year-old boy beaten to death two years ago by his mother's boyfriend, filed suit against the Florida Department of Children and Families on October 28. The lawsuit, says <http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/state/7127047.htm>, alleges that the department failed to act on evidence that her grandson was in danger.

Toddler Gets By Alone for Weeks

A two-year-old Florida girl managed to live on her own for nineteen days after her mother was sent to jail. Although the apartment was a mess and the baby needed some treatment for malnutrition and dehydration, http://www.tallahassee.com/mld/tallahassee/news/breaking_news/6893383.htm indicates that the resourceful child survived the experience without injury and in pretty good condition, physically and emotionally.

Maybe Younger Voters Would've Cared?

Nobody voted in a Mississippi school board election, not even the guy running unopposed for a mid-term vacancy, says <http://www.blythevillecn.com/articles/2003/09/17/news/news02.txt>. Since he got no votes, candidate Carl Miner is deemed to have lost; the school board will now appoint somebody else.

Mother and Son Both Arrested Over Toy

Nine-year-old Thomas Clark Jr. of Ohio was playing with his toy gun while waiting on a bench outside a beauty parlor on October 25. Alerted by a passerby, a policeman pointed his *real* gun at Thomas' head, ordered him to the ground, handcuffed him, and placed him under arrest, even though Thomas said the gun was a toy. When his mother, pleading for leniency with curlers in her hair, refused to leave the police car where her son had been placed, she too was arrested for "obstruction of justice," according to <http://www.zwire.com/site/10419957.html>.

Canadian Province to Save Kids From Selves

The government of British Columbia hasn't given up on its plan to lock up youths deemed to be "high-risk" to save them from future trouble with drugs, prostitution, or other crime. But although the "Secure Care Act" was actually passed by the provincial legislature in July 2000, the government is proceeding with caution, limiting the population eligible to be locked up and maximum lengths of stay, imposing procedural safeguards, and so forth. After all, these kids are to be locked up without being charged with any crime. It seems that the only recent update on "Secure Care" that can be viewed online is a November 4 article posted at <http://www.oblivion.net/news/display.php?articleID=893>.

Australians Want Gentler Role Models

An August 19 article at <http://us.altnews.com.au/article.php?sid=5299> tells us that many childcare centers in Australia are prohibiting children from pretending to be superheroes, such as Superman, Batman, or Spiderman, claiming that this type of role-playing leads to aggressive behavior.

Incense-itivity in Ireland

Stories at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/08/22/wchuch22.xml> and <http://www.irishcatholic.ie/030827-n3.htm> report on the growing awareness by Catholic church officials that incense may be harmful to worshippers with asthma, especially altar boys and girls in close proximity to the "cloud of smoke."

Japan Gets Tough On Young Offenders

In April 2001, the age at which a lawbreaker in Japan can be tried in adult court was lowered from 16 to 14. On November 20, the first youth affected by this change was sentenced to up to six years in prison; details are at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?nn20031121a3.htm>.

Supreme Court Hears Benefits Case

Employees of General Dynamics Land Systems are presenting arguments of age discrimination to the U.S. Supreme Court, challenging their union's contract which phases out certain retirement benefits for workers who were not yet 50 years old when the agreement took effect. Because the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits discrimination against workers over the age of 40, and because the union contract specifically mentioned the age of 50 as the cutoff for receiving the future benefits, employees who were 40-49 years old at the time maintain they're being illegally discriminated against, reports <http://www.ajc.com/business/content/business/1103/13retire.html>.

Two books on sex education

With the rise of “abstinence-only” training, sex education has returned to its 19th century roots. In those days, few young people attended school as continuously as those of today, so teaching about sex, when it happened at all, was left to parents or clergymen, and was often confined to conveying the danger and wickedness of any sexual thought or activity.

This, according to *Teaching Sex*, was the experience of a young man born in 1844 named Granville Stanley Hall. Frightened in his childhood by tales of grotesque diseases, mental decline, and the wrath of God, Hall struggled throughout his life to overcome an image of himself as a worthless, corrupted sinner unfit to share the company of decent human beings.

Hall went on to become a research psychologist. His lifelong preoccupation with the terror and misery he endured throughout his own childhood and early adulthood culminated in the publication of his famous *Adolescence* in 1904. Hall, at the age of 60, at last publicly condemned the “morbid modesty” of his own upbringing—although he never entirely repudiated it. Still clinging fast to the necessity for young people to be “pure” in thought and deed, Hall supported replacing silence and repression with systematic sex education by trained experts as the best way to ensure this ideal of premarital chastity. The rise of public schools in the early 1900s made such programs feasible, and public health concerns over the prevalence of venereal diseases drove some school districts to implement them.

The year of the publication of *Adolescence*, 1904, was also the year Mary Steichen was born. Like Hall, she felt she was harmed by silence and misinformation about sex, and repression of sexual feelings and desires. Like Hall, she pursued the subject as an academic, earning her medical degree and serving as a physician for public schools in New York state. In 1953 she became the national medical director for Planned Parenthood. In these two positions, she witnessed first-hand the harmful repercussions of young people’s “stunning ignorance” about sex. In 1964, then called Dr. Mary Calderone, she founded the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), a decision that thrust her into the public spotlight and made her (like Hall, at the age of 60) a historic figure. But despite the openness and freedom from guilt espoused by SIECUS, Mary Calderone, like G.S. Hall, continued personally to disapprove of premarital sex.

Moran, Jeffrey P. *Teaching sex : the shaping of adolescence in the 20th century*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2000.

Teaching Sex, a historical survey of sex education in the United States, covers these and many other stories in great depth, revealing the delicate balance that sex instructors had to maintain—to give accurate and complete information, hold the interest of the students, and avoid enraging the community. To meet these demands, sex education classes were presented in a variety of guises over the years, as “social hygiene,” “health,” “family life” or “relationship” classes. Whatever the format or slant of the courses, subsequent studies found their influence on students’ choices and behavior to be minimal, and students’ performance did not predict future success in relationships:

Professional sex educators were naturally delighted with the popular interest in their subject but ambivalent about community expectations Certainly some sex educators explicitly denied that sex education would “solve” anything. But by interlacing their articles and speeches with statistics on illegitimacy, teenage marriage, and sexually transmitted diseases, they nevertheless implied strongly that their program had at least a tangential bearing on remedying the problems.

Opponents of sex education sometimes claim that knowledge of sex leads to sexual experimentation, and that sex education is responsible for an “epidemic” of teen pregnancy, poverty and venereal disease. In the book’s final chapter, author Moran presents strong arguments against these claims, caling into question the very existence of such “epidemics.” He also cites evidence that poverty and poor performance in school are *predictors* of sexual activity in youth—not the other way around:

The critical question is not whether students understand the mechanics of the condom but whether their vision of their own life is such that preventing pregnancy or avoiding disease is important enough for the condom to seem relevant To students ... who find the question of where they will be in five or ten years a matter of fatalism or indifference, an education based on future consequences has little meaning.

My main complaint about *Teaching Sex* is its bizarre and unhelpful index, which cannot be relied upon to locate passages of interest. Otherwise, I fully recommend this enlightening and enjoyable history.

Sue's Review

Irvine, Janice M.. *Talk about sex : the battles over sex education in the United States*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 2002.

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Janice Irvine's *Talk About Sex* retells the last half of the sex education story in Jeffrey Moran's *Teaching Sex*, beginning around 1960. But Irvine's book delves more deeply into the responses and strategies of sex education's *opponents* than into the content of the courses themselves.

The first chapter is all about SIECUS and its founder, Dr. Mary Calderone. Calderone's aim in forming the organization was to help create a climate in which sex could be discussed openly, scientifically, without guilt or embarrassment. Ironically, the determination of her opponents to *remove* the subject of sex from the public debate forced them to speak openly in response, calling even more public attention to an unseemly topic they hoped would disappear. So even when they were victorious, having succeeded in removing sex programs or textbooks from some district's schools, the victors remained angry and resentful, feeling that they were losing the war over public discourse.

The sense of loss and victimization mobilized the religious right, prompting them to wage campaigns of misinformation, distortion, and spreading of rumors about sex education. Tales of elementary school children instructed to fondle one another, or films in which close-ups of human genitals filled the screen, began to be reported. Pamphlets stated that the AIDS virus passed easily through supposedly porous latex condoms, and the the average lifespan of gay people was 42 years (both claims are false). Even when educators managed to refute the flood of allegations and falsehoods, local citizens were often left with the feeling that *something* must be wrong with their programs! In the late 1980s and 1990s, when many feminists turned their attention to sexual harassment, sex education opponents borrowed the concept, calling sex education a form of child abuse.

People who want to suppress speech have a very different understanding of the United States, my nation, than I do. My understanding has always been that we consider only three types of speech harmful in themselves: falsehoods (sometimes forgivable when it is about oneself and is nobody's business, or to avoid hurting someone's feelings), threats, and mob or mass action incitement (such as yelling "fire"). In the case of other speech we don't like, such as insults, disagreement with our views, or espousing theories or outlooks with which we disagree, my understanding of the concept of free speech is that we as citizens are expected to develop the confidence to

withstand such "assaults," to listen to them, to challenge them, to have the strength to accept or reject them. Surely, wise children know that the best way to deal with schoolyard insults and teasing is to laugh it off whenever possible. People who feel threatened by speech need help in standing up to that speech, by ignoring it, accepting it good-naturedly, or fighting back with their own words. Accepting the notion that speech itself can victimize, I think, is not the American way.

One would think that people of strong religious faith would find it easy to defend their own beliefs against secular, values-neutral presentations of sex, in programs that allow students to reach their own conclusions about the sexual behaviors that are right for them. But according to Irvine, opponents of such programs *have* resorted to lies, threats, and incitement of mob action to eliminate any talk of ideas that conflict with their own:

Community meetings have erupted in shouting matches and even physical violence School board members and prominent activists have received death threats, donned bulletproof vests, and ... received police escorts to their cars [one] sex education supporter said, "I now know what it felt like to be in Nazi Germany."

Again, I can only conclude that compulsory education, which forces most children to attend school and accept the teacher's authority, is responsible for the explosive reaction of parents. Still, weren't most of these adults exposed to sexual talk and ideas and even images when they were children, whether in a class or outside of it? were they corrupted by it? why the fear?

Irvine includes a long section about the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), about which I knew little. AFLA, which passed in 1981, prohibited schools and other programs receiving federal funding from mentioning abortion (that part I knew). But according to Irvine, the act also required sex education programs applying for federal grants to "involve religious groups." Applications were reviewed by a panel of appointees, all with conservative religious backgrounds. AFLA, as described here, sounds like today's "faith-based funding."

Talk About Sex is another worthwhile and fascinating book.

Young Minds to Heal

continued from page 1

Psychological debriefing is usually conducted very soon after a tragedy. It is intended to give victims an opportunity for catharsis, to get the trauma “out of their systems” by retelling and reliving it. It also provides them with the experience of being listened to in a supportive way; in the hectic aftermath of a disaster, it can be reassuring to know that *somebody* cared about one’s own personal story. Debriefers also provide information about symptoms to be expected, strategies for coping, and resources for future help.

While debriefing sessions often make people feel better in the short term, the long-term results can be negative. One early large-scale debriefing of children, following the sinking of a cruise ship in 1988, reportedly yielded “good effects,” but a follow-up found 34% suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder more than five years later, a percentage high enough to raise questions about the value of the technique.⁹ Two researchers have come up with several possible reasons why debriefing might actually impede recovery.¹⁰

One common response to a disaster is rapid alternation between avoidance of and intense focusing on the traumatic event. These researchers suggest that confronting the trauma “in small doses

facilitates natural recovery.” Prolonged focusing on the tragedy in a debriefing session soon after the event may be more than the mind is ready to handle.

A crucial part of coping with tragedy is the ability to recall and describe it as a *memory*, something that happened, but is now over. Encouraging victims to tell about the event in its immediate aftermath may reinforce the impression of it as an ongoing experience, still happening.

Trauma sufferers without careful guidance may emphasize “unproductive” aspects of their experience, such as what they should have done, why they deserved what happened to them, or how their life has been destroyed. They may recall only the most frightening moments of the ordeal, never moving on to moments of relief, of the discovery that they did, after all, survive, and could recover. Listening supportively to such negative ruminations without also encouraging a progression to more productive thinking can reinforce this pattern.

Finally, informing people of post-trauma symptoms and the usual progress of improvement may increase concern about their own reactions. Symptoms do linger long after the event. People monitoring their own symptoms closely may attach too much importance to them and conclude that they are getting worse—which can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Many articles mention the special needs and vulnerability of children in a disaster, but whenever actual predispositions and symptoms of children are described, they seem virtually identical to those of adults. A recent article mentioned children around the country who believed all of New York City had been destroyed on September 11, 2001, due to their “inability ... to digest the news and keep perspective.”¹¹ Some adults I know had the same misconception!

Younger children do have a smaller likelihood of suffering long-term effects. Some call this “a child’s natural resilience,” but it may be that the sense of “mental defeat” which strongly affects future recovery¹² is felt much less keenly by people with less “autonomy” to lose.

A recent article quotes one psychologist: “Unless people are having tremendous difficulty, therapists should leave them alone.” For those considering therapy, the article advises, “Trust your instincts.” But children are expected to comply with and trust decisions made by others. If authorities want them to attend debriefing sessions, they’re unlikely to resist.

The ineffectiveness and risks of debriefing have only recently been recognized by psychologists. It may be long years before educators hear the news—and stop pushing children into unnecessary and potentially harmful therapies.

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