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# Youth Truth



Official 'Zine of Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions [www.asfar.org](http://www.asfar.org)

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## Curing Childhood

Lisa Freeman

The thrilling news just couldn't wait. On June 2, headlines around the world trumpeted that the antidepressant Prozac had been found significantly more effective in treating depressed youth than "cognitive behavioral therapy", only 12 weeks into the 36-week, government-funded trial.<sup>1</sup>

The participants were 439 young people 12 to 17 years old, all diagnosed with depression, the severity of which was measured with "common psychological scales." (After some participants dropped out or had to be excluded, 378 people remained in the study by the 12th week.) Four test groups were created: Prozac plus cognitive behavioral therapy, Prozac alone, cognitive behavioral therapy alone, and a placebo group. The early results found that 71% of the Prozac-plus-therapy group and 61% of the Prozac-only group had "responded well," compared with 43% of the therapy-only group and 35% on placebos.

As for "adverse events" (suicide) associated with antidepressants, there have been no actual suicides in the study. Most articles downplayed the fact that five suicide attempts occurred in the Prozac groups and one in the non-Prozac groups—among youth who are depressed, this could be attributable to chance.

The reports, however, made much of the fact that the study was fully financed by the National Institute of Mental Health, that no funding had come from pharmaceutical companies (particularly Eli Lilly, the manufacturer of Prozac). This makes the study seem especially reliable. The researchers must be exceptionally virtuous, to have accepted untainted government money, instead of dirty drug company dollars.

The news reports seem to exonerate not only Prozac, but the practice of prescribing psychotropic drugs to children in general. They tell us that the millions of children medicated with "quick fixes" handed out by busy, stressed-out doctors, enriching the pharmacy giants—are actually being helped! and the miracle of modern medicine is more than a myth.

But let's look at the facts: there are several varieties of antidepressant drugs. This study is testing *one* of them. Prozac happens to be the only antidepressant drug *not* banned from pediatric use in England, so it has already been deemed by some to be the most effective and the least dangerous of the lot, the only one with a "favorable risk/benefit ratio."<sup>2</sup> The results of this study should not be extended to include other antidepressant drugs, all of which, in the United States, can be prescribed to patients of any age.

In fact, on the same day all the good-news reports about Prozac came out, the Attorney General of New York State filed suit against drug company GlaxoSmithKline, charging them with concealing evidence of ineffectiveness or harm to children by *their* antidepressant drug Paxil, publicizing studies with favorable results and burying the rest. (The Prozac trial, too, might not have received much publicity, so early in the study, if the results hadn't been what the researchers had hoped for.)

The trial tested Prozac's effectiveness in treating depression, the very problem it was designed to treat. But antidepressant drugs are prescribed for a wide range of problems for which they've often been found to be *ineffective*: eating disorders, anxiety, attention-deficit disorder. A study comparing Pfizer's antidepressant Zoloft with cognitive behavioral therapy for obsessive-compulsive teenagers found that the *psychotherapy* worked better than the *pharmacotherapy*. But that news, again coincidentally released on the same day as the Prozac announcement, made no headlines—some of the Prozac stories briefly mentioned the Zoloft failure, way down at the end.

Drug companies might like a positive study of one drug, for one type of disorder, to "rub off" on the rest of the industry, but one study *shouldn't* provide a big "thumbs up" for dosing kids with drugs to fix whatever we think is wrong with them.

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# Buzz

## 2004 Voting Age Protests!

Attention ASFAR members and youth rights supporters! ASFAR is holding nationwide protests of the voting age on two dates this year: **Saturday, August 21st**, and Election Day, **Tuesday, November 2nd**, 2004. But we need your help!

So far, protests are planned in Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. If you live in one of these areas, the contact info for your local coordinator is listed on this page and at <<http://www.asfar.org/voting/protests/>>. If your area is not covered, YOU need to organize a protest of your own!

Here are the steps:

1. **Contact us** at <[voting@asfar.org](mailto:voting@asfar.org)> to let us know you're organizing a protest, so we can post the information for other people in your area who are interested in participating. We need your name, e-mail address, location of the protest, and (optional) telephone number.
2. **Call your local police** to find out how to get permission to hold a demonstration. The sooner you do this, the greater the likelihood of getting permission in time!
3. **Make signs and print out literature!** Contact our secretary <[secretary@asfar.org](mailto:secretary@asfar.org)> to request lots of essays, buttons, and pamphlets for distribution at the protest!
4. **Contact your local newspapers and TV stations** to inform them of the protest.

### Supporting Self-Discrimination

The media can always pick a few quotes from someone under 21 who thinks the latest anti-youth drinking measure is wonderful because "most people our age can't control themselves." This is that "everyone but me" syndrome that afflicts people of all ages. It's also slightly tactical—a lot of people ... see who's ahead in any particular battle and join the winning side, even if it's self-defeating in the end. The voting age debate is especially interesting. You have a few people under 18 saying that extending voting rights to people under 18 is bad because they'll make bad choices, ill-informed, etc. It's funny, because that concept applies to the speaker as well, rendering their opinion just as worthless and "age stained" (for lack of better words). Pedro P.

These protests are going to happen, but they can't without your help. This is how it begins, folks!

Below is contact info for the local organizers. New information will be added at <<http://www.asfar.org/voting/protests/>>.

#### Alaska

November 2

Contact: Ty  
<[voting\\_ak@asfar.org](mailto:voting_ak@asfar.org)>

New York, New York  
August 21 & November 2  
Contact: Oliver Traldi  
<[voting\\_nyc@asfar.org](mailto:voting_nyc@asfar.org)>

#### Arkansas

August 21 & November 2

Contact: Kevin McCormack  
<[voting\\_ar@asfar.org](mailto:voting_ar@asfar.org)>

North Carolina  
August 21 & November 2  
Contact: Tim Hines  
<[voting\\_nc@asfar.org](mailto:voting_nc@asfar.org)>

#### Chicago, Illinois

August 21 & November 2

Contact: Susan Wishnetsky  
<[voting\\_chicago@asfar.org](mailto:voting_chicago@asfar.org)>

Hillsville, Virginia  
August 21 & November 2  
Contact: Andrew Jennings  
<[voting\\_hillsville@asfar.org](mailto:voting_hillsville@asfar.org)>

#### Boston, Massachusetts

August 21 & November 2

Contact: David Schneider-Joseph  
<[voting\\_boston@asfar.org](mailto:voting_boston@asfar.org)>

Washington, D.C.  
August 21 & November 2  
Contact: Oliver Traldi  
<[voting\\_wdc@asfar.org](mailto:voting_wdc@asfar.org)>

#### Michigan

August 21

Contact: Ty  
<[voting\\_mi@asfar.org](mailto:voting_mi@asfar.org)>

## Letters

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# Redirect

What presidential candidate supports lowering the voting age? Ralph Nader, says a page on his web site at <<http://www.votenader.org/issues/index.php?cid=28>>. Whether you support Nader or not, the page contains a host of arguments in favor of youth voting that are well worth reading.

“There isn’t any single age of maturity,” says longtime columnist Ellen Goodman. Her wonderful editorial in support of lowering the voting age can be seen at <<http://www.tallahassee.com/ml/democrat/news/opinion/8634089.htm>>

Teenagers “have a stake in their communities, just as older voters do,” says a commentator at <<http://www.lavozdeanza.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/05/10/40a022e0c6042>>, also arguing that without votes, young people are victims of taxation without representation.

In his State of the Union Address, George W. Bush credited drug testing in schools with reducing youth drug use, but one editorial at <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4375351/>> points out that his evidence was limited to just one study, ignoring others that cast doubt on such programs’ effectiveness. The article notes that Bush’s plan would expand funding for drug testing “more than tenfold, to \$23 million.”

“It’s time we stopped trying to close our kids off from society” and treating “our citizens-in-training as pre-criminals,” says a Detroit-area mother at <[http://www.freep.com/news/metro/des4\\_20040504.htm](http://www.freep.com/news/metro/des4_20040504.htm)>, a commentary on the recent prohibition of unescorted teens at her local mall.

## **After Testimony, Committee Approves Bill**

Youth rights activists from around the state and around the country came to Sacramento to testify on May 5 before the California Senate’s Elections and Reapportionment Committee in support of “Training Wheels for Democracy,” the bill which would grant partial votes to people as young as 14. An article at <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2004/05/06MNGCR6GIIK1.DTL>> describes some of the testimony. The bill passed out of the committee by a 3-2 vote.

## **California Considers Vote for “Nearly-18s”**

ACA-25, a constitutional amendment before the California State Assembly, would allow 17-year-olds to vote in primaries if they will turn 18 before the general election. The article at <<http://www.smdailyjournal.org/article.cfm?issue=05-21-04&storyID=31029>> said this bill—which might actually have a chance of passing—was coming up for a vote in the last week of May, but as of this writing, it hasn’t happened yet.

A resident of Brookline, Massachusetts has asked his town to approve a resolution discouraging local parents from using corporal punishment; see <<http://nospank.net/n-m22r.htm>>.

N.B.A. commissioner David Stern wants to make athletes wait until they’re 20 to play pro basketball, saying “it’s better for them to stay in school.” A commentator at <<http://www.officialforum.com/thread/13550>> thinks he’s dead wrong.

If you can’t get ahold of *The Language Police* by Diane Ravitch—or if you’ve already read it and want more—the author’s update at <<http://www.opinionjournal.com/forms/printThis.html?id=110004691>> gives a summary of the book, plus loads of ridiculous new examples of textbook censorship.

Standards of “decency” are impossible to define, says <[http://www.ncaac.org/cen\\_news/cn93views.htm](http://www.ncaac.org/cen_news/cn93views.htm)>, and they make “a hash of the First Amendment.” But the article also states, naively, that “no one seriously claims that a few distasteful words or a fleeting image ... inflict actual harm on minors.” (Alas, some people *do* seriously make that claim!)

A new book, *The Silencing of Student Voices : Preserving Free Speech in America’s Schools*, is free online at <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/speech/studentexpression/news.aspx?id=13074>>.

# News Links

## **College Towns Discourage Student Voting**

A long article at <<http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=18761>> describes the efforts of Williamsburg, Virginia college students to change restrictive residency policies that keep them from voting where they live.

## **“Vote at 17” Bill in Minnesota**

A general human-interest story on lowering the voting age, at <<http://www.marionstar.com/news/stories/20040427/localnews/307599.html>>, mentions SF 1820 (still in committee at press time), a bill to lower Minnesota’s voting age to 17.

## **Navajo Nation May Lower Voting Age**

Briefly mentioned at <<http://www.thenavajotimes.com/20050306/News/votes.html>> is a proposed referendum to lower the voting age to 16. A source tells us the proposal has already passed one of three committees that will consider it before the Navajo Nation Council can place it on the November ballot.

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# News Links

## **Cannes Rewards Acting, Not Age**

On May 23, breaking the tradition of giving awards only to older actors who'd "paid their dues," judges at the Cannes Film Festival named 14-year-old Yuya Yagira of Japan "best actor", reports <<http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp/news/20040523p2a00m0dm005003c.html>>. Yagira, who was 12 when the film was shot, missed the ceremony because of school exams.

## **Youth Rock Band Acclaimed**

In Detroit, it's still possible for kids to form a successful garage band. The Dollfaces, now high school juniors, released their first CD this year and were named "Artist of the Week" at <<http://www.detnews.com/2004/events/0405/01/e10-137991.htm>>. The four started playing together in sixth grade.

## **Where Youth Grows Pale**

On May 20, a bill making the use of tanning booths illegal for anyone under 18 passed the California Assembly, 42-26, says <<http://www2.cnn.com/2004/HEALTH/05/21/tanning.ban.ap/>>, and is now being considered by the Senate. California already requires parental permission to use tanning salons.

## **Drug Use Linked to Nagging**

While no *causal* connection should be assumed, a Canadian study based on interviews of over 4000 12- to 15-year-old kids, released May 19, found a correlation between nagging parents and the use of drugs or alcohol by kids, says <<http://www.the-globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20040519/HDRINK19/TPScience/>>. Drug use was also higher among kids with stepparents. But the article closes by telling parents to avoid "freaking out," quoting an expert in youth behavior: "Most try it, and most get over it."

## **Parents Unaware of Children's Obesity**

A survey of children and parents, reported at <<http://www.technewsworld.com/story/34251.html>>, reveals that 67% of mothers and 47% of fathers of overweight children didn't know their child was overweight. Many parents of normal-weight children thought they were too skinny and didn't eat enough.

## **Parents Skeptical of Psych Meds**

A Columbia University poll of 512 parents, described at <<http://www.forbes.com/lifestyle/health/feeds/hscout/2004/06/04/hscout519275.html>>, found that most parents believe too many kids are prescribed antidepressants. A majority felt that many kids being treated for depression don't have the disorder, but that most kids who do don't get treatment. The parents were evenly split on whether antidepressants were dangerous to youth, with a large number undecided.

## **Draft Called Unlikely (But You Never Know)**

Will you be drafted before you ever get to vote? Probably not, opines <<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/nation/8744293.htm>>, but the possibility is real enough to scare many young people, and their parents, too.

## **Jobs Aplenty? Not For You!**

If you're a kid with no recording contract or best actor award, expect lean times ahead. Last year's youth employment rate was only 37%—the lowest since 1948—and according to <[http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/employment/2004-05-03-teen\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/employment/2004-05-03-teen_x.htm)>, this summer will be even worse.

## **Weed Better Than Speed?**

If a stimulant can slow down people with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), maybe marijuana can help them focus? A California pediatrician says it can; on April 1 she argued before a U.S. House of Representatives committee that doctors should be allowed to prescribe cannabis to ADHD patients, including kids. The story and a discussion appear at <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,1174541,00.html>>.

## **Florida Ban On Gay Adoption Upheld**

We overlooked a January 29 circuit court ruling against four gay men, who had hoped to overturn Florida's prohibition against gay adoptive parents. Florida, says <<http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/01/29/gay.adoption.ap/>>, is the only state with such a ban. With all the problems in Florida's child welfare and foster care system, you'd think the state would encourage adoption by any loving couple.

## **Christian Identity No Guarantee of Ethics**

A survey conducted by the Gospel Music Association, and described at <<http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/2004/0501-125207-1657r.htm>>, found that teens who consider themselves born-again Christians are just as likely as other teens to download music illegally from the Internet.

## **States Try New Versions of Failed Laws**

The Children's Online Protection Act (COPA) has failed in the courts so far, and on March 26, Virginia's attempt to keep online porn away from kids met the same fate—it was found unconstitutional by the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals, says <[http://www.bizreport.com/article.php?art\\_id=6668](http://www.bizreport.com/article.php?art_id=6668)>. But states keep trying. A bill to add computer-generated images to the definition of child pornography—nearly identical to a federal law struck down by the Supreme Court in 2002—has now been introduced in Ohio ... and get this: the bill's sponsor is quoted, at <[http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-03-26-ohio-porn\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-03-26-ohio-porn_x.htm)>, as saying that the law removes "the burden placed on prosecutors to prove there is a real victim." (Won't *somebody please* think of the *prosecutors*?)

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# News Links

## Why Should Teens Get Away With Not Voting ...

... when the rest of us have to? In a May 13 interview, Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt of Belgium, where everyone able and eligible to vote is required to do so, expressed support for the idea of lowering his nation's voting age to 16, according to <[http://www.expatica.com/source/site\\_article.asp?subchannel\\_id=48&story\\_id=7555](http://www.expatica.com/source/site_article.asp?subchannel_id=48&story_id=7555)>.

## British Movement Gaining Steam

Recent developments in the drive to lower the ages to vote and run for office in England are described at <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/3682847.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3682847.stm)>. Another article at <<http://www.leadstoday.net/ViewArticle.aspx?SectionID=39&ArticleID=792003>> tells how a member of Parliament was “won round” after talking with schoolchildren.

## Lower Voting Age Proposed In Ireland

On May 6, the Youth Affairs spokesman of the Fine Gael party, responding to a report on widespread political apathy among young people in Ireland, spoke in support of lowering the nation's voting age to 16, says <<http://www.politics.ie/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4880>>.

## Teens Arrested For Voting In Philippines

Four young people who didn't “look” 18 had already cast their ballots on May 11 when they were arrested by Marines helping patrol polling places in the Philippines, according to <<http://www.mindanews.com/2004/05/12polls-minors.html>>.

## Taiwan Group Urges Lowered Voting Age

An alliance of social groups in Taiwan made recommendations to the legislature on May 21, including, says <<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2004/05/22/2003156483>>, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18.

## Canadian Court Denies Youth Voting Rights

On May 13, the Alberta Court of Appeals upheld a lower court ruling that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada does not guarantee young people the right to vote. The case was brought to court by two high school students, says <[http://www.cbc.ca/stories/2004/05/14/canada/teenvote\\_20040514](http://www.cbc.ca/stories/2004/05/14/canada/teenvote_20040514)>, who are now deciding whether to file another appeal.

## Alabama Principal Pushes Voter Registration

Nobody's complained (yet), but a high school principal's insistence on registering seniors to vote before they graduate might, by his own admission, border on coercion; take a look at <<http://www.al.com/news/birminghamnews/index.ssf?/base/news/108495834611640.xml>> and judge for yourself.

# Poem

## Frequently-Questioned Answers

“You may look mature, but  
You need supervision.  
Your mind is too young for  
A grownup decision.”

“You don't need to vote  
In any election,  
Because you are still under  
Our protection.”

Our looks are irrelevant.  
As for the mind,  
Why are we alone held  
To a rule of this kind?

While you mean well, your choices  
Are often just guesses,  
And too much authority  
Leads to excesses.

If IQ or maturity  
Shows who should vote,  
Test everyone—that is  
The plan to promote.

You test, diagnose us,  
Observe every breath.  
You can send us to jail  
Or condemn us to death.

But would we tell grownups  
Whose brains perhaps scatter,  
Because of that defect  
Their votes do not matter?

If we argue, use reason,  
No matter how strong,  
If you disagree  
It is we who are wrong.

No human knows everything.  
Let us be frank.  
We aren't forced to vote.  
We can leave a line blank.

Even for those  
Who may turn out okay,  
One's voice for “protection”  
Is too much to pay.

“You may be quite smart.  
I don't say you're not.  
But it's life experience  
That you haven't got.”

“Don't be so impatient  
To go through new doors.  
In just two more years  
The world will be yours.”

I have no life experience?  
Oh yes, yes I do.  
It's just not the kind  
That's important to you.

This world we'll inherit—  
Will it be the same?  
Are you guarding our future  
As well as you claim?

We have experienced—  
I and my peers—  
The life that you gave us  
These past sixteen years.

Once I am eighteen,  
Will I find myself free  
To make what I can  
Out of what's left of me?

We lived where you said  
And we did as you told  
Because we were not yet  
Sufficiently old.

Or perhaps I will find  
It's already been planned  
I must kill or be killed  
In some foreign land?

For some it was good,  
For some bad. Either way,  
It affects us, and we should  
Be given a say.

For some of us, it is  
Already too late.  
That's why I insist that  
My vote cannot wait.

- Sandra Buckley

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# Perspectives

## Youthful Rebellion by David Schneider-Joseph

Like many these days, I've become caught up in the blogging phenomenon. I read blogs every day, and even started my own last year. The author of one of the blogs I read regularly, *USS Clueless*, wrote a post — [http://www.denbeste.nu/cd\\_log\\_entries/2004/04/IndependenceandDisagreeme.shtml](http://www.denbeste.nu/cd_log_entries/2004/04/IndependenceandDisagreeme.shtml) — which I think there's a lot of truth to. Here's the meat:

It isn't demeaning, or a sign of slavery, to feel respect for the achievements of others, as long as it is *you* who evaluates what they did and decides that it is worthy of respect. Being independent doesn't require you to automatically reject and condemn everything ever done by "dead white males," or indeed to automatically reject anything whatever.

In fact, you are just as much an intellectual slave if you automatically oppose everything that a certain "other" thinks and does as you are if you automatically support and agree, for when you automatically oppose them, you still let them control your position.

What independence *does* require is that you make those choices for yourself. Unfortunately, that's a lot of work and it's pretty scary. It's easier to deceive yourself that you are independent by embracing the currently-fashionable "independent" lifestyle and political position.

In other words, it's important to recognize that truly being a free-thinker means being willing to *agree* with conventional wisdom, when it actually makes sense. If you automatically reject any position just because of its source, you're being at least as much of a "conformist" as those you are rebelling against.

But other parts of Den Beste's post are more problematic:

That basic drive to rebel, and to prove rebellion by doing things your parents condemn, is something most of us outgrow eventually. That's what most of us learn as we mature, as we outgrow youthful rebellion: "I can agree with others and retain my independence, as long as I am the one making the decision."

I've never accepted this concept of blind youthful rebellion being a natural part of growing up. There's no reason why young people have to be inherently rebellious. I've rebelled against a lot of things, and with good reason, but I don't think I ever rebelled for the sake of rebellion. True, many young people do, but they should not be excused for this because of their age. All people, young and old, have a responsibility to maintain an internal moral conscience.

That's the first thing to recognize. Despite how much disdain I have for the manner in which children are treated in this society, it is vital to avoid the trap of making excuses for those among them who genuinely make bad choices. Treating children like human beings works both ways: they must be held accountable to their choices as much as they must have the right to make those choices.

## News Links

### Louisiana May Open Files to Youth

In the only state where people can be denied access to public records if they're under 18, ASFAR member Michael Barker took action. The article at <http://www.splc.org/newsflash.asp?id=782> tells of Barker's role in the introduction of HB 492, an amendment to Louisiana's Public Records Act to ensure open access, regardless of age. Representative Tommy Wright, the bill's sponsor, thinks it has a good chance of passing.

### Class President's Message Cut Short

Moments after Nicholas Noel referred to his Michigan school as "the Union High prison system" in a May 19 commencement address, his microphone suddenly stopped working, just four sentences into his speech, says an article at <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=13388>.

### Police Destroy Student Press Photos

On May 11, two reporters for a Virginia high school newspaper photographed an incident involving eight police cars and five of their fellow students. One officer approached the photographer, asking to "see" the digital camera; he took it and showed it to another officer. When it was returned 10 or 15 minutes later, says <http://www.splc.org/newsflash.asp?id=808>, all the photos had been deleted from the camera's memory.

### Cops Save Girl From Self-Exploitation

A 15-year old Pennsylvania girl, arrested in March, has been charged with possession and dissemination of child pornography for posting her own nude photos on the Internet, says [http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/westmoreland/s\\_186625.html](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/westmoreland/s_186625.html).

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## Cheating and Integrity

by Renee Grissom

On Thursday, April 29, student cheating was the topic of the ABC news program *PrimeTime*. Descriptions of new technology used by cheaters—web sites to plagiarize, cell phones to store crib notes—were recent developments in this old story. But the most appalling revelation for the TV audience must have been the *prevalence* of the cheating. The numbers were designed to shock and mobilize a nation already angry at youth and their seeming unwillingness to be “educated” by their schools.

ABC’s own survey found 36% of students were cheaters, but their web page at <[http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/cheating\\_040429-1.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/cheating_040429-1.html)> mentions one survey in which 74% of high school students admitted cheating at least once. Today’s youth in crisis! The web site *doesn’t* mention that such confidential surveys, past and present, generally find “occasional cheating” levels of around 50% ... although one, in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* did report a figure of 81%—in December 1967.

When interviewed, many cheaters insisted that they believed in integrity and considered themselves ethical people. Lack of time for study, pressure by parents and schools for good grades, and the need to cheat just to “get by” in a world where everyone else is “doing it” were all reasons why they felt that they had to compromise their usual standards in certain cases.

A discussion forum on the *PrimeTime* web site prompted many irate responses to these “excuses.” Students who cheat, yet claim to have “integrity,” cried the postings, must either be deliberately lying or deceiving themselves—or else they don’t understand the meaning of the word.

### Judge Okays Campaign Censorship

Of the ten posters Jarred Gamwell put up at his North Carolina high school to promote himself for class president, two—the ones that said “Queer Eye for Hunt High” and “Gay Guys Know Everything”—were gone an hour later. On April 27, says <<http://www.gay.com/news/article.html?2004/04/27/5>>, a county court upheld the principal’s right to remove the posters.

### Web Site Expulsion Ends

An Ohio student, expelled for his web site, got help from the ACLU, says <<http://www.lancastereaglegazette.com/news/stories/20040507/localnews/371102.html>>. An update at <<http://www.nbc4columbus.com/education/3305249/detail.html>> reports that the school lifted the expulsion, and is working on a way for Thomas to make up all the school he missed.

## Perspectives

If we choose to engage in a group activity—try out for a team or a play, or accept a job—we also agree to any pre-existing rules. Any disagreement about what the rules are, or ought to be should be worked out beforehand; after that, it is a matter of integrity to follow the rules. If a supervisor, director, or coach is in authority, we must respect that person’s decisions, as long as our obligation lasts. To do otherwise would be dishonorable.

But if we did *not* choose to participate, did *not* consent to the rules, how does it show a lack of “integrity” not to obey them?

Imagine you are held hostage. The gunman obviously wants you to see him as an authority figure and obey his rules, and might feel justified in punishing you if you didn’t. But from *your* perspective, your obligation is not to obey the gunman, but to *escape* the situation, or at least get out of it alive. Your obligation is to do whatever it takes to achieve that goal—even lying or cheating. To allow his goals to become your own would be to relinquish your identity—and your integrity.

Adults may scoff at this comparison, since *their* actions aren’t illegal ... but the situations seem similar when *you’re* the one forced to pursue a goal you didn’t choose, and follow someone else’s rules, with no way out of it. It’s easy to condemn cheating when *you* have the right to set your own goals and make your own deals, before you submit to any rules.

## News Links

### Students Suspended for Protesting Policy

Was there “libel” in the fliers distributed on April 6 by three New Mexico high school journalists? The district’s lawyer thinks so, and says the suspension of the three protestors was justified. But from the article at <<http://www.splc.org/news/flash.asp?id=792>>, it seems what the fliers called “immature” and “immoral” was a newly-reimposed policy of “prior review” of the school paper—not the superintendent who imposed it.

### 1776 Too Racy For Middle School

Middle-schoolers in Fairfax County, Virginia will no longer be exposed to the “sexual innuendo” of Thomas Jefferson saying he “burns” for his wife in the movie *1776*, since the film has been banned, says <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A11721-2004Mar20.html>>.

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# News Links

## **New York Copies Chicago’s Mistake?**

In March, just as New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg decided to emulate the strict policy against “social promotion” that seemed to have been so successful in Chicago public schools, the Chicago Board of Education was concluding that maybe holding kids back wasn’t such a hot idea after all. By month’s end, says [http://cbsnewyork.com/topstoriesny\\_story\\_085162404.html](http://cbsnewyork.com/topstoriesny_story_085162404.html), the policy in Chicago had officially changed.

## **Reading, Writing, Roadwork**

An Arizona charter school faces fraud charges for taking state money from one agency to educate students, and more money from a different agency to have them perform road labor on school time, says <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0421SchoolCharged21-ON.html>.

## **In Loco Parentis**

On April 19, a Florida teacher allegedly told two 14-year-old boys to throw a female classmate out the window, which they did, according to <http://www.wsbtv.com/news/3034477/detail.html>. And on May 6, a second-grade teacher in Texas allegedly had the kids in her class line up and take turns hitting one boy, says <http://msnbc.com/id/4965104>.

## **Gang-Related = Whatever Black Kids Wear**

Students in Gwinnett County, Georgia, it seems, can wear anything they want, as long as it’s accompanied by white skin. The ACLU is representing one honors student who has been repeatedly singled out for violations of the vague prohibition of “gang-related” attire. Once, says <http://www.macon.com/mld/macon/news/politics/8558117.htm>, a boy’s pocket watch—a gift from his mother—was deemed “gang-related.”

## **“Southern Heritage” Controversy**

One thing school officials don’t want to see is Confederate flags, but students are vigorously protesting these bans, often with parents’ support. In North Carolina, a high school found the ban more “disruptive” than the symbol, and repealed it soon after it was instituted, says [http://www.flagwire.com/display\\_article.asp?id=7592](http://www.flagwire.com/display_article.asp?id=7592). And in Virginia, reports [http://www.flagwire.com/display\\_article.asp?id=7608](http://www.flagwire.com/display_article.asp?id=7608), over 80 students showed up at school wearing Confederate flag t-shirts the day after their prohibition was announced.

## **No Private Life For Private School Students**

Neil Kirkpatrick of Oregon, 12, was expelled from St. Pius X school for playing rock music at home. A brief mention is at [http://www.ncac.org/cen\\_news/cn93\\_long\\_short.htm](http://www.ncac.org/cen_news/cn93_long_short.htm); his mom’s thoughts are at <http://www.freemuse.org/sw4299.asp>.

## **GED Not For Kids, Some Say**

The percentage of General Educational Development (GED) diplomas being awarded to teenagers has “doubled since 1989” while “high school graduation rates have declined.” This, we learn at <http://www.tribnet.com/news/story/5073610p-5001170c.html>, worries some educators. “The GED was intended to be a second chance for adults,” not to “replace a high school education,” says one. (Maybe they also believe enduring hazing or torture is valuable for building character.)

## **California Senate Passes Drug Test Ban**

On May 18, the California State Senate approved SB 1386, banning random or “suspicionless” drug testing in the state’s schools, by a 26-10 vote. The story and a link to the bill’s text are at <http://www.news10.net/storyfull.asp?id=7165>.

## **Search and Seizure of Cell Phone**

An apparently drug-obsessed vice principal in Pennsylvania checked all the messages on a student’s confiscated phone, finding evidence of drug-dealing wherever she looked. The article at <http://www.timesleader.com/mld/timesleader/8573723.htm> says she also sent text messages to some people in the phone’s address book, pretending to be the student.

## **What Are They Hiding?**

Two Hartford, Connecticut elementary schools have prevented officials of the state’s child advocates office from entering to investigate complaints of misuse of restraints, injuries, and educational neglect of special education students, reports <http://www.wfsb.com/Global/story.asp?S=1860338>. The schools claimed they were protecting the children’s privacy.

## **One Less Worry For Indy Kids**

On May 25, the Indianapolis school board voted to ban corporal punishment from the city’s public schools, says <http://www.theindychannel.com/education/3347691/detail.html>.

## **Boy Used For Prank**

A music teacher in Brooklyn allegedly hung a kindergardener by his belt loop in a coat closet (having tried and failed to hang *another* child by his jacket and catching him as he fell to the floor), and left him there for another teacher to find, as a joke, according to [http://www.nydailynews.com/04-02-2004/news/crime\\_file/story/179799p-156265c.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/04-02-2004/news/crime_file/story/179799p-156265c.html).

## **The Weight of Discipline**

An Ohio mother, says <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/3310911/detail.html>, was shocked to learn that her son’s first-grade teacher made him wear a vest filled with sand to keep him still in class. The school superintendent defended the vest, saying it has a “comforting effect” on children, but agreed that it should not have been used without the mother’s approval.

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# News Links

## **Anchorage Curfew Stands**

On May 14, the Alaskan Supreme Court unanimously upheld the curfew law in Anchorage, requiring kids to be home by 11 on school nights and 1 a.m. in the summer and on weekends. Challenges the law has faced over the years are described at <<http://www.adn.com/alaska/story/5073842p-5001378c.html>>.

## **Illinois Curfew Allows “First Amendment” Activities**

Like the Alaskan curfew, Illinois curfews have added various exceptions to their curfew law to avoid unconstitutionality, including one for kids engaged in “First Amendment” activities, says <<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/cgi-bin/ppo-story/localnews/current/gu/05-20-04-300379.html>>. Now, doesn't the First Amendment include the right of peaceable assembly? As long as no violence had erupted, couldn't a group of kids, or one kid coming from any type of gathering, truthfully state that an activity protected by the First Amendment had kept them out after curfew? Only trouble is, that'd be kind of unfair to the solitary types who break curfew.

## **Detroit Malls Say No To Kids**

Two Detroit area shopping malls have instituted those “no unaccompanied kids” policies. Teen customers of the Fairlane Mall, interviewed at <<http://www.detnews.com/2004/metro/0405/03/b01-140528.htm>>, swore they would never return to that mall, which instituted its anti-youth policy on June 1; the Eastland Mall ban starts June 15, and is described at <<http://www.detnews.com/2004/business/0405/25/b01-162821.htm>>. But in several New York City suburbs, some sympathetic mall owners and managers assure their young customers that no such policy will be imposed; at <<http://www.thejournalnews.com/newsroom/052404/a0124curfew.html>>, one mall official remarked, “After ... the horror of 9/11, teens in the mall is not something I'm particularly concerned about.”

## **Father Overreacts, Misinterprets Scuffle**

On May 1, Daniel Peterson of New Jersey saw his daughter engaged in what appeared to be a fight with some boys outside his home, and came out to break it up. Satisfied that the fight was not serious, he started back inside, but the father of one of the boys, who had just arrived in his truck, got out and shot him in the head, according to <<http://www.wnbc.com/news/3261929/detail.html>>. Peterson is expected to recover.

## **Child Sex-Ring Hysteria Victim Freed**

After serving nearly his entire prison sentence, John Stoll was cleared of child molestation charges by a superior court judge on April 30. The article at <<http://signonsandiego.com/news/state/20040501-0019-ca-bakersfieldmolests.html>> says that Stoll's 1985 conviction was based entirely on the testimony of six children, four of whom now claim that they were coerced by investigators into making up the molestation stories.

## **Infamous Youth Prison Shut Down**

Soon after the privately-run Tallulah Juvenile Prison opened in Louisiana ten years ago, tales of brutal abuse began surfacing. Intermittent rioting prompted the state to step in periodically to assume control. Now, says <<http://www.theneworleanschannel.com/news/3353679/detail.htm>>, the state has given up, and is transferring all the residents to other facilities.

## **Riot At Florida Girls Prison**

Local police and rescue workers were called in when a violent melee broke out at the Florida Institute for Girls, near West Palm Beach, reports <[http://www.tcpalm.com/tcp/palm\\_beach\\_news/article/0,1651,TCP\\_1020\\_2858488,00.html](http://www.tcpalm.com/tcp/palm_beach_news/article/0,1651,TCP_1020_2858488,00.html)>. Eleven residents were sent to hospitals. Allegations of abuses had plagued the privately-run prison since it opened in 2000.

## **Tennessee Won't Force Church On Kids**

With single-family homes, each housing two house-parents and six kids, Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes sounds like it could be way better than state institutions. But the state can no longer send children to the homes, says <<http://www.abpnews.com/abpnews/story.cfm?newsId=4185>>, because all residents must attend church, whether they want to or not. The agency has never taken state money for children's care.

## **Nothing Done About Abuse**

Security camera footage of guards assaulting two inmates at a Stockton, California juvenile detention center, released to the media on April 1, prompted widespread outrage, but no criminal charges or discipline for anyone, says <[http://www.cjcj.org/press/videotaped\\_beating.html](http://www.cjcj.org/press/videotaped_beating.html)>.

## **Michigan Youth Home Official Resigns**

Ron Gekiere, superintendent of Macomb County Youth Home for 23 years, announced his resignation, reports <[http://www.freep.com/news/locmac/youth22\\_20040522.htm](http://www.freep.com/news/locmac/youth22_20040522.htm)>. The home, says <[http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=11624204&BRD=988&PAG=461&dept\\_id=141265&rfti=6](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=11624204&BRD=988&PAG=461&dept_id=141265&rfti=6)>, has been accused of abuse and “humiliating discipline,” rodent infestation, and failure to provide education to residents; there is also some suspicion that its officials may have misappropriated funds from the state and private donors.

## **Cops Pay Those Who Inform On Kids**

The Portsmouth, New Hampshire police want to catch kids drinking, and they'll pay \$50 for any tip that leads to an arrest. According to <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5078400>>, the police are publicizing the program to make sure pizza delivery guys and hotel clerks know about their “booze bounty.”

## Four books about fear.

Stearns, Peter N. *Anxious parents : a history of modern childrearing in America*. New York : New York University Press, 2003.

"No single group of people," observed Dr. Richard Farson in 1974, "has been studied more than children," so much so that "a complete and separate discipline has emerged .... In addition to the thousands of studies of children, there are hundreds of books giving advice on how to raise children." Now, of course, we can add the talk show episodes, news segments, and special TV reports, as well as the web sites, all devoted to various beliefs or concerns about children and their problems.) Anthropologist Mary Ellen Goodman, comparing the U.S. with other nations and cultures around the world, noted: "No other people seems ever to have been so preoccupied with children, so anxious about them ... so uncertain of how to deal with them."

The romantic myth is of childhood as a time of play and discovery, of parenthood as filled with joy, awe, and satisfaction. But in the United States, at least, both childhood and parenthood have been increasingly characterized by fear.

Author Peter Stearns traces the change in attitude to around the beginning of the 20th century. Advice manuals for parents suddenly grew larger and multiplied rapidly, now authored not by clergymen or their wives, but by psychologists or doctors. The view of children and youth as sturdy and resilient was challenged by a host of experts on the dangers to these vulnerable creatures' minds and bodies, even as the health of children improved and child mortality rates fell.

The perils were everywhere. For many parents, the new awareness of omnipresent germs translated into unachievable standards of sanitation for children, their

surroundings, and their potential playmates. Toothbrushes and pastes, luxury items in the 1800s, became essential for health by the 1920s, with daily use prescribed to combat another flaw in the bodies of human children. During the first half of the century, many schools and doctors embraced the notion that children's posture was naturally, almost universally bad, always requiring some kind of intervention to correct it.

Children were excluded from workplaces such as factories, confined instead to schools, but schoolwork could lead to eyestrain or promote damaging levels of inactivity. Automobiles made going outside increasingly hazardous, but the home, too, was full of danger and had to be "child-proofed"—toxic cleaning fluids and electrical outlets were fairly recent additions to many American homes.

Children's psyches were also at risk. Common emotional disturbances like nightmares and phobias required just the right handling, lest they develop into permanent psychological disabilities. A wrong word from a parent might cause irreversible damage. But if parents' guilt reached unbearable levels, they could embrace the "medical model," which pronounced parents blameless for their child's schizophrenia or depression, as well as newly-invented diseases as autism or attention-deficit disorder.

Smaller families may have contributed to the stake parents felt they had in each child, increasing their protective urges. But Stearns also points to the influence of capitalism in stoking up fearfulness. Magazine and book publishers had an "urgent need to find new issues to pon-

tificate about .... pediatricians and psychologists needed clients, and their claim that only they [could] resolve otherwise crippling deficiencies in children went a long way toward redefining ... childhood." Manufacturers of child safety devices were also "stakeholders in the belief in children's vulnerability."

Arranged by topic, *Anxious Parents* moves back and forth in time, comparing the different generations' childhood experiences of discipline, school, work and entertainment. Stearns is sympathetic to both children and their parents. While he opines that all this worry and control may not have had "a deleterious impact on children" overall, he does note an increase in childhood depression; among youth and young adults, difficulties with decision-making, lack of spontaneity, and prolonged transitions to independence have been observed. The effect on parents is clearer: surveys since the 1950s revealed ever greater levels of unhappiness, stress and guilt among parents, as compared with childless couples.

A few gems for youth rights supporters: the U.S. is now "one of very few societies around the world trying to defend a drinking age of twenty-one" (p. 53); in the 1950s, a father "grounded" his son, "a five-year-old ... thus confined to his back yard instead of being free to roam the neighborhood" (p. 77); the perceived increase in sexual content available to kids "has not been matched by comparable increases in youth degeneracy" (p. 186).

This is an enjoyable and enlightening book that should stimulate some great discussions. Get a copy and share it with your parents.

## Sue's Review

Susan Wishnetsky  
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Anderegg, David. *Worried all the time : overparenting in an age of anxiety and how to stop it*.  
New York : Free Press, 2003.

A parenting advice book for the anxious, *Worried All the Time* contains many of the hateful, insulting generalizations that are typical of the genre. But here and there, when the author is not dishing out his instructions on how to parent, some of what he has to say is not too bad.

As a psychology professor and child therapist, author Anderegg regularly sees parents turned into basket cases by non-existent or minor problems. He witnesses their overreactions to the crises-du-jour on the news or their favorite parenting web site (and people say that *kids* are the impressionable ones!). He hears about the lengths to which they are willing to go—sometimes compromising their dignity or their ethics—to spare their children from failure, consequences, rejection, or any kind of emotional hurt.

Some of his anecdotes are comical as well as revealing: a mother who spends every evening online learning how to interact with her daughters while they sit alone in their rooms, a father who demands that other kids laugh at his son's jokes for the sake of his self-esteem, a mother considering homeschooling because a boy in her daughter's second-grade class hit somebody once. On the more serious side, he deplores the overreactions of school officials to school shootings, enlisting student snitches to help identify any kids who are "weird" or "loners."

Anderegg proceeds to debunk some of the common beliefs among parents that he feels are exaggerated or untrue: the crucial need for "bonding," preschool, and a full schedule of extracurricular activities to ensure future success; fears of day care and babysitters, divorce, media sex and violence, and overstress.

(However, when he dismisses the harm of occasional corporal punishment, his other arguments become suspect!)

Occasionally citing data to make his case, the author does present some nice common-sense arguments for viewing one's child as just another person, rather than as a prized personal possession to be encased in a protective dome. Anderegg attributes much of the worry to excessive media hype, but he believes that smaller families—especially those with only one child—are an even bigger contributor. He doesn't go so far as to advise readers to "have another kid, you'll feel better," but seems to think it's not a bad idea.

The ugly parts are all about discipline, of course. Anderegg cites the studies of one psychologist, Diana Baumrind, who identified, between "authoritarian" and "permissive" parenting, a style she dubbed "authoritative," which involves listening, explaining, and "non-punitive" firmness. Baumrind claimed that children of authoritative parents turned out to be the "best". In Anderegg's interpretation, authoritative parenting means listening to your kids' requests and complaints, expressing empathy and understanding, and then enforcing your decisions anyway, because "there is a boundary between kids and adults that is a good thing—kids and adults are not the same."

Anderegg encourages parents to put aside their guilt over their own freer, less-supervised childhoods, learn to embrace their adulthood and the wisdom it has brought them, and stop being afraid to utilize the power of being a parent. From his descriptions of many of these parents, it sounds like maybe they *didn't* gain a lot of wisdom from adulthood, and maybe

they're right not to be too sure of themselves. Is there anything wrong with admitting that, to oneself or one's child?

One thing Anderegg decries is parents pretending that decisions made out of personal self-interest (such as enrolling kids in prestigious schools to enhance the parents' status, or arranging alternative care so parents can take a trip alone) are actually for the good of the child. There's nothing wrong with self-interest, but one should be honest about it.

The authoritative parent, as described, could be a force just as restrictive on a child's efforts to become independent, but, perhaps, harder to reject or hate. Might "authoritativeness" not be just a method of having one's own way, yet not seeming to be an ogre? Is that honest?

A few nice passages: "... kids who have been very protected from the extremes of contemporary media culture might be more vulnerable to temporary imitation, because it for those kids that the images are the most vivid and strange" (p. 156); "... parents who require ... that their children, and they themselves, will never, ever feel even a little eensy bit threatened by another child may be asking too much" (p. 185); "being watched ... can spoil a childhood .... If every move you make is videotaped by Mom or Dad ... you might develop a sense of being onstage a lot of the time" (p. 206).

There are some horrible passages, too. By the way, the index is worthless, pointing to topics that aren't there, leaving out topics that are. I recommend this book mainly for the discussions it can promote, but, as Anderegg himself would say to parents, don't take it too seriously!

## Sue's Review

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McGrath, Malcolm. *Demons of the modern world*. Amherst, N.Y. : Prometheus Books, 2002.

*Demons of the Modern World* is the true story of fear run wildly amok.

In 1983, California mother Judy Johnson reported to police her suspicions that her two-year-old son had been involved in satanic practices and sexual abuse at the well-respected McMartin Preschool. She claimed her son had told her about rituals involving goats, coffins, and drinking of blood, although the boy denied having said any such things. The story included the boy's eyes, ears, nipples and tongue being pierced with scissors or staples, but no injuries were found. Even so, the police decided to send letters to parents of current and former students of the preschool, asking if their children showed any signs of sexual abuse.

Two years later, Judy Johnson was diagnosed with schizophrenia; she died soon afterward. But the nationwide witch hunt she had begun had taken on a life of its own, spawning the psychological movement to retrieve repressed memories of abuse, believed by some to be present in as many as 54% of all women. Claims that a giant conspiracy of over a million Satanists, involving large corporations and government agencies, were responsible for the murder of as many as fifty thousand people a year, were duly reported in the news; the news reports themselves were then cited as evidence of the truth of the claims.

Author McGrath fills his pages with a great deal of material peripherally related to the satanic abuse craze itself: comparisons to other events such as the Salem witch hunt and the "Red Scare" of the McCarthy Era, a biography of Cotton Mather, long explanations of how human

beings tend to explain the world around them, psychological studies on memory and dreams, examinations of gothic and horror genres of literature and film. One might say this book throws together a hodgepodge of everything that might be in some way related to its primary topic. Yet almost all of it is interesting, if sometimes a bit repetitious. (After reading this book, I think I have a better understanding of the Henry James novel *The Turn of the Screw*, which had always baffled me—that's one thing I personally gained.)

The satanic abuse mania began with a few people, some of them professionals, who formed their conclusion *first* and found evidence to support it afterward. Training manuals for recovering repressed memories of abuse instructed practitioners that believing that abuse had occurred was essential for practitioners; only those already convinced that abuse had happened could guide their patients into remembering it. Aided by drugs, hypnosis, leading questions, and long, tiring sessions, they often succeeded. Self-help manuals for the public listed possible symptoms of repressed abuse so wide-ranging that nearly everyone could claim to have several of them, or see them in their children. In fact, even having no symptoms was seen as a sign that the hidden abuse had been pushed especially deeply into the subconscious.

Denial of abuse was always interpreted as a "state of denial" or being "in denial." Special meanings were superimposed by determined therapists onto any type of dream, doodle, or play activity. So these unwilling patients found themselves disbelieved and disrespected by people claiming to help them. But anyone who

hesitated to believe the abuse stories was accused of even greater disrespect: "to doubt the victims' claims was to act like those who doubted the Holocaust." Or, as in witch trials where questioning the reality of witches was itself "a form of heresy," one might find oneself accused of being part of the conspiracy.

While McGrath presents many examples of adults whose memories were altered by various types of intervention (which some children did resist), he repeatedly states that children's memories are more easily distorted. He also maintains that children's ability to distinguish between fact and fiction is especially unreliable, a surprising claim in light of all the adults who embraced the unfounded beliefs he describes in his book. At one point he makes the unqualified generalization that "all adults" have childhood memories of living in a world in which magic and monsters seemed real. I can assure him that I, for one, have no such memories. (Maybe I repressed them.) For a man who embraces the idea of gathering evidence *before* reaching conclusions, he seems all too willing to accept the prevailing assumptions about children.

I also think McGrath misinterprets the willingness of many people to believe in Satanists as a belief in magic or witchcraft. What was frightening to many of the people involved was not the idea that these Satanists had real magical powers, but that they were apparently committing actual, physical crimes of abuse.

Nevertheless, the book is a fascinating expose of a phenomenon that harmed or destroyed many lives and careers in the name of protecting children.

## Sue's Review

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Sternheimer, Karen. *It's not the media : the truth about pop culture's influence on children*. Boulder, Colo. : Westview Press, 2003.

Several weeks after the infamous 2004 Superbowl halftime show, at an ASFAR board meeting, somebody noticed that the members of this youth-rights organization seemed to be the only group of people that *hadn't* posted any comments about the "wardrobe malfunction" that caused so much furor. Everyone present agreed that they didn't care about the subject—except for feeling scornful of those who *had* made a big deal out of it. The discussion lasted a minute or so.

We weren't quite the only voices that didn't join the chorus of media-bashing. Author Mike Males has been ridiculing that old song for years; recently he was joined by cartoonist/screenwriter Gerard Jones (the author of *Killing Monsters*, reviewed previously in *Youth Truth*). Now sociologist Karen Sternheimer has joined the resistance, giving due credit to both of these two predecessors.

*It's Not the Media* brings together all the arguments against all the foolish fears. For youth rights advocates, it is a joy to read. The author won me over right away when she tells how her students respond when asked to define the term "child":

... there seems to be no trouble finding common adjectives. Words like innocent, good, cute, pure, helpless, and vulnerable to mischievous, impulsive, ignorant and selfish come up year after year. A close analysis of these terms reveals that they certainly do not apply to all children, and ... fit the behavior of some adults. Note that these words connote either sentimental or pejorative views of young people, a caricature of a vast and diverse group.

But Sternheimer has many more facts at her disposal than were gleaned from her students' responses, facts which should convert all but the most stubborn media-phobes. She addresses, chapter by chapter, each of the supposed media threats: violence, cartoons, video games, music, advertising, sex, and the internet. With the help of an unusually long list of source material, she debunks the usual myths, revealing that:

-the growth of media culture has NOT been matched by increased youth violence

-children's recognition of product brand names and slogans does NOT mean they've been seduced into wanting the products

-kids are in LESS danger online than just about anywhere else

The author echoes Mike Males in her chapter about society's "war on youth," adding to it the unfair characterization of her own generation, reaching adulthood during a recession, as "slackers" living at home, too lazy to find jobs. The view of young people as more wild, unethical, and out-of-control than ever before is not hard to find, even though "young people today are less likely to be violent, sexually active, smoke, or use drugs compared with their parents when they were teens."

Sternheimer exposes the flaws in studies claiming to prove that kids' exposure to media violence leads to real violence. The trouble is, like the sex abuse conspiracies described in *Demons of the Modern World* (reviewed in this issue), theories are often taken as gospel as soon they are embraced by a few famous names. If a famous psychologist or well-known

government official proclaims that the conclusions of a study are true, then the study itself is no longer needed as proof. The proof is in the endorsements.

There is even some information on the latest threat: obesity. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that the greatest increases in obesity during the 1990s were among adults 18-29 years old—not among children, as we are led to believe by news stories. I hadn't heard *that* piece of information before reading this book.

In other sections, Sternheimer examines often-criticized cultural phenomena such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, Eminem, and Marilyn Manson, to determine what it is about them that frightens adults and how kids often perceive them. She also looks at "family-oriented" entertainment, such as Disney films that tend to reinforce stereotypes and present unrealistic worldviews. The media doesn't originate, but rather reflects, societal problems. Of media influence, all we need to fear is media-inspired fear itself.

In contrast to many of the books I find myself reviewing, this one, while very well-researched, is not written in a "scholarly" style, thank goodness. You can skim it, you can skip around if you want, and you won't have to read the same sentence over and over to follow what it's trying to say. It's written for ordinary people, for readers who maybe didn't graduate from Harvard or Oxford

After over four years of writing reviews for *Youth Truth*, I think I've finally come across a book about which I can find absolutely nothing to criticize.

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## Curing Childhood

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The comparison in this study was between Prozac and one particular type of “talk therapy” (as it is rather derisively named in the news reports): cognitive behavioral therapy. This type of therapy is “goal-oriented,” teaching patients to shape their own thought patterns in positive directions, while avoiding “negative ruminations.” But according to one 2002 article, this approach is probably *not* well-suited for all depressed kids. Those who are depressed because of family problems would likely benefit more from “relationship-oriented” therapy. By closely examining the “contextual factors” of a child’s emotional problem, one can match each patient with the type of therapy that will work best.<sup>3</sup>

The Prozac study found that, of kids in the groups receiving cognitive behavioral therapy, their scores on those “common psychological scales” were more likely to improve if they also took Prozac. But the study’s rate of improvement from therapy alone, 43%, was lower than the rates found in many studies of “targeted” psychotherapy. The 2002 article cited above found recovery rates up to 87% from psychotherapy alone, if it was the appropriate *kind* of psychotherapy.

Even more striking is the fact that 35% of the placebo group “responded well” to no treatment at all. These are kids who were believed by the researchers to be “clinically depressed,” a condition that—many psychologists will claim—*doesn’t* just go away by itself. These are kids who would have been very likely to have been prescribed some kind of psychotropic drug—a drug with frequently-occurring side effects including weight gain, nausea, diarrhea, and elevated blood pressure—if they hadn’t ended up in the placebo group of a clinical trial.

If we assume that around 35% of all four of the groups would have “responded well” to no treatment at all, well, suddenly the “risk/benefit ratio” of Prozac doesn’t seem so impressive. Maybe a lot of those millions of medicated kids in this country *didn’t* need Prozac after all, and *weren’t* actually helped by it. Maybe all they needed was time.

For people with depression so severe that they simply cannot function in the world, and who *don’t* get better by themselves, a drug that enables them to get along and even enjoy themselves is a godsend. But many children are prescribed a drug as the first response to a problem, before other options are

explored. For those who are unhappy because of circumstances in their lives, handing them a drug to reduce their unhappiness encourages them to avoid dealing honestly with their world and the problems it presents.

Our emotions, however unpleasant they may be, can drive us to take necessary action to confront obstacles, work out compromises, make our lives and our world better. Although the force of our emotions may be frightening to those closest to us, it can also shake them into listening and paying attention. Sometimes the expression of strong emotions are what it takes for humans to effectively deal with those around them.

With enough drugs, we could probably all be oblivious to all the problems around us. Perhaps we could live perfectly happy fantasy lives as human batteries, as in the movie *The Matrix*. But most of us would not see that as a human life. As human beings, we *decide* when our emotions should be suppressed, expressed, or simply felt. We gradually learn when we should conquer them, and when we should let them carry us forward. We learn what they are about and what we can do about them.

Psychotherapy can sometimes help in this process of learning and deciding about our emotions. Simply taking pills cannot. And in most cases, we don’t need to take a pill, we don’t need to make the emotions go away. We can live with them, tolerate or try to control them, use them, accept them as part of ourselves.

There are many things about childhood that can make a child depressed. Even if we can cure the depression, it will take more than drugs or therapy to make the problems go away. It will take changes in our laws and changes in our society. We need our emotions and our wits about us, if we are to face the problems in our world as human beings.

1. “Prozac appears safe, effective in teens.” *drkoop.com*, June 2, 2004, <<http://drkoop.com/template.asp?page=newsdetail&ap=93&id=519310>>.
2. “Will British ban spur FDA to act?” *Insight*, Feb. 2, 2004, <<http://www.insightmag.com/news/2004/02/17/Features/Will-British.Ban.Spur.Fda.To.Act-593520.shtml>>.
3. Sherrill, J.T. and Novacs, M. “Nonsomatic treatment of depression.” *Child and adolescent psychiatric clinics of North America*, v. 11, no. 3 (July 2002), p. 579-593.

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