
Youth Truth



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Standing Alone

Susan Wishnetsky

Like many of his classmates, José David was mad. The newly-installed security cameras at DeWitt Clinton High School pointed at students like accusing fingers. Their cellphones, which might link them to their parents in an emergency, were now forbidden in the name of safety. Leaving school for lunch was no longer allowed, even though the cafeteria was regularly overcrowded already. Most ominous of all were metal detectors, not yet functioning, at the school's entrance.

The increased security was prompted by what was either a "surge in violent crime" or a "rash of weapons-related incidents." Whatever the violations were, they didn't occur *last* year, but the year *before*, the 2003-2004 school year, when the Bronx high school tallied 13 offenses, instead of New York's citywide average of 8.3.

"You hardly see fights in our school. Our school is safe," protested one student.

On Wednesday, September 14, the new screening procedure was explained to the students. Line up. Empty your pockets, remove belts. Backpacks and other bags will be X-rayed, and may be searched.

The first two days of the new regime went horribly badly. Imagine facing airport security the day before Thanksgiving—every weekday for nine months. Students

resigned themselves to getting up an hour earlier. And José David collected 266 signatures on a petition against the new measures in less than an hour.

Over the weekend, the students griped and debated on a high-school web site called Sconex.com. José David chimed in too, posting an invitation for others to join him in an hour-long silent protest outside the school on Monday morning. He prepared some banners for the event.

But by the Monday morning, José David found everyone's mood had changed. At 7 a.m. he was standing all by himself as all the other students dutifully lined up to pass through security. "Nobody stood with me, not even my friends A lot of people were like, 'Don't even waste your time.' I felt like an idiot." For all he knew, his protest really had failed—it really looked as if no one was going to join him.

How long he stood there alone, feeling like an idiot, we do not know. We only know that it was long enough. Long enough for a few students to get tired of standing in line, look over at him, and realize that there was *another* place to stand that made more sense. Then a few more got disgusted and left the line. And then more. And then once the protest was really happening, they didn't want to quit, and decided to stay awhile longer.

By 11:30, the crowd had grown to 1500. By noon, DeWitt Clinton protesters were marching two miles to the Department of Education's office, carrying banners. When they arrived, four of them were allowed to meet with officials.

What did they achieve? The school has pledged to eliminate the long morning delays, but the other policies, so far, are still in place. They got their names in the paper and a lot of public support.

More important is what they learned, and what we can learn. Taking a stand means taking a risk. José David's efforts might have failed; he might have been punished, or at least embarrassed. Taking a stand doesn't mean anything will necessarily change, or even that anyone else will stand with you. But before you can have the *possibility* of change, or of people just coming together to fight for change, you need to have a José David, someone who is willing to go *first*, to lead.

ASFAR members know what it's like to feel alone, silently cringing at offensive comments that "everyone" agrees with, or defending our point of view only to be shot down or ridiculed. It's safer and easier to back down, when push comes to shove. But if *none* of us is willing to take the risk and be that lone person standing, nothing can ever change.

The *New York Times* article about José David was on page 1 of section B, Sept. 21, 2005. Others are at <http://wcbstv.com/topstories/local_story_263064338.html>, <<http://www.ny1.com/ny1/content/index.jsp?stid=1&aid=53657>> and <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/story/348052p-297031c.html>>.

Redirect

Recent ads from the Office of National Drug Control Policy blaming marijuana for causing depression and schizophrenia caught the eye of author Maia Szalavitz. Her Salon.com article debunking the drug czar's shoddy science is reprinted at <<http://www.cannabisnews.com/news/thread21124.shtml>>.

The Center for Education Reform released a report in August on charter school funding, which claims that the charters are getting cheated; it appears at <<http://edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=document&documentID=2165§ionID=55>>. On the other hand, an editorial sends the warning that, with *that* kind of attitude, charter schools will end up with just as much "bloat" as public schools; see <<http://www.educationnews.org/Youve-got-to-be-kidding.htm>>.

On the FDA's "concern" over teens' access to "Plan B" birth control, judges who recuse themselves from abortion cases, and other laws restricting kids' access to reproductive health care, syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman speaks her mind at <<http://www.jsonline.com/news/editorials/sep05/356332.asp>>.

On August 17, the school board of Pennsylvania's Central Columbia School District voted 5-3 in favor of a new policy restricting the speech and writing of students on their own time. The policy essentially imposes the same restrictions on kids at home that they face while at school. When dissenters warned of lawsuits, one board member responded "Bring 'em on." Mitchell Sommers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* counts the ways the policy sucks, at <<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/opinion/local2/12719406.htm>>.

Schools open in August? or July? Columnist Mitch Albom of the *Detroit Free Press* doesn't like it one bit, and says so at <http://www.freep.com/sports/albom/mitch28e_20050828.htm>.

When a National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse study recommended that families eat dinner together to keep the kids off drugs, a columnist at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was skeptical, and expressed her doubts at <<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/magazine/daily/12667886.htm>>.

A nice piece about Able Child, an organization promoting alternatives to Ritalin and other psychotropic drugs, appears at <<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/local/articles/0918edADHDagainst.html>>.

Obituary

Elizabeth Blodgett Hall, founder of Simon's Rock College in Massachusetts, died July 18 at the age of 95. Simon's Rock grants early admission to talented 16- and 17-year-olds. Hall established the school because of her belief that high schools were failing to serve mature adolescents eager for "academic and personal challenges."

Hall herself dropped out of college after one year, but returned to attend Radcliffe at the age of 32, fitting her classes around her children's schedules. She then served as headmistress of a private school for 14 years before founding the innovative "early college" in 1964. A wonderful obituary illustrating Hall's intelligence and quirky humor appears at <<http://www.simons-rock.edu/externalAffairs/EBHweb.html>>.



Elizabeth Blodgett Hall

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Letter

Thank you very much for your “care package” of buttons, flyers, and back issues of *Youth Truth*. I read every one.

I was disappointed but readily understand why the “hot button topic” was rarely discussed: the age of consent. These backward laws ruin countless thousands of lives every year. To criminalize consensual human affection simply because of age is simply unforgivable.

In 1954, I was nine years of age. My best friend in the neighborhood, nine-year-old “Petey,” had an older sister, “Shirley,” a gentle, sensitive girl of about 14 or 15. Shirley and I became very close in spite of our ages. We had many mutual interests, especially music and flowers. It wasn’t long before we began to share touches and then embraces. I was thrilled, excited, and flattered by the love of such a beautiful and thoughtful young woman. And then we went beyond embraces. All of it was totally consensual, very gentle and enlightening.

Shirley shared our secret with one of her girlfriends who felt it was her duty to tell her parents about this “inappropriate behavior.”

From what you describe, the adults who learned of your relationship handled the news in the stupidest and most damaging of ways. It’s too bad we cannot hear Shirley’s story, which was probably much worse (although your insistence that you were a willing participant may well have made her hardship less severe).

ASFAR members have repeatedly voted to affirm the section of the organization’s Declaration of Principles opposing the concept of the “age of consent.” This position has certainly not helped ASFAR as an organization: talented members have resigned over it, and mainstream groups have refused to work with us on joint projects—just because of this one

I never saw Shirley again.

The police came to my house, convinced that I had been “victimized” by this older person. I wondered then why it was any of their business, or anyone else’s. They tried to get me to admit that I had been deceived, tricked, seduced, or forced to participate. I told them I’d participated willingly, but they didn’t buy that—I had been “victimized.” Why should they care? Neither of us had a complaint. Was it only because she was 15 and I was 9? Why should that matter? I wanted to see Shirley, but didn’t dare go to her house.

None of my friends saw Shirley again. A week or two later, her house was empty.

What right did they have to ruin that wonderful girl’s life?

Today, half a century later, I look back on my relationship with Shirley as the happiest experience of all my childhood. The experience with those interfering adults—“for my own good”—burned into me an extreme hatred of youthful oppression of all kinds.

I will love Shirley forever!

position. We continue to affirm it because we believe in it and it is consistent with our other principles. But even among our members who support the position (and there are those who don’t), I think it’s safe to say that most probably *wouldn’t* choose that issue as their first priority.

The subordinate position of minors in our society really may put them in a position in which their consent (or refusal) cannot be considered free or voluntary. Consider a minor’s “choice” to obey his or her parents, embrace their religion, go to school, and so on. Kids are *constantly* made to do things against their will, and they’re sometimes pressured to pretend they *like* it. They are forced, by law, into

As you know, young people are extremely affectionate—and sexual—and not only with “age appropriate” partners. I remember very clearly in my mid-20s (early 1970s), my best friend, 26, fell completely in love with a young woman who returned his affection fourfold. They were inseparable. She was 14. The tension and the fear of discovery always loomed large, and finally, after two years, they parted. I had known my friend since 1957, and he was never before or after as happy as he had been in those years.

How many other countless thousands or perhaps millions of intergenerational affectionate human relationships have been ruined by these unrealistic laws?

Please, let’s take this subject off the back burner. I realize that it is a sensitive subject—let’s kick the hell out of it! I am hoping that ASFAR will devote more attention to this serious subject.

Ryan Edwards
August 12, 2005

Response

a dependent position from which they cannot walk away. They are legally permitted to be punished at will, potentially at the mercy of whoever is “in charge.” How can one *not* worry about coercion?

To your claim that “young people are extremely affectionate—and sexual,” I must add the word “*some*.” Young people, like older ones, are *not* all the same. Some, like you and Shirley, may willingly enter into intimate relationships. But it’s not unreasonable to think that kids may be *more* likely to be intimidated into them. Not because they’re young, but because they’re permitted and expected to be intimidated in so many areas of their lives.

Susan Wishnetsky

Perspective

Government by, for, and of the people is the principle upon which this republic (if we may call it that) and other modern republics and democracies were founded. In theory, it means that the people govern themselves. In practice, it means that government is the responsibility of elected officials, chosen by voters periodically from a field of candidates. In addition, every person is supposed to be guaranteed certain basic rights. This form of government arises from the mechanism of the Social Contract.

In the real world, the social contract will always be less than the ideal. John Locke admitted that few, if any, men since Cain and Abel have existed in a State of Nature (which people leave by creating the Social Contract). These people, few as they may have been, created the Social Contract because they desired law and order more than they desired unlimited anarchic liberty, and saw that government was the best way to ensure that law and order. The contract for a republic such as ours states that the people give the government the authority to govern, but retain the authority to

reappoint the government periodically. This is less than the *ideal* Social Contract—government changing on a dime to suit the people’s wants—but it suits the real world just fine.

The basis of the modern American Social Contract is the vote. Through voting, Americans exercise their sovereignty as a people to decide who will fill the positions created by numerous levels of government. When officials, legislators and executives are elected they are able to create bureaucracies, collect taxes, make other laws, and maintain a police force to enforce laws important enough that breaking them is deemed a criminal offense. In some places judges are elected as well and judge all legal disputes brought before their courts in the name of the people and the law.

Dirtying this happy state of affairs is the ugly specter of legally-enforced ageism. While in most of the states of our Union even ex-felons are allowed their Social Contractual right to vote, all people under the age of eighteen are governed without that right. They are considered

chattel, the property of their parents or state-appointed guardians, with no rights except the right to live safely and receive the state’s version of education. They are not granted Locke’s natural rights of Liberty and Property, nor are they included in the Social Contract which covers the rest of the nation—that allowing the government to govern gives them the authority to vote, and thereby to govern the government.

So what is their Social Contract? In a nation of government by, for and of the people, how does a disenfranchised minority group fit in?

For young people, the situation is this: government *by* elected officials over the voting age, *of* voters over the voting age, *for* people under the age of majority. Adults over the voting and candidacy ages govern by deciding what they *think* young people need. The governed youth are given no legal recourse whatsoever, no channel through which to speak their actual needs and desires, except through guardians who have every option to not pay any attention at all. However, this is still a form of Social Contract and must therefore serve the young people’s rights of Life, Liberty and Property.

News Links

Hosty Tries For High Court

In June, a circuit appeals court ruled in favor of the dean and against the student journalists in *Hosty v Carter*, a decision that would extend to college newspapers the limitations on free expression rights originally applied to high school papers. The students have now appealed to the Supreme Court, says <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?15809>>.

“Free Speech” School Censors Site

Hudson High School in Massachusetts is a member of the “First Amendment Schools” project, but it draws the line when a school club’s posters include links to photos of people being beheaded. Club founder Christopher Bowler has sued the school on his club’s behalf, says <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1058&year=2005>.

Rapper Wins

Anthony Latour, a 14-year-old Pennsylvania student, is back in school, since a district court judge overturned his suspension for composing rap lyrics in his home. The school viewed the lyrics as “threats,” says <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=15695>>.

By, For, and Of : An essay concerning government by trust and
the philosophical justification of young people's rights
in the United States of America

Eli Gottlieb

As in the monarchies of old, however, perversions of interest inevitably occur. Thus a school system which purposely inculcates obedience and destroys the innate love of learning present in most children has been foisted upon them. The award-winning teacher John Taylor Gatto tells us that "After the Civil War, utopian speculative analysis regarding isolation of children in custodial compounds where they could be subjected to deliberate molding routines began to be discussed seriously by the Northeastern policy elites of business, government, and university life. These discussions were inspired by a growing realization that the productive potential of machinery driven by coal was limitless."

Curfews and parental custody restrict young people's movements around their own homes and hometowns. They are routinely denied the right of fair trial over the age of majority take for granted, old enough to be pronounced guilty of breaking rules and laws set up by adults, but not old enough to serve on a jury that would provide a fairer trial. They can be put in medical or psychiatric treatment by parental consent alone, against their will, or whisked off to an abusive gulag school by night.

Young people's money, investments and material possessions are controlled by their "wiser" parents and guardians—sometimes with the result of guardians stealing or squandering their children's goods and never being held responsible. Can it be in the child's best interest for parents to take out credit cards in their children's names and go deep into debt, resulting in the child having such a horrible credit rating they can't get their own card when they try to set one up? That has actually happened to some young people. It is a result of young people being governed as "trusts" with their parents as the trustees.

The current system of government by adults, of adults, and for youth not only allows these kinds of abuses, but fosters them. In the name of preserving their Life, the Liberty and Property of young people are confiscated. But the Social Contract is established to uphold all of those natural rights—Life, Liberty, and Property. If those rights are violated or denied, the people have the right, under the Social Contract, to reconstitute the Social Contract and the government until their grievances are addressed.

Unless they are given a proper Social Contract that truly upholds their rights, young people will remain as oppressed as the subjects of an absolute king or olden-day black slaves. Government by the people, of the people and for the people—all of them—is the only regime that can be tolerated in any nation that wishes to call itself a democracy or republic. It has already been established that the fundamental right of the people in the Social Contract is that of voting; therefore young people need the right to vote before all their other rights.

Once the right to vote is granted all other rights will surely follow, as young people exert more influence in government. First will come the lowering of the voting age, next the ages for holding office, and then others ... until finally all age limits are abolished and a truly reasonable and just Social Contract-based government is established for all citizens, young as well as old.

News Links

New York Suspension Upheld

If you're 13, writing a violent, sexy story (not a good idea these days anyway), here's a tip: *don't* name your characters after your *classmates*. That literary device led a judge to uphold the suspension of Dylan Finkle, says <<http://www.splc.org/newsflash.asp?id=1080&year=2005>>.

Book-Banning Fight in Arkansas

An Arkansas group called Parents Protecting the Minds of Children wants the Fayetteville school board to remove 58 books from its school libraries; the list seems to have come straight off of a national web site. Another parents' group has formed to take the other side, says <<http://www.nwaonline.net/article/2005/09/11/news/regional/01book.txt>>.

"Under God" Struck Down Again

On September 14, U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools is unconstitutional. Attorney Michael Newdow, whose earlier lawsuit on behalf of his daughter was dismissed by the Supreme Court, gives a good argument at <<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/LAW/09/14/pledge.ruling.ap/>>.

News Links

Department Won't Publish Bilingual Ed Report

A report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education on bilingual—as opposed to English-only—education of non-native speakers has apparently come out strongly in favor of the bilingual method. But after spending \$1.8 million on the report, the department has decided not to release it, saying that the report is flawed. Political motives for the decision are suspected by many immigrant groups. An admittedly biased article (but the best we could find) provides the details at <<http://www.nabe.org/press/press9.html>>.

House Okays Faith-Based Hiring for Head Start

On September 22, the U.S. House approved Ohio Rep. John Boehner's amendment to a Head Start reauthorization bill, allowing groups receiving federal funds to run Head Start programs to include the religion of applicants in their hiring criteria, says <<http://www.knoxstudio.com/shns/story.cfm?pk=HEADSTART-09-30-05&cat=WW>>.

Funding Cut Off for Silver Ring Thing

Charging that funds provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to an abstinence program called Silver Ring Thing were being used to promote religion, the ACLU sued the department earlier this year ... but they won't have to go to court this time. The Department pulled the plug on its grant to the group, ordering it to submit a "corrective action plan" if it hopes to get the funding back. See <http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/news/article_print.cfm?id=3176>.

Evolution Fight Proceeds

Regarding the battle to give equal time to "intelligent design" in biology classes, there are too many articles to list. The two main news items in the past few months: President Bush's August endorsement of the idea, and the September 26 start of a Dover, Pennsylvania's civil trial on the issue; those two stories are at <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8792302/>> and <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=15830>>.

Okay, Two More ...

If you're really into the creation vs. evolution thing, there's a long, critical profile of Kansas Board of Education member Connie Morris, who called evolution an "age-old fairytale," at <<http://www.pitch.com/Issues/2005-08-18/newsfeature.html>>. And a story we missed this summer: Virginia teacher Larry Booher used *Creation Battles Evolution*, a book he wrote himself, in his biology class for 15 years without any school officials knowing about it. Booher agreed to cease and desist, says <<http://www.roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/xp-25094>>.

Spellings Caves on Tutoring

Chicago Public Schools and four school districts in Virginia have persuaded Education Secretary Margaret Spellings to allow their "failing" schools to provide their own tutoring services, instead of hiring outside companies to do the job. And now that a few districts have gotten a break, chances are all the other districts will ask for one too. Read the details at <<http://www.suntimes.com/output/education/30tutor.html>>.

Connecticut Sues Education Department

Claiming that it has not received nearly enough funding to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, the state of Connecticut filed a lawsuit on August 22, demanding that the federal government either drop the mandates or fork over the funds, according to <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-08-22-connochildleftbehind_x.htm>.

Schools Now Out of Kids' Medical Decisions

On July 1, an amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, the "Prohibition on Mandatory Medication," took effect; now schools may no longer require a child to take a controlled substance to stay in school, according to <<http://www.aapsonline.org/nod/newsofday196.htm>>.

Katie Isolated From Family

Katie Wernecke, the 13-year-old Texas cancer patient ordered by a judge to receive radiation treatment against her wishes and those of her parents, has been rebelling against her treatment, even the chemotherapy which she'd previously accepted. Although Katie insisted that her resistance was her own idea, Judge Carl Lewis banned her parents from all contact with their daughter, before he himself was hospitalized with a heart condition. The legal and emotional situation is described at <<http://www.click2houston.com/news/5035023/detail.html>>.

Another "Black Box" for ADHD Drug

Less than a year after a "black box" warning of potential liver injury was added to the packaging of the attention deficit hyperactivity drug Strattera, its manufacturer Eli Lilly is now adding another such warning, this time for suicidal thinking. The basic facts are at <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory?id=1170050>>, but another article at <<http://www.fortune.com/fortune/articles/0,15114,1112519.00.html>> reveals that Strattera may have even more serious side-effects.

Too Short? Try Increlex!

Now FDA approved: a drug for "short stature" in children who don't respond to growth hormone therapy. See <http://www.medgadget.com/archives/2005/09/igf_approved_fo.html> and <<http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/514140>>.

News Links

Texas In Violation on Medicaid

In August, U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice found the state of Texas had not complied with its 1995 agreement to improve the healthcare it provides for children in the Medicaid program. The judge agreed with attorney Susan Zinn, who filed the case on behalf of Medicaid-eligible Texas youth, that the situation has even deteriorated in the past decade, reports <http://www.cwa-tseu.org/news_050823_texas.html>.

Judge Recusal Trend Worries Planned Parenthood

In 33 states, the parents of a pregnant minor must either give their permission or at least be notified if she wants to get an abortion—unless a judge agrees to waive that requirement. Now more and more judges are recusing themselves from such cases, leaving many girls with no access to the courts, says <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/09/04/news/abort.php>>.

FDA Women's Health Head Quits In Disgust

On August 31, Dr. Susan Wood resigned as head of the Food and Drug Administration's Office of Women's Health, presumably because of the agency's continued refusal to grant over-the-counter status to the emergency contraceptive pill known as Plan B. FDA Commissioner Lester Crawford has repeatedly cited his concern that minors might be harmed by taking the drug without a doctor's supervision. Wood wrote in a note to women's health groups that "scientific and clinical evidence, fully evaluated ... by the professional staff here, has been overruled." See <<http://www.wpherald.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20050901-042812-9148r>>.

Husband of Minor Faces 50-Year Jail Term

They married with their parents' blessings in May, in Kansas, where it was legal for them to do so, and returned home to Nebraska to raise their newborn daughter. But when the state's attorney general John Bruning heard about the couple in July, he charged 22-year-old Matthew Koso with sexual assault—against his willing bride, Crystal, who was 14. The good news: public opinion mostly favors leaving the couple alone, says <http://handelonthelaw.com/news_details.aspx?News=1403>.

Book Cancelled Over Controversial Chapter

"About 20 e-mail messages," prompted by a scathing article on the web site WorldNetDaily, were all it took to convince Haworth Press to cancel its publication of a scholarly book on same-sex relationships in history. The trouble was provoked by a chapter in the book on sexual relations between adult men and adolescent boys, which failed to condemn such relationships as inevitably and universally harmful to the younger participants. More details are found at <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/09/27/publish>>.

Groups Sue Utah Over Internet Content Law

This isn't the "anti-spam" registry for children we discussed in our last issue; as far as we know, that law has not yet been challenged. No, this one is a law requiring internet service providers to block all content containing anything "harmful to minors," similar to other laws that have all been struck down by courts. The ACLU is joined by Center for Democracy & Technology, the Freedom To Read Foundation, and a large number of internet service providers, artistic and informational groups, bookstores and other businesses in their suit against the state of Utah, filed on June 9. See <<http://www.techweb.com/wire/security/164301907>> and <<http://www.cdt.org/publications/policyposts/2005/15>> for more details.

Video Game Panic Spreads Westward

Following the lead of Illinois, the California General Assembly has passed a bill banning the sale of violent video games to minors. As we go to press, Governor Schwarzenegger hasn't yet signed or vetoed the bill; see <http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/sep2005/id20050913_126634.htm> for more details. Meanwhile Kevin Kieffer, a psychology professor at St. Leo University in Illinois, is trying to spread the truth about video games: that his own studies and those of other researchers have demonstrated *no* long term increase in aggression or violence among gamers, and that the games' benefits may well outweigh the short-term consequences, he explains at <<http://www.news-gazette.com/localnews/story.cfm?Number=18869>>.

The Real Roots of Violence

In 1999, a jury awarded \$4.4 million to Yusimil Herrera and her sister to compensate them for their years of abuse in Florida's foster care system (after an appeal, Herrera settled and got about \$80,000). On September 17, Yusimil was again in court, now accused of beating her 3-year-old daughter to death. See <<http://www.sun-sentinal.com/news/local/miami/sfl-d-hearing17sep17,0,2194017.story?coll=sfla-news-miami>>.

Agency Monitoring Doesn't Save Child

When Charlene Snyder of Las Vegas found her two-year-old daughter dead in her mobile home, she dutifully called police. The police were shocked to find an emaciated body weighing about 11 lbs., and a home infested with lice, feces and garbage. Two older girls and a baby boy were also living in the deplorable conditions. Nevada's Child Protective Services had been "monitoring" the family since 2002, but the police reported that none of the children had seen a doctor in about a year; see <<http://www.klastv.com/Global/story.asp?S=3696925>>.

Sue's Review

Susan Wishnetsky
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Johnson, Steven. *Everything bad is good for you : how today's popular culture is actually making us smarter*. New York : Riverhead Books, 2005.

I mostly enjoyed Steven Johnson's book. It was about pop culture, which is usually fun to read about. It told me (mostly) what I wanted to believe anyway. But as a source of great arguments, it was a little disappointing.

Video games, he says, don't turn kids into zombies—that's focus, not mindlessness. Do kids become addicted to video games? Well, they become obsessed, but a little obsession is necessary to thoroughly master anything. And today's video games teach kids to make decisions, set goals, and figure out how to achieve them—valuable skills in the real world.

Johnson addresses some doubts, but not to my satisfaction. Could it be, for example, that people drawn to video games are already "hard-wired" to be skilled at "winging it" and making decisions? That gamers would be better at these skills even if they'd never played a video game? He cites studies showing that non-gamers also get better at certain skills immediately after playing. Sure, a little practice will help anyone, even at something they're lousy at, but they're not likely to improve much in the long-term, if the skills don't come naturally. And gamers, if they had no video games, might well find some other way to practice decision-making and goal-achieving skills.

Johnson makes a fairly good case that TV shows and movies are more challenging than they used to be, and that people of average intelligence are the ones who have benefitted most. But his arguments are not without logical flaws:

A famous study by University College London found that London cabdrivers had, on average, larger regions in the brain dedicated to spatial memory than the ordinary Londoner. And veteran drivers had larger areas than their younger colleagues. This is the magic of the brain's plasticity: by executing a certain function again and again, you recruit more neurons to participate in the task. (p. 108)

I'm not convinced by that at all! And what's worse, the author doesn't tell you—anywhere—what that study was called or how to find it! There are "notes" in the back of the book, but only for portions the author *feels* like commenting on. Long passages full of "facts" give no sources at all.

I liked how the author casually mentioned, just in passing, that there was "no clear consensus" on a link between TV violence and violent behavior. *I liked* a lot of this book. But I wouldn't really call it persuasive—not if you read it carefully.

News Links

Corporal Punishment Costs Cops

Two Illinois boys who were taken into custody by police and spanked or paddled in the police station in 2004 have settled their lawsuits for a total of \$94,000; a third boy has just filed a similar lawsuit, says <<http://www.nospank.net/n-o99r.htm>>.

Teen Treatment Article Ignores Abuse

An August 17 *New York Times* article covered the troubled teen "industry" from the financial angle, as a business or investment story. The author interviewed and quoted parents, as well as the owners and employees of facilities, but the opinion of the teens themselves was apparently unworthy of being heard. Author Maia Szalovitz saw this article and had to respond; her article appears alongside the *New York Times* piece at <<http://www.nospank.net/n-o93r.htm>>.

Baby Dies in Disreputable Daycare

A Virginia woman with a long rap sheet, including abuse of children left in her care and stealing identities of her clients, surfaced once again when nine-month-old Hannah Weiss died in her home, serving as a day care center, on September 14, reports <<http://www.wtkr.com/Global/story.asp?S=3861116>>.

Ohio Children Slept in Cages

The kids weren't kept in the brightly painted cages all the time—only at night. The adoptive parents said a psychiatrist recommended locking them up at night, to protect them. They played outside, had toys, seemed well-fed. But when police, alerted by a social worker, saw urine-stained mats inside tiny boxes lined with wire mesh, it sure looked like abuse to them. Eleven children, eight who slept in cages. See <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20050913/ap_on_re_us/caged_children> and <<http://www.newsnet5.com/news/4972643/detail.html>>.

Sue's Review

Levitt, Steven D. and Dubner, Stephen J. *Freakonomics: a rogue economist explores the hidden side of everything*. New York : William Morrow, 2005.

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I argued with myself over whether a review of *Freakonomics* belonged in *Youth Truth*—I read it just for fun, and it's not really on topic. But then, it doesn't exactly have a topic—except how questions are properly answered and how they're not. And while some of the questions the authors address are about real estate agents' motivations and incentives, sumo wrestlers' rigged matches, and office workers eating bagels, some are quite relevant to us, like how and why teachers cheat, and what kind of parents have kids with the highest grades.

All of the questions are fun and interesting, and the authors seem to have no political agenda. Interest groups cherry-pick data, finding results to support the answers they wanted in the first place; this book doesn't seem to do that. If the answer is clear, it explains why it is so clearly true, and it's believable. And when the answer isn't so clear, that gets explained too.

Truth is truth whether you like it or not, and in the chapter called "What Makes A Perfect Parent?" there were some things I didn't like at all. First, the chapter's title—it is only the children's "academic performance" that is used to measure the "perfection" of the parenting (and it's not even clear whether this is based on school grades or standardized test scores).

Second, the data source itself may not be reliable; the authors even admit this. They'll look at any data they find, but that doesn't mean they buy into it completely. But third, being "regularly spanked" is listed among the factors that have *no impact* on this presumably good outcome; that you can be a "perfect parent" whether you spank your kids or not. Yikes.

It is a bestseller, after all—pop lit, not heavy-duty scholarship, and the authors express doubts about this particular finding. They suggest that parents who *admit* to doing something so "unenlightened" must be "congenitally honest," and "it may be that honesty is more important to good parenting than spanking is to bad parenting." I can think of other explanations ... but let's take it for what it is: one study showing no correlation between spanking and grades. That's not so bad.

Notes in the back referring to page numbers (with no little superscript numbers sprinkled through the text) seems to be a common convention for popular books, but at least in this book the notes are thorough, covering every section and giving all the facts and sources you need. The conclusions the authors reach in *Freakonomics* may be debatable, but their approach and their style, are certainly ... well, irreproachable.

News Links

Pakistan Serious About Violence-Free Schools

On September 18, the Chief Secretary of Pakistan, as part of a crackdown on corporal punishment in schools, ordered that notices be placed inside and outside the main gates of all schools which read "Corporal punishment in all government and private schools is forbidden by the Punjab government." Visits by inspectors were also planned, to ensure compliance, says <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_18-9-2005_pg7_22>. Just ten days later, another article reported that a headmaster was fired and fined for beating a student, according to <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_28-9-2005_pg7_21>.

Hooray, British Curfew Struck Down

In July, the British High Court ruled in favor of a 15-year-old challenging "under-16" curfew zones, says <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/england/london/4699095.stm>>.

Taiwan Heads Toward Corporal Punishment Ban

On August 9, Taiwan's Premier Frank Hsieh announced his plans to make his nation a place "where no kid gets beaten." The Education Minister planned to introduce a bill at once to ban corporal punishment in schools; the Interior Minister said he would focus on educating families to avoid physical punishment, gradually moving toward a total ban, says <<http://www.crin.org/violence/search/closeup.asp?infoID=6075>>.

Army Needs Men, Even Old Ones

Desperately seeking new enlistees, the Defense Department took a small step in the right direction on July 18 and asked Congress to raise the maximum recruitment age for all branches of military service from 35 to 42, according to <<http://www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-983408.php>>.

News Links

Parenthood Now Officially Too Risky

In August, an Ohio jury found the parents of Ben White largely responsible for stabbing a girl 11 days before he turned 18, ordering them to pay *\$10 million* to the girl and her parents. The parents may well have been exceptionally “negligent,” as the jury found, but still ... doesn’t it make you think twice about having a kid? See <<http://crime.about.com/b/a/196684.htm>>.

Illinois Parents All Upset Over Nothing

On September 8, “three or four teenagers ... giggling and laughing” in a car pulled alongside some elementary school kids and asked “Do you want some candy? Do you want a ride home?” It seems likely that the teens wouldn’t have let the children in the car, even if any had accepted the offer, but many area parents saw this clear case of kidding around as a real threat, says <<http://www.nbc5.com/news/4969652/detail.html>>.

Major Penalty for “Unlawful Restraint of Minor”

He sounds like an old grump, but you gotta feel sorry for poor Fitzroy Barnaby. His name will now appear on an Illinois sex offender registry, even though all he did was grab a girl by the arm to lecture her for running out into traffic. Luckily for him, this story is posted all over the Web, so if anyone accuses him of being a pervert, all he has to say is “Google my name.” The original *Chicago Sun Times* article is at <<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-molest01.html>>.

Son’s Exposure to Wicca Okayed on Appeal

In his 2004 divorce decree, Judge Cale Bradford of Indiana ordered Thomas E. Jones and Tammy Bristol, both practicing Wiccans, to shield their son from their “non-mainstream” faith. But this August the Indiana Court of Appeals struck down Judge Bradford’s requirement, according to <http://www.beliefnet.com/story/173/story_17335_1.html>.

Illinois Super Robs District Blind

Thomas Ryan, a tough, zero-tolerance kind of superintendent who was paid \$180,000 a year to run one of Illinois’ poorest school districts, was charged in August with (among other crimes) stealing more than \$100,000 from school funds—an estimate which may rise, since police uncovered \$730,000 in cash in Ryan’s basement. Two articles on the scandal appear at <<http://www.wtop.com/index.php?nid=316&sid=557102>> and <http://susanohanian.org/show_outrages.html?id=4717>.

Hertz Not Number One With Young Adults

You can vote and even legally drink, but still can’t rent a car! Hertz generally refuses to rent to drivers under 25, but Avis and Budget have eased up a bit on the age thing, although they may charge you extra for being young. Some good tips are at <<http://www.thedesertsun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050814/LIFESTYLES08/508140309/1050>>.

Grownups Misbehave, Kids Punished

“It’s not kids getting tickets and getting in accidents on Lake George,” said Peter Bauer, executive director of the Residents Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, “it’s older people in their 20s, 30s and 40s.” So why did he *support* the village bill raising the minimum age to operate a Jet Ski from 10 to 14? The law, passed on July 28, takes effect in 2006, says <<http://timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=384014>>.

Big Bail for Boston Boy

Bail for a 12-year-old who fired a gun on the street, harming no one, was set at \$250,000 by a frustrated Judge Paul D. Lewis even though the D.A. had recommended an amount of \$5000, says <<http://crime.about.com/b/a/196678.htm>>.

School Limits Free Speech of Parents

A private school in England now requires parents to sign a contract vaguely requiring them not to “bring the school into disrepute.” It also *seems* to state that corporal punishment might be allowed, although corporal punishment was outlawed in British schools 30 years ago. More on the bizarre school at <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1783022,00.html>>.

Oops, Forgot to Say—No Gay Parents

In September, 14-year-old Shay Clark of California was kicked out of Ontario Christian High School because her parents’ sexual orientation was deemed “inconsistent with a positive Christian life style.” Tina Clark and Mitzi Gray had made no secret of their 22-year relationship, and their older daughter had attended the school for four years with no problem. See <http://www2.presstelegram.com/news/ci_3056813>.

Colleges Train Parents to Let Go

Colleges have set up orientations sessions to teach parents the difference between “caring” and “interfering.” But one Boston University employee said she was surprised at how seldom students these days object to the intrusive behavior of their parents. See <http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2005/08/20/case_of_the_hovering_parents/>.

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