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Documents and Depression, by Kris Anne Bonifacio

Joaquin Luna's dream was simple. He wanted to become a civil engineer. But the Texas student's undocumented status limited his options for the future. Left without hope, the 18-year-old shot himself the day after Thanksgiving last year. In his goodbye letters, Luna expressed despair. In one letter addressed to Jesus Christ, he wrote that he had "no point of existence in this cruel world… I've realized that I have no chance in becoming a civil engineer the way I've always dreamed of here… so I'm planning on going to you and helping you construct a new temple in heaven."

Luna was one of the more than 2 million undocumented children and young adults living in the United States. The inability for them to legally obtain a social security number makes it a struggle to get a driver's license, apply to college and find a job. Young people like Luna are already at a heightened risk of having anxiety disorders, that often go untreated, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. But for undocumented youth, the risks are even greater due to uncertainty over their future, fear of getting arrested and deported, and social stigma about being undocumented. "Being undocumented means instability, uncertainty," says Fanny Lopez-Martinez, an undocumented 23-year-old graduate student at the University of Chicago. "You have no future. You can't plan. You can't envision what you want to do. You feel locked in a box. And it's hard to come to terms with the fact that you're going to be like this for you don't know how many years."

Clinical Research

According to Josefina Alvarez, a professor on Latino mental health at the Adler School of Professional Psychology in Chicago who works with immigrant community organizations, evidence about the mental health consequences of being undocumented are beginning to emerge out of case studies with immigrant children and families. "Feeling insecure and uncertain about your life and your future has serious mental health consequences and may lead to anxiety and depression," Alvarez says. "Feeling stigmatized and unwanted can also have a negative impact on self-esteem and may lead to depression and other negative behaviors."

In a 2008 study done by the Carolina Population Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, 31% of Latino adolescents in North Carolina showed signs of sub-clinical or clinical anxiety and 18% showed signs of depression. The study did not distinguish between those who are here legally and those who are undocumented, but the demographics of those surveyed reflect that 93% of the children were not U.S. citizens. The study also looked at the participants' usage of mental health services and found that only 4% of those surveyed had received any mental health services in their lifetime. Undocumented immigrants are already at a disadvantage due to the structural barriers to accessing these services, such as lack of health insurance, cost of services and language barriers.

Paralyzing Fear

Fear of authorities and fear of deportation isn't just a barrier to seeking mental health care. It can often be the very cause of anxiety and depression for undocumented immigrants. In 2010, 19-year-old undocumented Brazilian Gustavo Rezende hung himself behind his Marlborough, Mass., home, reportedly worried about his court hearing after being arrested on misdemeanor charges

for driving under the influence and driving without a license. Rezende's family and friends said he was afraid of being deported back to a country he barely knew.

In a case earlier this year, 22-year-old Yanelli Hernandez attempted suicide twice while being detained at Butler County Jail in Ohio.

Hernandez had been arrested on a DUI charge and was awaiting deportation. Her case became the cause célèbre for many immigration groups, including National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) and the Chicago-based Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL). Activists demanded that Hernandez be released from detention so she could receive treatment for depression, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials announced in late January that she was deported to Mexico. Saavedra, who is a friend of Hernandez's and organizes with NIYA, experienced the conditions inside a detention facility firsthand when he infiltrated the Broward Transition Center in Florida in July. Saavedra and another NIYA activist, Viridiana Martinez, intentionally turned themselves in at Port Everglades in order to raise awareness about the detention and deportation proceedings are like.

"The wait while you're inside [the detention center] is huge mentally," Saavedra says. "It was taxing. The center is nowhere near their families and these people don't know their legal rights. They're about to be deported to countries where they have no resources." Saavedra says that though the detention center was very similar to a motel, the psychological effects of being imprisoned take a toll on the undocumented immigrants, especially the minors.

Furthermore, detention and deportation often causes family separation, something that Velazquillo personally experienced. In 2010, her brother Erick was driving home from the gym in North Carolina when a cop pulled him over for driving with his high beams on. He was arrested and charged for driving without a license and spent three days in jail. He posted a bond and was released, but for almost a year, his future remained uncertain as he faced the prospect of deportation back to Mexico. Velazquillo and her family worked with NC DREAM Team to publicize her brother's case. After a judge granted her brother a reprieve, ICE officials decided in August 2011 to let him stay in the country.

"For those who find themselves or their loved ones in detention, it causes a lot of distress," Velazquillo says. "You're separated from your family, and it's hard to get in touch with them to try to get information about what's going on. The financial aspect is also a huge burden, having to post a bond for them to be released. And the effect it has on children in the family, it's hard to explain to them what's going on."

Keeping Secrets

Even those who manage to avoid arrest and deportation still deal with the daily worries of keeping their status a secret. Yaxal Sobrevilla, a Chicago resident and organizer for IYJL, says that while her parents were open about their immigration status within their family, her mother told her she had to be careful about whom she talked to about being undocumented.

Furthermore, simple tasks that citizens and legal residents sometimes take for granted become a source of frustration, such as getting a driver's license. "What were supposed to be minimal privileges, such as getting a driver's license, become such an obstacle," Sobrevilla says. "I became dependent on my parents and friends to get me places. Although they were, for the most part, willing to drive me around, it made me feel like such a burden."

For Saavedra, the constant lying and keeping secrets took a toll on his mental health. Saavedra said that as he came closer to graduating from college, the pressure about his immigration status and uncertain future caused a lot of stress. "The timeline for me was getting shorter, so I started feeling really depressed during my junior year of college," Saavedra says. "For the sake of my mental health, I decided it was time to tell people the truth about my immigration status."

After College

In a study conducted last year by University of Chicago professor Roberto Gonzales, only 31 of the 150 undocumented immigrants interviewed received a bachelor's degree or more. Of those 31, none were able to pursue their chosen careers after graduation. And though all of the 150 respondents were educated in the United States, they ended up in the same jobs their parents had, such as working in construction, cleaning services and restaurants.

Carla Navoa, a 23-year-old undocumented Filipina who studies at University of Illinois at Chicago, says that while her immigration status inspired her to work hard in school, she found out later that she wouldn't be able to achieve her dream of becoming a teacher. "In high school, knowing that I was undocumented made me work harder in school to prove I was just as good as other students and the sacrifices my parents made coming here were worth it," Navoa says. "But in my junior year in college, I found that I couldn't apply for a teacher's certificate. I had a serious breakdown and had a lot of mental issues, and I had to leave school for a while to work through that."

In an incident similar to Luna's, Chicago resident Benjamin Pintor committed suicide on Thanksgiving weekend in 2010 because, friends and family say, his undocumented status left him without many options. Dr. Martinez says that undocumented youth have a tendency to take it upon themselves to help their family rise above their immigration status.

"They take on a lot of responsibility, in some ways self-imposed, that they have to be the one to lift up and advance their family,"Martinez says. "It's common in undocumented families, a lot of whom are low on the socioeconomic scale. They know that education is the key to a good quality of life, but when the opportunity to succeed is taken away, it takes a severe toll on their mental health."

Undocumented and Unafraid

One bright spot is that young activists are feeling empowered by the DREAMers movement and many of them say that organizing and getting involved has helped them cope with depression and anxiety. "For me, coming out and being outspoken about how urgently the immigration system needs to be fixed is so necessary," Sobrevilla says. "It was hurting me more not being able to try to change my situation." Sobrevilla says that groups like IYJL and NIYA provide a support network for many undocumented youth. That network is particularly comforting for undocumented young adults, as they risk getting arrested and deported by coming out about their immigration status.

The University of Chicago's Lopez-Martinez says she found comfort in attending an IYJL meeting and hearing the stories of undocumented youth just like her. She says she first heard about the group from two of her college friends. "They told me that there's a group of students just like us," Lopez-Martinez says. "They're undocumented, they're young and they want to make a

difference. IYJL is a place to talk about your feelings, what it means to be undocumented. That's very empowering, to know that you're not alone and that many other youth just like you are going through the same thing."

Velazquillo and other organizers from NIYA decided to use the healing power of a support system to help other undocumented youth across the country. They started Undocuhealth, a blog that deals specifically with the mental health needs of undocumented immigrants. "We wanted a place where we could talk about these issues because they are not being addressed," Velazquillo says. "We want to be able to provide resources for those who need it."

But ultimately, the lack of action on immigration reform continues to be taxing for undocumented youth. Though there was alot of buzz after the election on the increasing electoral power of Hispanics and the pressure they can levy on politicians, immigration, in the immediate future, has taken a backseat to the fiscal cliff discussions in Washington. "Continuing to delay a solution to the problems related to undocumented immigrants adds to the stress these young people feel," Alvarez says. "If they see that we, as a society, can't find a solution to this problem, they will become more discouraged and hopeless."

Saavedra says that he is hopeful he and other activists can increase understanding and awareness among Americans about undocumented youth. "I hope our work humanizes DREAMers instead of having people think of us as 'illegal' or 'border crossers,'" Saavedra says. "People need to recognize that we can suffer from depression just like they can." Alvarez agrees that humanizing the issue would help address the problem. "Immigration policy has real mental health consequences," she says. "It's not just about dealing with those who have broken the law and securing the borders. There are real human beings that are going to be affected by our immigration policies."

Zero Tolerance: Childfree and Bigotry, by Henry A. Giroux

There are mounting ideological, institutional, and political pressures among conservatives, liberals, and other advocates of corporate culture to remove youth from the inventory of ethical and political concerns that legitimize and provide individual rights and social provisions for members of a democratic society. One consequence is that there is growing support among the American public for policies, at all levels of government, that abandon young people, especially youth of color, to the dictates of a repressive penal state that increasingly addresses social problems through the police, courts, and prison system. As a result, the state has been hollowed out, largely abandoning its support for child protection, healthcare for the poor, and social services for the aged. Public goods are now disparaged in the name of privatization, and those public forums in which association and debate thrive are being replaced by what Paul Gilroy calls an "info-tainment telesector" industry driven by dictates of the marketplace. As the public sector is remade in the image of the market, commercial values replace social values and the spectacle of politics gives way to the politics of the spectacle.

In the summer of 2000, The New York Times Sunday Magazine ran two major stories on youth within a three-week period between the latter part of July and the beginning of August. The stories are important because they signify not only how youth fare in the politics of representation but also what identifications are made available for them to locate themselves in public discourse. The first article, "The Backlash Against Children" by Lisa Belkin, was a feature story

forecasted on the magazine's cover with a visually disturbing, albeit familiar, close up of a young boy's face. The boy's mouth is wide open in a distorted manner, and he appears to be in the throes of a tantrum. The image conjures up the ambiguities adults feel in the presence of screaming children, especially when they appear in public places, such as R-rated movies or up-scale restaurants, where their presence is seen as an intrusion on adult life. The other full-page image that follows the opening text is even more grotesque, portraying a young boy dressed in a jacket and tie with chocolate cake smeared all over his face. His hands, covered with the gooey confection, reach out towards the viewer, capturing the child's mischievous attempt to grab some hapless person by the lapels and add a bit of culinary dash to his or her wardrobe.

According to Belkin, a new movement is on the rise in American culture, one founded by individuals who don't have children, militantly describing themselves as "child free," and who view the presence of young people as an intrusion on their rights. Belkin charts this growing phenomenon with the precision of an obsessed accountant. She commences with an ethnographic account of 31-year-old, California software computer consultant Jason Gill, who is looking for a new place to live because the couple who have moved in next door to him have a new baby and he can hear "every wail and whimper." Even more calamitous for the yuppie consultant, the fence he replaced to prevent another neighbor's children from peering through at him is now used by the kids as a soccer goal, "often while Gill is trying to read a book or have a quiet glass of wine." But Belkin doesn't limit her analysis to such anecdotal evidence, she also points to the emergence of national movements such as an organization called No Kidding!, which sets up social events only for those who remain childless. She reports that No Kidding! had only 2 chapters in 1995 but has 47 today. In addition, she comments on the countless number of online "child free" sites with names like "Brats!" and a growing number of hotels that do not allow children under 18 unless they are paying guests.

Of course, many parents and non-parents alike desire, at least for a short time, a reprieve from the often chaotic space of children, but Belkin takes such ambivalencies to new heights. Her real ambition has very little to do with providing a space for adult catharsis. Rather it is to give public voice to a political and financial agenda captured by Elinor Burkett's The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless—an agenda designed to expose and rewrite government policies that relegate "the Childless to second-class citizens." Included in Burkett's laundry list of targets are: the federal tax code and its dependent deductions, dependent care credits, child tax credits among "dozens of bills designed to lighten the tax burden of parents" and, "most absurd of all" an executive order prohibiting discrimination against parents in all areas of federal employment. Her position is straightforward enough: to end "fancy" benefits (i.e., on-site child-care and health insurance for dependents) that privilege parents at the expense of the childless and to bar discrimination on the basis of family status. "Why not make it illegal to presuppose that a non-parent is free to work the night shift or presuppose that non-parents are more able to work on Christmas than parents?" Burkett demands. Indeed, why should the government provide any safety nets for the nation's children at all?

Belkin modifies her sympathetic encounter with the child-free worldview by interviewing Sylvia Ann Hewlett, a Harvard educated economist and nationally known spokesperson for protecting the rights of parents, and the founder of the National Parenting Association. Hewlett argues that parents have become yet another victimized group who are being portrayed by the media as the enemy. Hewlett translates her concerns into a call for parents to organize in order to wield more economic and political power. Hewlett's comments occupy a minor commentary

in the text that overwhelmingly privileges the voices of those individuals and groups that view children and young people as a burden, a personal irritant, rather than a social good.

The notion that children should be understood as a crucial social resource who present for any healthy society important ethical and political considerations about the quality of public life, the allocation of social provisions, and the role of the state as a guardian of public interests appears to be lost in Belkin's article. Instead, Belkin focuses on youth exclusively as a private consideration rather than as part of a broader public discussion about democracy and social justice. She participates in an attack on youth that must be understood within the context of neoliberalism and hyper capitalism in which the language of the social, community, democracy, and solidarity are subordinated to the ethos of self-interest and self-preservation in the relentless pursuit of private satisfactions and pleasures. In this sense, the backlash against children that Belkin attempts to chronicle are symptomatic of an attack on public life, on the very legitimacy of those non-commercial values that are critical to defending a just and substantive democratic society.

The second article to appear in The New York Times Sunday Magazine is titled "Among the Mooks" by RJ Smith. According to the author, there is an emerging group of poor white males called "mooks" whose cultural style is fashioned out of an interest in fusing the transgressive languages, sensibilities, and styles that cut across and connect the worlds of rap and heavy metal music, ultra-violent sports such as professional wrestling, and the misogyny rampant in the subculture of pornography. For Smith, the kids who inhabit this cultural landscape are losers from broken families, working-class fatalities whose anger and unexamined bitterness translates into bad manners, anti-social music, and uncensored rage.

Smith appears uninterested in contextualizing the larger forces and conditions that gives rise to this matrix of cultural phenomena deindustrialization, economic restructuring, domestic militarization, poverty, joblessness. The youth portrayed in Smith's account live in a historical, political, and economic vacuum. Moreover, the teens represented by Smith have little recourse to adults who try to understand and help them navigate a complex and rapidly changing cultural landscape in which they must attempt to locate and define themselves. Along with the absence of adult protection and guidance, there is a lack of serious critique and social vision in dealing with the limits of youth culture. No questions are raised about the relationship between the popular forms teens inhabit and the ongoing commercialization and commodification of youth culture. There is no understanding in Smith's analysis of how market driven politics and established forms of power increasingly eliminate non-commodified social domains through which young people might learn an oppositional language for challenging those adult ideologies and institutional forces that both demonize them and limit their sense of dignity and capacity for political agency.

Of course, vulgarity, pathology, and violence are not limited to the spaces inhabited by the hyper-masculine worlds of gangsta rap, porn, extreme sports, and professional wrestling. But Smith ignores all of this because he is much too interested in depicting today's teens, and popular culture in general, as the embodiment of moral decay and bad cultural values. Smith suggests that poor white kids are nothing more than semi-Nazis with a lot of pent up rage. There are no victims in his analysis, as social disorder is reduced to individualized pathology, and any appeal to injustice is viewed as mere whining. Smith is too intent in reinforcing images of demonization and ignorance that resonate comfortably with right-wing moral panics about youth culture. He succeeds, in part, by focusing on the icons of this movement in terms that move between carica-

ture and scapegoating. For instance, The Insane Posse is singled out for appearing on cable-access porn shows; the group Limp Bizkit is accused of using their music to precipitate a gang rape at the recent Woodstock melee; and the performer Kid Rock is defined in racially coded terms as a "vanilla version of a blackploitation pimp" whose concerts inspire fans to commit vandalism and prompts teenage girls to "pull off their tops as the boys whoop." It gets worse.

At one level, "mooks" are portrayed as poor, working class, white kids who have seized upon the most crude aspects of popular culture in order to provide an outlet for their rage. But for Smith, the distinctive form this culture takes with its appropriation of the transgressive symbolism of rap music, porn, and wrestling does not entirely explain its descent into pathology and bad taste. Rather, Smith charges that black youth culture is largely responsible for the self-destructive, angst-ridden journey that poor white male youth are making through the cultural landmines of hyper-masculinity, unbridled violence, "ghetto" discourse, erotic fantasy, and drugs. Smith points an accusing finger at the black "underclass," and the recent explosion of hip hop which allegedly offers poor white kids both an imaginary alternative to their trailer park boredom and a vast array of transgressive resources which they proceed to fashion through their own lived experiences and interests. Relying on common racist assumptions about black urban life, Smith argues that black youth culture offers white youth a wide-screen movie of ghetto life, relishing the details, relating the intricacy of topics like drug dealing, brawling, pimping, and black-on-black crime. Rap makes these things seem sexy, and makes life on the street seem as thrilling as a Playstation game. Pimping and gangbanging equal rebellion, especially for white kids who aren't going to get pulled over for driving while black, let alone die in a hail of bullets (as Tupac and B.I.G. both did).

Trading substantive analysis for right-wing cliches, Smith is indifferent to both the complexity of rap as well as the "wide array of complex cultural forms" that characterize black urban culture. Smith alleges that the problem of white youth is rooted in the seductive lure of a black youth, marked by criminality, violent hyper-masculinity, welfare fraud, drug abuse, and unchecked misogyny. Smith unapologetically relies upon this analysis of black youth culture to portray poor white youth as dangerous and hip-hop culture as the source of that danger. Whatever his intentions, Smith's analysis contributes to the growing assumption that young people are at best a social nuisance and at worse a danger to social order.

These articles reflect and perpetuate in dramatically different ways not only the ongoing demonization of young people, but also the growing refusal within the larger society to understand the problems of youth (and especially youth of color) as symptomatic of the crisis of democratic politics itself.

As the state is divested of its capacity to regulate social services and limit the power of capital, those public spheres that traditionally served to empower individuals and groups to strike a balance between "the individual's liberty from interference and the citizen's right to interfere" are dismantled. At the same time, it becomes more difficult for citizens to put limits on the power of neo-liberalism to shape daily life—particularly as corporate economic power is feverishly consolidated on a transnational level. Nor can they prevent the assault on the state as it is being forced to abandon its social role as the guardian of public interests. The result is a state increasingly reduced to its policing functions, and a public sector reduced to a replica of the market. As neoliberalism increases its grip over all aspects of cultural and economic life, the autonomy once afforded to the worlds of cinema, publishing, and media production begins to erode.

Public schools are increasingly defined as a source of profit rather than a public good. Through talk shows, film, music, and cable television, for example, the media promote a growing political apathy and cynicism by providing a steady stream of daily representations and spectacles in which abuse becomes the primary vehicle for registering human interaction. At the same time, dominant media such as the New York Times condemn the current cultural landscape—represented in their account through reality television, professional wrestling, gross-out blockbuster films, and the beat-driven boasts and retorts of hip-hop—as aggressively evoking a vision of humanity marked by a "pure Darwinism" in which "the messages of popular culture are becoming more brutally competitive."

Unfortunately, for mainstream media commentators in general, the emergence of such representations and values is about the lack of civility and has little to do with considerations of youth bashing, racism, corporate power, and politics. In this sense, witness to degradation now becomes the governing feature of community and social life. Most importantly, what critics take up as a "youth problem" is really a problem about the corruption of politics, the shriveling up of public spaces and resources for young people, the depoliticization of large segments of the population, and the emergence of a corporate and media culture that is defined through an unadulterated "authoritarian form of kinship that is masculinist, intolerant and militaristic."

At issue here is how we understand the ways youth produce and engage popular culture at a time in history when depravation is read as depravity. How do we comprehend the choices young people are making under circumstances in which they have become the object of policies that signals a shift from investing in their future to assuming they have no future? Certainly not a future in which they can depend on adult society for either compassion or support.

"Normalizing" Intersex Youth, by Hida Viloria

People who promote nonconsensual genital surgeries and/or hormone therapy for intersex infants and children — often called "corrective" or "normalizing" treatment –believe intersex children will grow up to be adults who fall short of social norms. However, these beliefs are purely speculation because they have not taken the time to speak with intersex adults like myself who did not undergo surgery, or to do follow-up studies on the children whose bodies they irrevocably changed. Doctors simply assumed that our bodies are not desirable, and that nonconsensual treatments would help us and/or our families. In my personal experience, and from the experiences that countless of intersex adults have shared, this couldn't be further from the truth.

Doctors decided, back in the late 1950's, that they knew how to make intersex bodies better. Although dozens of intersex adults who were subjected to these "corrective" procedures have been speaking out for almost two decades about how harmful these "treatments" were for them, the medical establishment has still not recommended that they be postponed until the child is old enough to decide for themselves if they'd like to change the genitals they were born with. Although other humans are given this right (with the exception of circumcision), most intersex infants today, sadly, are not.

One of the reasons these surgeries persist is similar to the reason circumcision does: people get used to whatever "look" is popular and want their children to have it, to "fit in." However, the bigger reason is that some people still assume that, because our biological sex is not standardly male or female, our social gender won't be either. It is this fear of an androgynous, non-binary so-

cial gender role that drives recommendations for surgery, for some believe it will lead to children and adults who "stick out," or suffer psychological difficulties.

I have found, in talking to dozens of intersex adults, that these fears are unfounded and incorrect, but, as a recent New York Times article illustrates, they persist.

> There haven't been any studies that would support doing nothing," says Larry Baskin, Grumbach's protégé and current chief of pediatric urology at the University of California, San Francisco. "That would be an experiment: don't do anything and see what happens when the kid's a teenager. That could be good, and that could also be worse than trying some intervention." In Baskin's view, being intersex is a congenital anomaly that deserves to be corrected like any other. "If you have a child born with a cleft lip or cleft palate or an extra digit or a webbed neck, I don't know any family that wouldn't want that repaired," he told me. "Who would say, 'You know what, let's wait until Johnny is 20 years old and let him decide?'"

Contrary to Dr. Baskin's statement, there have been studies that would support doing nothing. In fact, one of only two studies in existence about intersex adults, performed in 1952 by Dr. John Money for his dissertation at Harvard, showed that intersex adults who had not been medically tampered with showed less incidence of psycho-pathology than non-intersex adults. In other words, intersexuals were found to be psychologically healthier and better adjusted than non-intersexuals.

The other study, performed recently in England, found that even when adult intersexuals had voluntarily employed surgery to "normalize" their bodies, the results were ineffective and harmful. The surgeries were unable to provide "normal" bodies and created physical problems, such as tremendous physical pain, which made their lives more difficult than before.

Dr. Baskin claims it would be an "experiment" to "do nothing" to an intersex infant or child. However, changing a healthy body via modern medical science in order to try to make it "better" than what nature created is what seems an experiment. His view that ambiguous genitals are akin to a cleft lip that any parent would want to correct before adulthood is astoundingly simplistic and inaccurate. The function and psychosocial significance and impact of genitals is much more complex and significant than that of a cleft or uncleft lip. He misses the points that adult intersexuals and their advocates have made about how the surgeries left them sexually damaged and/or impaired and often very psychologically confused about their true identity.

However good the intentions may be, surgeries done on infants to "correct" their sex or their sexual organs have been shown repeatedly to be unsuccessful. Children do not need these organs to look any particular way until they become sexually active later, and as we have often seen, it is impossible to determine how an infant or child will want to express themselves sexually as an adult. Because we can not tell how masculine, feminine or androgynous a baby will later want to be, "picking" how to "make" their body appear is basically a crap-shoot. Why would you want to run that kind of irrevocable risk on your child's future fulfillment? What if you and the doctors made the wrong choice, one your child was ultimately so miserable with as to be suicidal, as we see in so many cases of "corrective" medical treatment.

In thinking about children and their development and experiences, many adults forget, or perhaps do not realize, that prejudices and stigma are learned. Children do not believe, for example, that black and brown people are dangerous, poor, unintelligent, or inferior until they learn these

beliefs from an adult. Even in those instances, some children reject these learned beliefs in favor of their own by adulthood or throughout it.

Because no one ever said a word about my genitals being "wrong" in some way, and I wasn't operated on or given hormones to "correct" anything, I was able to form my own beliefs about my body and my identity, and those ideas were positive. As I mentioned in a 2002 on ABS's 20/20, the first time I saw another girl's genitals in a locker room at age eleven, my first thought was "she's missing something." There was no reason for me to assume anything was wrong with my body and so I did not. Such is the case for others who escaped "medical normalization."

In 1998 I interviewed three intersex adults for my undergraduate thesis at U.C. Berkeley entitled, "Experience Versus Theory: The Testimonies of Adult Intersexuals on the Medical Management of Intersexuality." These adults, like myself, had not undergone surgical or hormonal treatment of their intersex conditions. The interviews revealed that, as children, they did not experience the trauma and confusion that doctors and others often presume they will, despite having very ambiguous genitalia and very unusual social circumstances to navigate through. Further, as adults, they were all in long-term, committed, seemingly happy, healthy relationships. They appeared mentally healthy, were gainfully employed, and had friends and a social life. Basically, they seemed just as happy and successful as any other group of people I've known.

One of the doctors who supports "corrective" surgery said to me once during a debate on the issue, "People can't even accept people of different colors sometimes, how can we expect them to accept a third sex?" My answer to him was, "By that reasoning, if you could make everybody white would you do that too?" Even if people do not, out of ignorance and/or bigotry, accept a group, eliminating that group of people, or the characteristics that make them different, is a poor solution to ending discrimination. If doctors or others in power had been able to do that with other minority groups in the past, we would have a much different society today. Our society would be similar to Adolf Hitler's vision of a homogenous race deplete of people of color, gays, and anyone else considered different by the group in power. Fortunately, Hitler was stopped before he could fully realize his dream, and Jewish people and others he considered inferior did not suffer total extinction. However, thousands suffered beforehand, just as thousands of intersex people have suffered since "normalization" began.

Outdated and unfounded bogotries towards intersex people have caused them decades of suffering. It is sometimes shocking to me and to the people I inform about this that these attitudes still exist. Then I remember that many humans are threatened by minority groups, by those who are different from them. They react with fear, rather than curiosity, and fear, as we know, sometimes leads people to hurt those they find threatening.

It's time to stop the intesex gendercide. To let go of old notions that came out of the 1950's (weren't African-Americans forced to use different drinking fountains back then, etcetera…?), to stop playing God on intersex children's bodies, and to accept intersex people as equals. Every person and particularly, parent, alive has the power to do this right now, and, I believe, the heart to want to.

Parenting Versus Protesting?, by Kirsten Anderberg

Is it irresponsible to take children to political protests? Some argue it is a good experience for children to participate, first-hand, in political organizing, marches, protests, and the making of

history. I am glad my mother took me, as a child, to civil rights protests, and actions against the Vietnam War, during the 1960's and 1970's. I do not believe textbooks can convey the feeling one gets when surrounded by riot police, while trying to peacefully demonstrate. I am glad I took my son to protests of the Gulf War in the 1990's, and the Iraq War in 2003. I feel it was part of his education to see nonviolent free speech and riot police clash on his own city streets, while with his mom for safety. But could I really guarantee my son's safety anywhere that riot police were present? Some argue that children should not be taken onto the front lines of American political change. But as an activist single mother, I could not just sit home, and not protest wars, simply because I had a child. And children are supposedly our hope for the future. Thus it seems essential to include them in our political struggles, if we want the issues to live longer than us. Are certain protests acceptable for children to attend, but not others? How does one determine which protest activities are appropriate for our children? How does a politically active parent balance their own needs to protest a war, for instance, with the responsibilities of parenting?

I surveyed a group of activists on this topic, from different parts of America; from Chicago, New York City, and Seattle, as well as from Wisconsin, Maryland, California, and Colorado, and also from England and Canada. More in the group self-identified as anarcho-feminists, than the other categories cited, which included radical leftists, anarchist parent of color, anarchist, Green Party member, progressive humanist atheist, and others. Seven of the 12 people interviewed are street medics, and 10 of those surveyed are parents. And only two of those surveyed say they had parents who took them to political protests. So, basically, this article is written from the viewpoint of first-generation (except for two), politically-active, parents, and street medics. Yet even within this somewhat politically-homogenous group, the opinions on this topic of kids at protests differ.

When asked if it is irresponsible to take children to protests, the overwhelming response from those surveyed was it depended on the nature of the protest. Several respondents felt protests that directly affected children's services, such as funding cuts at hospitals that treat children, or midwifery rights protests, warranted the strategic use of children at the protests. But many feel it is positive to involve children in a broad spectrum of political issues. For example, at the FTAA protests in Miami in November 2003, there was a Baby Bloc of mothers with children who marched together. One parent surveyed said, "I think it is not only safe, but necessary, to take children to (most) protests. As activists, and as parents, bringing up the next generation, we need to show our children that when things are going wrong, it is our responsibility to voice our dissent." Another respondent said taking kids to protests was a good idea because "children need to know that their parents hold certain views, and that these views are not unique to their parents…" Some said it would be nice if the community could work together so that some parents can be medics and legal observers, while others could center solely on children at protests. Another mother surveyed said she had quit being politically active, then her adult daughter (who she used to take to protests as a child), asked her to go to a protest, and now she is protesting again. That went full circle!

A distinction was made by some regarding direct actions and marches/demonstrations. Many felt large, permitted, labor union marches, for example, were safer than direct actions against corporations, like some of the FTAA or WTO protest actions. The former was seen as non-confrontational and the latter as confrontational. One street medic said, "I had to treat an 8-month old boy for tear gas/pepper spray in Quebec during the FTAA protests there and I don't want to EVER, EVER, EVER, have to do that again!" Yes, we all agree we do not want that to

EVER happen, and that is why we need to talk about this topic seriously. Protests are not your typical family event, and we all know that. One respondent said protests are as safe for kids as they are for anyone else, "in other words, usually safe, often not, and usually hard to know in advance." Some felt that large gatherings of people in any context, presented a danger to children, in general, and that protests were no different. One person said, "You could argue because there is sometimes trouble at soccer matches (in the UK), it would be irresponsible to take children to soccer matches, but 100,000's go and get looked after by their parents."

"I do not think it is "irresponsible" to take children to protests. I think it is irresponsible for police departments, fellow protesters, and others, to not recognize that children have a legitimate right to be at protests. At the Feb. 15th anti-war march in New York City, several police officers made snide comments that we were being irresponsible mothers by taking our children to the march. However, there is something very, very wrong with our society if children do not belong and cannot be kept safe at marches for peace," says one activist I surveyed. Two other people surveyed said, "I think that the police presence needs to be responsive to the fact that there are regularly kids in the crowd," and "If the reality is that kids are regularly SEEN at protests, then the response from police might change." And these are good points. If we can get police to behave as if there are children in their midst at all protests, perhaps they can rein in some of their random violence, and free speech would be safer for all in America.

Most of the activists I surveyed felt if you were politically aware enough to protest for political causes, you should be astute enough to do proper research on a protest before bringing a child. There seemed a consensus that parents needed to know who called the demonstration, what the political issues involved are, who would attend, what the agenda of the protest is, if the protest is permitted, what tactics are expected both by protesters and police in response, etc. All agreed "Safe Places" cannot be guaranteed, and one medic surveyed wondered aloud if the community should begin having kid-friendly non-violent action trainings. The parents surveyed felt you should have a clearly defined contingency plan with children, "from bathroom breaks to police attacks," including what to do if separated. Suggested basic supplies to take to protests with kids included sunscreen, extra diapers, food, water, and proper layers of clothing. Some commented paying attention to weather reports was also beneficial, as a kid wet in pouring rain at a protest, or frying hot in sun, will not be fun, and thus proper weather protection is an issue as well. A basic knowledge of street first aid would be nice too, if you live somewhere you can get access to that, such as Boston or Portland. Other advice included "always be aware of where you are, the mood of the crowd, the mood of the kids (and other adults if in a group), and the mood of the police." Many felt the best way to go for parents, kids and protests, were small affinity groups, where parents and children could collectively take care of one another. And although these are all good tips for parents and children, these are basics for adults too.

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