

WHAT BEHAVIOR IS UNDERMONITORED?

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1 Almost as long as I've been alive I've been aware that I'm a member of "an invisible minority," but it was only Saturday that I discovered a fresh obligation: this minority I'm in "must define themselves and organize for self-protection." Sounds reasonable. Isn't every other minority on the American scene doing same?...How did I get my consciousness raised on this? Stanley Coren did it. In his *THE LEFT-HANDER SYNDROME: The Causes and Consequences of Left-Handedness* (The Free Press/92).

People don't get "organize[d] for self-protection" unless they're aware they need protection, & that awareness depends on their feeling oppressed, & that feeling isn't readily available to you (1) if you've swallowed, introjected, a major oppression or (2) if the oppression is so minor you've scarcely noticed it or (3) if the painful experiences lie so far in the past you have to work at recalling them.

This last is my case vis-a-vis lefthandedness. Only as a small child was I taunted for it by my mates &, by teachers, forced to write with my right hand (consequence: mirror writing, & teachers soon gave up reading my papers in their mirrors). As a college freshman I was oppressed by the college into eating right-handedly, but I took that as instruction in learning a new skill, so did not experience it as oppression.

Mr. Coren has for me some bad news & good news. Bad: I may "die as many as nine years younger." Good: I "may be more intelligent and creative in some spheres." (On this last, compare another physically aberrant minority, viz homosexuals. Of them it's so true that they "may be more intelligent and creative in some spheres" that any society depriving itself of their gifts is stupid. Another similarity: both minorities are ca.11% of any human population. And a difference: handedness is, unchallengedly, only nature, with no nurture component. The possible nurture component in homosexuality is a matter of continuing debate.)

2 If you're in a visible minority, please don't think that I've trivialized your situation by expounding on my minuscule oppression in an invisible one. Please hang in with me in hope I'll say something helpful before Thinksheet-end.

3 What degree of monitoring what behavior is good for people/society? Over-monitor & you get **implosion**: communist societies, & even some socialist (eg Sweden), have been collapsing inwardly. Undermonitor & you get **explosion**: anomic youth, eg. Right now, almost the whole human earth is engaged in searching for, experimenting toward, a more humane balance of order & freedom.

4 ITEM: Should our public schools distribute *free cigars & condoms*? I think not. Everybody knows, though not all will admit it, that cigars are bad for kids (adults, too). I smoked one once (never before, never after) but wouldn't have had I had to pay for it. Besides, everybody was doing it, & there wasn't anybody there I knew who could monitor against this behavior either internally (by my inner censor) or externally (by rebuke).

Transpose, please, to free junior-or-senior-high condoms. Can you not hear the kids say "It must be all right or the school wouldn't be doing it. They're not just permitting it, they're promoting it. Besides, it doesn't cost anything. In fact, they wouldn't be doing it if it weren't good for you."

Now follow the parallel adult line of [il]logic: "They'll do it anyhow, so it's better that they have the protection." Illogic #1: If it's hard for adults to monitor adolescent behavior, give up, don't even try. Illogic #2: DHHS says kids' use of condoms provides not more than 80% protection, which means 20% UN"safe sex." Put that way, who would argue that teen recreational sex is worth 20% risk of disease & pregnancy? (What about teen commitment sex, as in "West Side Story"? Romantic nonsense good mainly for Big Bucks on B'way. Sense in "Romeo and Juliet": those kids were, in that culture, of nubile age.)

5 The practical **alternative** to free condoms? Sexually segregated education from the 6th through the 12th grade. Not practicable? That would not detract

from its being practical, sensible, effective. Detroit has opted for it in the case of African-American boys (though a court injunction is holding up the experiment). A panacea for debased sexual morality? Of course not, but a way to reduce (1) recreational sex (lowering temptation, the reverse of GBS's definition of marriage) & (2) hormonal disturbance of cognitive education (which in America is in dire straits).

6 One way to distinguish ethics/morality is this. Ethics deals with good/bad, morality deals with **right/wrong**. (Both concern themselves with both ultimates & sanctions of consequence.) In light of psychospiritual, intellectual, & biological consequences,* teen recreational sex is wrong whether or not it's bad. But at all levels our society is now so permissive that to say anything is wrong is itself oppressive behavior!

* And, please, social!

Suppose, now, that an American community agrees, by an overwhelming majority, that teen recreational sex--make it just "teen sex"--is wrong. What can the community do about it? Will its public schools say wrong & teach the inner monitor of conscience against it? And what of outer monitoring? Might they agree on what would be over/under-monitoring? Further, where would the churches be in this process?

(Consider the bearing of right/wrong in the former USSR. The USSR Chief Marshal's suicide note complained that he didn't want to live in a society that had reversed these terms, that was now asking him to consider "wrong what I have lived and worked for for fifty years." That, friends, is revolution. Do we not need a moral-ethical revolution in America, in public as well as private behavior?)

7 As I write, the Senate Judiciary Committee continues to grill Clarence Thomas. He's been slithering around on "natural law" & "natural rights," confusedly claiming both that this conceptual area is pertinent to judication & that his "philosophy of law" is "irrelevant to how I would face actual cases." But his paper trail strongly inclines the reader to belief that this U.S.Sup.Ct. nominee would monitor pregnant women against aborting. Proper monitoring, say pro-lifers: overmonitoring, say we pro-choicers.

8 **Monitoring** is tighter, stronger, than regulating. The S&Ls were regulated--but not monitored! M. is from Lat. to advise, prompt, warn, remind to obey. In the freshman year of college, the monitor training me to eat with my right hand struck my left hand, when I forgot, with the bowl of a spoon--a warning I needed only twice. (It was a splendid college, the students being monitored to the best degree. Overmonitored? That's a modern, & tragic, conceit.)

9 In Hitler's Germany, children were taught to monitor, & report deviances of, their parents. In this long permissive aftermath of WWII, society has been learning to monitor the parents and other adults on behalf of the children: "children's **rights**" have increased with the steady increase of child abuse. Both questions have reached the anguish level: (1) What's the optimal level of child-monitoring by parents? teachers? other adults? (2) What's the optimal level of adult-monitoring to protect children from adults (parents, teachers, & others) and other children?

10 Currently, a special instance of the last question is campus administration-enforced "politically correct" (PC) speech. *In loco parentis*, some higher-learning institutions are saying in effect, "Children, fight nice: no verbal assaults on each other." Overmonitoring, I call it. (I'll not touch on other dimensions of PC: students monitoring teachers, the administration monitoring teachers, teachers monitoring students.) Comments:

(1) King is famous for saying children should be judged not by externals but by "the content of their character." Verbal abuse strengthened his.

(2) Freedom of speech is an American basic. Verbal abuse, & the expression of dissident opinion, test this principle. When not denied or crippled, it stands the test.

(3) In various ways, God, society, & conscience monitor speech & all other behavior. Laws & petty rules clamp down on us when the divine & social sanctions are weak, as now in the American civilization.