

Chapter 4

Anticulturalism

A modern trend today is anticulturalism: the belief that children as autonomous individuals should be left alone and even challenge the current culture. John Leo in *U.S. News & World Report* comments:

Hymowitz argues that as child-liberation ideas entered the mainstream, they hardened into a philosophy she calls “anticulturalism” — the idea that socializing children and attempting to mold the character of the young is a wrongful use of power by the strong against the weak. Children should develop independently of the prevailing culture and even in opposition to it. This idea is radical, because it forbids what all cultures have assumed they must do: transmit cultural values from one generation to the next....

Hymowitz demonstrates how widely this improbable philosophy has managed to spread. “Anticulturalism,” she writes, “is the dominant ideology among child development experts, and it has filtered into the courts, into the schools, into the parenting magazines, into Hollywood, and into our kitchens and

family rooms.” It boils down to the notion that children should be allowed to develop on their own; that parents and schools should stimulate and encourage but otherwise stay out of the way. The emergence of the moral self must not be quashed by what Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan calls the “foreign voice-overs of adults.” Children are not to be raised, but simply allowed to grow.¹

Today this influence has created a strong movement in educational circles that it’s wrong to attempt to mold the character of children. Now it becomes clear why these individuals oppose character-building materials while praising materials that promote autonomy.

What is your philosophical viewpoint? Do you believe children should be totally independent to develop their own set of values, or do you believe children should be taught values from parents and society about how to make proper choices? If you believe children should be autonomous, you’ll despise character-building materials. If you believe children should be trained concerning values, you’ll praise such materials. This is what my extensive research and personal experience have revealed—people either hate or love materials promoting values.

Publisher's Dilemma—Please or Perish

I realize going public and exposing review journals concerning their position about materials teaching morals is an unwise strategy for a publishing company. To enter the school market, I should please journals such as *School Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *The Horn Book Guide*. In addition, not only are the negative reviews printed in the review journal, but they are also published on various booksellers' web sites. So one can realize the tremendous influence these reviewers wield.

What is the result of this bias against character education children's books? From our research of asking librarians nationwide, "Is there a scarcity of character education children's books?" the overwhelmingly response is, "Yes."

Listen to Dr. William J. Bennett describe his experience of the shortage of character-building materials when he was director of the Office of National Drug Policy under President George H.W. Bush:

I visited about 140 communities and heard over and over a much different concern. Whether I was talking to teachers, school administrators, parents, cops or judges, they wanted to know: Who's raising the children? What kind of character do our kids have? Who's paying attention to their morals? A judge in Detroit once said to me, "When I ask

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young men today, 'Didn't anyone ever teach you the difference between right and wrong?' they answer, 'No sir.' And you know, Mr. Bennett, I believe them. It is a moral vacuum out there." I remember teachers in the public schools asking, "Can you help us develop some materials that we can use with our kids to teach them right from wrong?" Isn't it ironic? The public schools of this country, which were established principally to provide common moral instruction for a nation of immigrants, were now wondering if this was possible.²

Why is there such a scarcity of character-building books when so many want them? One must realize publishing companies must print books bringing them profit; otherwise, they'll be forced out of business. The larger publishers know the position of major review journals, so they either please the reviewers or perish.

What should I do? My desire is to publish materials teaching children principles on how they can become successful. Should I yield or buck the system? I made the decision not to submit. To date, many of our books have been translated into foreign languages, and we've sold over 200,000 of these books, many to public schools and libraries. We have also sent a free copy of the first edition of *Character Under Attack & What You Can Do About It* to every public elementary school in America, over 55,000 schools.

Child-Centered Education

Children should be provided with a child-centered environment that respects their inherent nature and produces optimal development and growth. The focus of this education should be to provide materials and instruction that is best for the child. The question emerges, “What is the best educational environment for maximizing optimal development and growth for children”?

Some believe that if you let children grow up naturally they’ll turn into beautiful flowers. It’s like planting a garden with flower seeds. There are two options: Leave the garden alone and hope for the best or watch over the garden by weeding, fertilizing, and watering. Everyone knows what would happen if one doesn’t take care of the garden. One will have a garden of weeds. That’s exactly what’s happening today in many so-called “child-centered” permissive environments. Many of these educators pride themselves on how they love children, but in reality they are destroying them by not providing children with an education that will benefit them for their future.

Christiana Hoff Sommers, a former philosophy professor and one who specializes in ethics and contemporary moral theory, stated, “Common sense, convention, tradition, and even modern social science research all converge in support of the Aristotelian

tradition of directive character education. Children need standards, they need clear guidelines, they need adults in their lives who are understanding but firmly insistent on responsible behavior, but a resolute adherence to standards has been out of fashion in education circles for more than thirty years.”³

A true child-centered environment provides children with discipline, direction, and training to allow each child to grow up properly. Wise are those parents and schools preparing children for their future by providing intelligent guidance. What does character education do? It promotes core ethical values that teach children life-guiding principles for success, such as respect, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, responsibility, self-discipline, perseverance, citizenship, and courage. It’s not religious indoctrination, even though practically all religions support such values. Character education provides intelligent guidance showing children the wisdom of doing things that will benefit them as well as society; however, there are many voices endorsing values that are detrimental to children.

Kids, Sex, and the Internet

One of the big debates among librarians is whether the Internet should have filters for children, and one of the big issues with parents is if they allow their children into libraries will they be permitted to view pornographic material. The American Library

Association Bill of Rights states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." Then it further states, "Parents—and only parents—have the right and the responsibility to restrict the access of their children—and only their children—to library resources. Parents or legal guardians who do not want their children to have access to certain library services, materials or facilities, should so advise their children."⁴

Could you imagine elementary children in a school library having unlimited access to the Internet? This is why legislation is being enacted to mandate filtering devices to prevent children from viewing pornographic materials. The common-sense balance is so skewed that innocent and impressionable children are unprotected from viewing porn while review journals censor books teaching positive values under the guise they are didactic. What a double standard!

One of the saddest results of the "children should choose their own values" and "if it feels good, do it" philosophy is the ruinous effect of promiscuous sex. Millions are now infected with a wide assortment of venereal diseases because of living out the relativistic philosophy in their lives. Consider the plight of those infected with venereal diseases and the horrible disease of AIDS with its unrelenting attacks on the body. What do many schools do to combat these sexually transmitted diseases? The morally neutral teacher promotes "do-what-makes-you-feel-good,"

but use safe sex methods by always using a condom when having sex. They also promote homosexual and lesbian lifestyles as a method of avoiding pregnancy. If a girl becomes pregnant, she's taught the earlier she has an abortion the safer it is. The result? Children are increasingly putting into practice what they are learning. George F. Will, in the article, "Can't fix education until we fix families," reports:

Family decomposition should dampen this week's self-congratulatory focus on the latest education legislation. In 1958 the percentage of children born to unmarried women was 5; in 1969, 10; in 1980, 18; in 1999, 33. The especially chilling number: in 1999 almost half (48.4 percent) of all children born to women ages 20-24—women of all races and ethnicities—were born out of wedlock.⁵

Think of this shocking statistic and the devastating impact this will have on the children and on the future of our nation that nearly half of "all children born to women ages 20-24—women of all races and ethnicities—were born out of wedlock."

Speaking about young mothers, Rosemary C. Salomone, Professor of Law at St. John's University School of Law, disclosed these facts:

"Only seven out of 10 teenage mothers complete high school. Meanwhile, their

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offspring are more likely to have low birth weight and other medical problems, and to be victims of abuse and neglect. Like their mothers, these children are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to have a child themselves in their teens, and one and a half times as likely to be out of work and school in their late teens and early 20s. And so the cycle continues.”⁶

But mention abstinence—and many want to attack it as an archaic and unrealistic lifestyle. But abstinence until marriage produces healthy families. You would think schools would actively promote abstinence until marriage. There are some that do, but many cling to the relativistic philosophy that there are no moral absolutes. An article in *Time* magazine, “When Dating Is Dangerous,” states, “One in five teenage girls reports being a victim of violence by her date.” The article reports, “A recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health highlights how perilous adolescence can be, especially for girls.” The comprehensive study of “high school girls shows that 1 in 5 reports being a victim of physical or sexual violence in a dating relationship. Girls reported being ‘hit, slapped, shoved or forced into sexual activity’ by dates.”⁷

The *Houston Chronicle* writing about the report stated the research “stems from surveys of 4,163 public school students in Massachusetts, but the

authors say the results likely apply to teens nationwide....The study also suggests that a disturbing number of adolescent boys 'have adopted attitudes that men are entitled to control their girlfriends through violence.'...More than 70 percent of the girls who participated were white, about 10 percent were Hispanic and about 6 percent each were black or Asian."⁸

Many of these teenage boys are following the values they were taught—"if it feels good, do it." The victims? The girls who had been physically or sexually abused—these girls the report states, are "about eight to nine times more likely to have attempted suicide in the previous year."⁹ What can be done?

William Kilpatrick, Professor of Education at Boston College, states in *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*:

The core problem facing our schools is a moral one. All other problems derive from it. Hence, all the various attempts at school reform are unlikely to succeed unless character education is put at the top of the agenda.

If students don't learn self-discipline and respect for others, they will continue to exploit each other sexually no matter how many health clinics and condom distribution plans are created.¹⁰

Time in "An Rx for Teen Sex," and the subtitle,

“Doctors are joining the abstinence movement. Here’s why they’re now telling kids, ‘Just say no.’” provides this report about Dr. Patricia Sulak, an obstetrician-gynecologist and professor at Texas A&M University’s College of Medicine, who once advocated that kids should use condoms. Sulak now says, “But after reviewing the data, I’ve had to do a 180 on kids and sex.” She has developed a sex-education curriculum where *Time* states “the lessons set forth the clinical consequences of teen sex in pictures and eye-popping statistics charting the numbers of young people infected with sexually transmitted diseases. The take-home message: abstain from intercourse or put yourself at grave medical risk.”¹¹

Houston Chronicle in “AIDS epidemic running rampant: Up to 46 million living with virus,” states: “There was some positive news in the report, with several countries making progress in combating the spread of the disease. Uganda was considered one success story, marking its 12th consecutive year of reduced HIV infections.”¹² CBC News from Canada tells what high school students in Uganda are hearing, “The kids are living through a national campaign against AIDS that’s intensifying, not slowing, as proof grows that it’s working. At their school near Kampala for instance, all students get tested regularly. Lectures are backed up with visits to hospital wards where they see AIDS patients dying.”¹³

Namgura Jenfrancis, an Ugandan teacher reports, “They see a person suffering of AIDS, and sometimes

they see a person dying. It's really scary. The kid has to feel it at heart and think, 'Okay, maybe the teachers are right, we should abstain.'"¹⁴

What's the message that's bringing success to Uganda in its fight against AIDS? It's the strong common-sense message of abstinence. Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), once an advocate for condom use, has come out in favor of abstinence-only programs.¹⁵

The United States government offers this advice on their website for parents, "Tell them abstinence is the healthiest choice."¹⁶ Houston Chronicle reports reactions to this advice. "That's dictating values, say organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union and gay rights groups, and they want the site taken down."¹⁷ They also report that SIECUS, National Education Association, and over 100 other advocacy groups are wanting to have this website shut down.

But since when is America's position that we as a nation are without values? What do these organizations want? They want their values to be promoted. But abstinence until marriage would put a screeching halt to the rampant epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases.

There is hope that some after seeing the devastating effects of recreational sex are reconsidering their approach to sex education. One wonders how many more ruined lives it will take to cause schools to change.