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BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

## In my opinion

# A Call to Reason



AILEE SLATER  
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

There has been a series of recent news articles that have done much more than pique my interest in the surrounding world. Each of these stories feels more like a vindictive blow to the stomach than a piece of journalism. I'm talking about Elizabeth Smart, Brooke Wilberger, Sarah Michelle Lunde, and so many others—all young women under the age of 20 who have, probably or definitely, undergone sexual assaults, kidnapping and murder. It seems that every day, a new picture of a smiling female child is posted in the newspaper next to a caption saying she has been abducted.

The most painful to me is a recent AP story detailing the brutal sexual assault of a mentally disabled high school girl. In this case, the perpetrators were a group of male classmates, who dragged the girl into their school auditorium and proceeded to videotape the abuse.

It is possible that at a high school age, not one young man in that group of assailants realized his actions were wrong. Did the boys just stop caring? The time has come for an in-depth, nationwide investigation into the circumstances that breed sexual assailants and how these assaults can be stopped.

An interesting aspect of this subject to consider is Groupthink. Psychological studies have proved that in most situations individuals will ignore what they know to be correct and agree with the rest of the group. In one famous social psychology experiment a subject was shown three lines, one obviously longer than the others. When asked which line was the longest, the subject answered correctly almost 100 percent of the time. However, when the subject was placed in a room with other subjects who chose a different, painfully incorrect answer, the actual subject tended to go along with the group and choose incorrectly. If a person can be persuaded by a

group to misjudge something as clear-cut as a line on a piece of paper, imagine the problem of Groupthink when it comes to such abstract issues as right and wrong.

So what is breeding a society in which men cannot learn from the world around them that it is wrong to assault?

In my mother's health class, the middle-school-age children are learning to say "No." I guess not much has changed since the "Just Say No" days of my own health curriculum; unfortunately, not much has changed in the way of sexual assault and teen pregnancy statistics either.

I don't know how to end sexual violence, but here's a thought to wrestle with: Instead of assuming that school-age children are victims who will one day need to say "No," why not assume that at least a portion of these children will one day be rapists? By god, that's hard to say, but it is the truth. Besides the media, which have their heads way too far up their own asses to promote social change, the education system may be the only way to reach the future rapists of this nation. The current rapists of this nation.

Youths, especially male youths, need to be engaged in a curriculum unit that tells them not to rape. It is a simple message, but one of a much higher importance than anyone realizes. If I can learn by the third grade something as simple as three times three equals nine, I have no doubt that children can also learn that sexual assault is wrong. If children are

surrounded constantly by the clear, unadulterated message that raping a person is wrong, social psychology surely mandates that these children will be less likely to perform assaults. Enough with abstract messages of peace and goodwill and assuming that this group of students does not contain a future criminal. Victims are told how to defend themselves, but what message is given to perpetrators? I want to hear every sexual education class begin with the teacher saying: "Don't rape people."

Granted, schools only have so much power in the context of the two other main influences on a child's development, the home and the media. If children learn in school that violence is wrong, yet return home every day to an abusive set of parents, the message will not get through. Likewise, telling young men not to rape will hit a serious roadblock if every television show and magazine advertisement portrays women as bodies to be sexualized.

I guess I can only call for a country-wide agenda against masculinized violence so many times. Instead, here's a different call to action: Don't rape people. Don't assault people. Don't kidnap. Don't perpetrate violence. Don't perpetrate sexual violence. If every person sits down and decides he or she will not be the reason another little girl is forced to perform oral sex on her male classmates or buried under a concrete deck by her best friend's father or systematically raped after being taken from her bedroom in the middle of the night. It hurts, doesn't it? But if every single person makes a conscious decision to not be that perpetrator, not be that reason, then maybe actual reason will finally prevail.

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## Editorial

# Voiding of licenses an egregious violation

Last year, about 3,000 same-sex marriages were held in Oregon after Multnomah County followed in the footsteps of San Francisco and began issuing licenses to gay couples. As legally married citizens, these couples enjoyed benefits such as access to insurance through a spouse's job, the ability to file joint tax returns and assumption of spouse's pension after death. Last Thursday, every one of those same-sex marriages was declared void by the Oregon Supreme Court, with justices citing Ballot Measure 36, which defines marriage as a union between one man and woman, as a major deciding factor.

And we thought "take-backs" went out of style after third grade.

The Emerald understands that, especially in light of the previously discussed Measure 36, not every Oregonian agrees that same-sex marriages should be legal. However, the citizens of this state can surely concur that the marriage certificates issued last year were binding legal contracts between two consenting adults. It is inappropriate for the state to toy with the emotions and the lives of gay couples by voiding a marriage that has already been declared legal under state law.

It is understandable that political climates change with time and often for the best; however, it seems the Oregon Supreme Court has given absolutely no consideration to the upheaval and devaluation of partnership that will occur because of its decision. The lives of gay couples who chose marriage have undergone dramatic changes already. Erasing those changes with the assumption that homosexuals do not have the same basic rights as heterosexuals is surely a toll to both the identity and the livelihood of people previously part of a same-sex marriage.

The argument has been made that the court is only carrying out the wishes of Oregon citizens in general; it is important to remember that as judicial officials, the Supreme Court should be held to a higher standard. It is one thing to disallow the issuing of new marriage licenses, but to deny the legality of documents declared legal prior to Measure 36 is unnecessary and verges on vindictive. An unfortunate parallel can easily be made between the denial of interracial marriages before the 1960s and the denial of same-sex marriages in present day. Although almost every American citizen would like to believe that our country has changed throughout time for the better, using religious values to deny a minority group's secular right to a civil partnership is sadly evocative of America's racist past.

The saying goes that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. In the instance of same-sex marriage, this is one case in which it is not better to have had something only to lose it. We hope the future leaders of this country will someday look back at the voiding of these marriage licenses and recognize it as an event soaked in discrimination and overall wrong intent.

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