**On Facebook, Bullies ‘Like’ if You Hate** By EMILY LAYDEN

For the digitally native generation, self-worth is accrued in likes.

My little brother went to school on a Friday morning last June, and this is what he heard: That another boy, a sixth-grader, had written a Facebook status the previous night asking his friends to “like” it if they hated my brother. The “like if you hate” question, the last time this informant had checked, had gotten 57 thumbs-up. Verification for my brother’s generation – the younger half of my own – is a statistical rat race, counted in friends, followers, re-tweets and re-pins. On an ordinary Friday morning, my brother learned that his name had garnered 57 “like if you hates.”

This is a hard thing for me to imagine: 57 likes for a hate – a hate for a person, a little boy, my little brother. But it’s more macroscopic, too. There is a marked difference between how my half-generation and my brother’s engages with and approaches the Internet. I remember dial-up and still have my AOL.com e-mail address (it’s basically a giant spam folder, now). I weed through my Facebook friends weekly, de-friending those whose names I don’t remember or maybe never really knew. I have friends with separate work and personal Twitter accounts and those who take weekends off from the Web. We deal with the Internet with separation. It is a tool to be used and put away.

For my brother’s half — the younger set, the one that did not grow up in step with the Internet, but rather with it already established — there is no wariness, no understanding, no concept of an Internet identity. There is no such thing for them, for example, as “Internet famous.” There is only fame, and the allure of instant gratification. This is how cyberbullying has reached a fever pitch, and where I feel my half of this generation has failed the younger.

We (my peers) use the numbers game. We understand how to turn hits on Web sites into ad sales, how to drive traffic, how to analyze page views and visitors for a better understanding of successful content — this is a legitimate business practice. We have done an abysmal job of translating this understanding to the younger half. Instead, we have allowed an entire half-generation to believe, simply, that more is more: To measure their existence against how many thousands of friends they have, how many hundreds more they have than their classmates, how many likes they can get.

This fact alone is toxic enough, but far worse is that we have taught them the secret to a quick hit, a fast follow: a cheap shot. Web sites like BuzzFeed and Gawker (and its sister sites Deadspin and Jezebel) operate with a vicious reliance on views, so that any press is good press. Rage-baiting is commonplace and infuriatingly successful, so the most prevalent language of the Internet is at its best cynicism and its worst outright meanness. (This is all, of course, made worse by the hammered-home fact that it is so easy to be cruel behind the safety of a computer screen. The cowardice is obvious.)

So my half of the generation (those of us in our 20s, the ones with job titles like “social media manager,” the developers of apps like Instagram and Path), in not communicating the difference between work and Web, between the Internet and reality, has allowed the younger set to seek personal validation in Internet numbers. We have shown them that the easiest way to do so is through varying degrees of cruelty. To eliminate cyberbullying, we must better address the Internet-bred narcissism at its core, and we must all be held accountable. Both the older set of digital natives and the generation above us assume that the Internet is a bubble – a space with limits. This is the logic behind the cyberbullying stance at my brother’s school, who informed my parents in the wake of the 57 likes that cyber bullying is a “tricky” matter that unfortunately falls largely outside their jurisdiction.

There is no jurisdiction for the bullied, no separation between Web and reality. On the Monday after the Facebook incident, my brother dreaded school for fear of facing his 57 bullies, who probably never gave their likes a second thought. The answer is not to teach our middle-schoolers that they are not who they are online. It is, actually, quite the opposite. It is too late to establish distance. To end cyberbullying, we must use the closeness we’ve allowed to breed to our advantage. We must teach them that if one is a cowardly, bullying, rage-baiter online – no matter how many laughs had or page views generated or ad space sold – then one is a bully off-screen, too.

This article appeared in The New York Times September 9, 2012 and can be accessed online at www.nytimes.com.

**Girl’s Suicide Points to Rise in Apps Used by Cyberbullies** By LIZETTE ALVAREZ

MIAMI — The clues were buried in her bedroom. Before leaving for school on Monday morning, Rebecca Ann Sedwick had hidden her schoolbooks under a pile of clothes and left her cellphone behind, a rare lapse for a 12-year-old girl.

Inside her phone’s virtual world, she had changed her user name on Kik Messenger, a cellphone application, to “That Dead Girl” and delivered a message to two friends, saying goodbye forever. Then she climbed a platform at an abandoned cement plant near her home in the Central Florida city of Lakeland and leaped to the ground, the Polk County sheriff said.

In jumping, Rebecca became one of the youngest members of a growing list of children and teenagers apparently driven to suicide, at least in part, after being maligned, threatened and taunted online, mostly through a new collection of texting and photo-sharing cellphone applications. Her suicide raises new questions about the proliferation and popularity of these applications and Web sites among children and the ability of parents to keep up with their children’s online relationships.

For more than a year, Rebecca, pretty and smart, was cyberbullied by a coterie of 15 middle-school children who urged her to kill herself, her mother said. The Polk County sheriff’s office is investigating the role of cyberbullying in the suicide and considering filing charges against the middle-school students who apparently barraged Rebecca with hostile text messages. Florida passed a law this year making it easier to bring felony charges in online bullying cases.

Rebecca was “absolutely terrorized on social media,” Sheriff Grady Judd of Polk County said at a news conference this week.

Along with her grief, Rebecca’s mother, Tricia Norman, faces the frustration of wondering what else she could have done. She complained to school officials for several months about the bullying, and when little changed, she pulled Rebecca out of school. She closed down her daughter’s Facebook page and took her cellphone away. She changed her number. Rebecca was so distraught in December that she began to cut herself, so her mother had her hospitalized and got her counseling. As best she could, Ms. Norman said, she kept tabs on Rebecca’s social media footprint.

It all seemed to be working, she said. Rebecca appeared content at her new school as a seventh grader. She was gearing up to audition for chorus and was considering slipping into her cheerleading uniform once again. But unknown to her mother, Rebecca had recently signed on to new applications — ask.fm, and Kik and Voxer — which kick-started the messaging and bullying once again.

“I had never even heard of them; I did go through her phone but didn’t even know,” said Ms. Norman, 42, who works in customer service. “I had no reason to even think that anything was going on. She was laughing and joking.”

Sheriff Judd said Rebecca had been using these messaging applications to send and receive texts and photographs. His office showed Ms. Norman the messages and photos, including one of Rebecca with razor blades on her arms and cuts on her body. The texts were full of hate, her mother said: “Why are you still alive?” “You’re ugly.”

One said, “Can u die please?” To which Rebecca responded, with a flash of resilience, “Nope but I can live.” Her family said the bullying began with a dispute over a boy Rebecca dated for a while. But Rebecca had stopped seeing him, they said.

Rebecca was not nearly as resilient as she was letting on. Not long before her death, she had clicked on questions online that explored suicide. “How many Advil do you have to take to die?”

In hindsight, Ms. Norman wonders whether Rebecca kept her distress from her family because she feared her mother might take away her cellphone again.

“Maybe she thought she could handle it on her own,” Ms. Norman said.

It is impossible to be certain what role the online abuse may have played in her death. But cyberbullying experts said cellphone messaging applications are proliferating so quickly that it is increasingly difficult for parents to keep pace with their children’s complex digital lives.

“It’s a whole new culture, and the thing is that as adults, we don’t know anything about it because it’s changing every single day,” said Denise Marzullo, the chief executive of Mental Health America of Northeast Florida in Jacksonville, who works with the schools there on bullying issues.

No sooner has a parent deciphered Facebook or Twitter or Instagram than his or her children have migrated to the latest frontier. “It’s all of these small ones where all this is happening,” Ms. Marzullo said.

In Britain, a number of suicides by young people have been linked to ask.fm, and online petitions have been started there and here to make the site more responsive to bullying. The company ultimately responded this year by introducing an easy-to-see button to report bullying and saying it would hire more moderators.

“You hear about this all the time,” Ms. Norman said of cyberbullying. “I never, ever thought it would happen to me or my daughter.”

Questions have also been raised about whether Rebecca’s old school, Crystal Lake Middle School, did enough last year to help stop the bullying; some of it, including pushing and hitting, took place on school grounds. The same students also appear to be involved in sending out the hate-filled online messages away from school, something schools can also address.

Nancy Woolcock, the assistant superintendent in charge of anti-bullying programs for Polk County Schools, said the school received one bullying complaint from Rebecca and her mother in December about traditional bullying, not cyberbullying. After law enforcement investigated, Rebecca’s class schedule was changed. Ms. Woolcock said the school also has an extensive anti-bullying campaign and takes reports seriously.

But Ms. Norman said the school should have done more. Officials told her that Rebecca would receive an escort as she switched classes, but that did not happen, she said.

Rebecca never boarded her school bus on Monday morning. She made her way to the abandoned Cemex plant about 10 minutes away from her modest mobile home; the plant was a place she had used as a getaway a few times when she wanted to vanish. Somehow, she got past the high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, which is now a memorial, with teddy bears, candles and balloons. She climbed a tower and then jumped.

“Don’t ignore your kids,” Ms. Norman said, “even if they seem fine.”

This article appeared in The New York Times September 13, 2013 and can be accessed online at www.nytimes.com.

**PERSONAL HEALTH; A Bully's Future, From Hard Life to Hard Time**

By JANE E. BRODY

The teasing started with a wisecrack about another person's sexual orientation, and escalated when the object of the remark responded with a provocative taunt of his own. The next thing anyone knew, one man had flung a metal chair, striking the other's face, shattering bones and partly severing his nose.

It is the kind of bullying behavior you might expect from unruly teenagers. But in this case, the authorities say, the bully was a New York City firefighter and his victim was a colleague, who had to be hospitalized and placed on a respirator.

According to other firefighters, an endless flow of sometimes vicious and cruel taunts is common-place in firehouse culture, with verbal abuse most often inflicted on young firefighters to toughen them up.

But, as studies of younger bullies have repeatedly shown, bullying can have disastrous effects not only on the victims but also on the bullies themselves, who often grow increasingly violent and antisocial.

**A Stepping Stone**

The rash of school shootings in recent years, including the massacre at Columbine, has renewed attention to the extent and potential consequences of bullying for both bully and victim.

In a videotape, the young gunmen attributed their acts to retaliation for years of taunting that they said friends and relatives had inflicted on them because of an unwillingness to dress and act as others wanted.

Bullies, researchers insist, are not born, they are made. And they can and should be unmade be-fore the behavior becomes so ingrained that it shapes their personalities and behavior for life. In a nationwide survey of 15,686 students in sixth through 10 grade in public and private schools, Dr. Tonja R. Nansel and colleagues at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that children who bullied and their victims were more likely to engage in violent behaviors than those who had never been involved in bullying.

They found that children who bully are at risk for engaging in more serious violent acts, like fighting frequently and carrying weapons.

For example, among boys surveyed who said they had bullied others at least once a week in school, 52.2 percent had carried weapons in the past month, 43.1 percent carried weapons to school, 38.7 percent fought frequently and 45.7 percent reported being injured in fights. The comparable statistics for boys who had never bullied others in school were 13.4 percent, 7.9 percent, 8.3 percent and 16.2 percent.

The greatest risk for engaging in violence-related acts was found among boys who bullied others when they were away from school; 70.2 percent of them had carried weapons.

Nor were girls exempt from potentially violent behavior. About 30 percent of girls who had bullied others in school at least once a week reported carrying weapons.

The victims of bullying were also at risk for violent behavior, with weapons carried by 36 percent of boys and 15 percent of girls who had been bullied in school at least once a week.

At greatest risk were boys and girls who both bullied others and were bullied themselves; they were 16 times as likely as youngsters not engaged in bullying behavior to carry weapons, the researchers reported last April in The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine.

''It appears that bullying is not an isolated behavior, but a sign that children may be involved in more violent behaviors,'' said Dr. Duane Alexander, director of the child health institute. ''The implication is that children who bully other children may benefit from programs seeking to prevent not just bullying, but other violent behaviors as well.''

**Bullying Starts Early**

Even preschoolers can be bullies, for example, giving other children insulting nicknames, refusing to invite particular classmates to birthday parties or excluding certain children from games.

In a study published in November in the journal Child Development, Dr. James Snyder of Wichita State University and colleagues reported that many kindergarten children found themselves verbally and physically abused by their playground peers. By the time the children reached first grade, an in-creasing amount of harassment had focused on a smaller group of perpetual victims.

In their observations of 266 students through two early grades, the Kansas researchers found that boys who experienced growing harassment were more likely to demonstrate antisocial and depressive behavior, and girls who were victimized in kindergarten were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior at home as they grew older and became more and more depressed at school if they continued to be victims.

''Substantial rates of victimizations were observed,'' Dr. Snyder reported. ''On average, children were targets of peer physical or verbal harassment about once every three to six minutes.''

Another study of bullying among young adolescents, published in Pediatrics last month, emphasized the ''social plight of victims: they are not only targeted by bullies but also ostracized by many of their classmates.''

''Victims suffer not only emotional distress but also social marginalization (i.e., classmates avoid them and they have low social status),'' Dr. Jaana Juvonen and colleagues at the University of California, Los Angeles, reported.

This study, unlike others that required children to report on their own bullying actions and in-stances of being bullied, questioned fellow students of sixth graders from 11 schools to determine the incidence and consequences of bullying and being bullied.

As in previous studies, they found that the most troubled group were those who were both bullies and victims. These youngsters exhibited the highest levels of social avoidance, conduct problems and school difficulties.

Furthermore, the researchers said, ''victims who bully others also best fit the profiles of seriously violent offenders.''

They analyzed 37 intended and actual school shootings and found that about two-thirds of those responsible had been bullied by their peers.

**What Can Be Done?**

Parents are advised to ask children about teasing as early as age 5. If a child engages in bullying, he should be taught to apologize, ask forgiveness and shake hands. Older children who are teased can be taught not to play the role of victim, either by saying to the bully: ''I don't like your teasing. Stop it,'' or simply ignoring the bully and walking away.

Children who are bullied should not be blamed for being victims, nor should they be told to fight back. That can only worsen the problem, encouraging bullies to become increasingly hurtful. It is also important to boost victims' self-confidence and make sure they take part in activities they enjoy and can excel at. Also, parents who see bullying should teach their children to stick up for victims whenever possible.

Parents of bullies are advised to take the problem seriously, looking for the causes of anger or frustration, letting them know that hurtful behavior will not be tolerated, supervising their behavior more closely, ''punishing'' bullying with positive acts toward others and teaching nonviolent ways of solving problems.

Experts say that schools, communities and parents must collaborate to control bullying. One effective school-based program, covering kindergarten through fifth grade, is called Take a Stand, developed by Dr. Sherryll Kraizer. A set of teaching guides and a training videotape costs $195.

This article appeared in The New York Times January 13, 2004 and can be accessed online at www.nytimes.com.

**Bullying: The Really Big Problem Behind the Really Big Problem**

By JONATHAN HEWITT

It's October. The weather is starting to change, we're planning Halloween costumes and starting to think about the holidays. But October is also now recognized as National Bullying Prevention Month. On the one hand, I'm thrilled that we are giving this critical issue such focused attention. But on the other hand, I am deeply saddened that bullying in our nation has reached such epidemic proportions.

We've all seen the heartbreaking and disturbing stories regularly making headlines on the news and in our local papers. It's way too often that we hear horrifying stories of teens committing suicide as a result of bullying, like the story a young girl posted about her sister, She was Bullied to death R.I.P., which has over 4.3 million views on YouTube. There was even a documentary film entitled Bully released in U.S. theaters earlier this year. Clearly, the bullying issue is getting the attention it deserves.

And everyone is working really hard to find solutions to the problem. Children and teens have been surveyed, research has been compiled and programs led by students, school administrators and bully experts are all attacking the issue. The Department of Education has hosted summits on bullying prevention and 48 states have now enacted anti-bullying legislation. Even celebrities are doing their part like Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation.

Yet the statistics are still staggering. According to the CDC, "Current estimates suggest that nearly 30% of American adolescents reported at least moderate bullying experiences as the bully, the victim, or both." Unfortunately, 83% of these bullying incidents receive no intervention and continue to hap-pen. I could go on and on with these kinds of sobering statistics.

Can the news be any worse? Well, I honestly believe that behind the really complex and pervasive bullying issue is actually another issue equally as complex and even more widespread. I believe that the really big problem behind the really big problem is self-bullying.

I have taught anti-bully programs to children and teens for 20 years. I have taught the mental, emotional, verbal and physical safety skills to prevent and deal with a bully situation. Of course, there is huge benefit to these kinds of programs, but at some point I realized that it just wasn't enough. I wasn't addressing the problem behind the problem.

Under the tremendous pressure and influence of peers and media, kids today are bombarded more than ever with how they should look, how they should act and who they should be. Because no child can possibly live up to these false standards, it all becomes fertile ground for self-directed negative thoughts, harsh self-judgments and damaging comparisons. The problem compounds because when children don't know how to deal with their own self-negativity, they look for other ways to alleviate the pain. Too often a child will try to feel better about himself by putting down someone else. Thus it's a domino effect and without addressing self-bullying, we will never have a chance of making a big dent in the bullying problem.

Of course, there is no overnight, quick-fix solution, but I am dedicated to attacking the self-bullying problem in two ways. First, we need to help our children build a strong, positive sense of self from within instead of looking to others for their validation and self-worth. Second, we need to help our children develop the skills to deal with negative thoughts when they do arise.

So, where do you begin in helping your child? I know that it can all seem overwhelming, but I invite you to take the first step which is awareness. Start with yourself. Become aware of your own self-bullying. Do your children see you judging yourself, comparing yourself to others, putting yourself down? What are you modeling to your kids? What are your children learning from you? Realize that you don't have to be perfect. No one is immune from self-bullying, but we all have the ability to learn skills to deal with it.

Start a conversation with your children about the topic of self-bullying. Without over sharing or overburdening your child, you can talk about your own experiences with it. You can ask your child to be-come aware of when they experience self-directed negative thoughts or putting themselves down. I invite you to air out this topic in your home and let it become something that you and your children can discuss openly.

Awareness and open conversation are great first steps to address self-bullying with your family. Stay tuned for a follow-up article when I'll be sharing specific tools to help your child deal with self-bullying thoughts and build a strong, positive sense of self from the inside out.

This article appeared in The Huffington Post Online October 4, 2012.

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**Mobs Are Born as Word Grows by Text Message** By IAN URBINA, Published: March 24, 2010

PHILADELPHIA — It started innocently enough seven years ago as an act of performance art where people linked through social-networking Web sites and text messaging suddenly gathered on the streets for impromptu pillow fights in New York, group disco routines in London, and even a huge snowball fight in Washington.

Young people filled South Street in Philadelphia on Saturday in what officials said was the latest flash mob to turn dangerous.

But these so-called flash mobs have taken a more aggressive and raucous turn here as hundreds of teenagers have been converging downtown for a ritual that is part bullying, part running of the bulls: sprinting down the block, the teenagers sometimes pause to brawl with one another, assault pedestrians or vandalize property.

On Wednesday, the police here said that they had had enough. They announced plans to step up enforcement of a curfew already on the books, and to tighten it if there is another incident.

They added that they planned to hold parents legally responsible for their children’s actions. They are also considering making free transit passes for students invalid after 4 p.m., instead of 7 p.m., to limit teenagers’ ability to ride downtown.

“This is bad decision making by a small group of young people who are doing silly but dangerous stuff,” Mayor Michael A. Nutter said in an interview Wednesday. “We intend to do something about it immediately.”

Flash mobs are not unique to Philadelphia, but they have been more frequent here than elsewhere. Others that resulted in arrests and injuries have been reported over the past year in Boston, South Orange, N.J., and Brooklyn.

Philadelphia officials added that they had also begun getting help from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to monitor social-media networks. And television and radio stations are helping to recruit hip-hop artists to make public service announcements imploring teenagers to end the practice.

In the past year, at least four of the flash mobs have broken out in the city, including one on Saturday in which roving teenagers broke into fights, several onlookers were injured and at least three people were arrested.

“It was like a tsunami of kids,” said Seth Kaufman, 20, a pizza deliveryman at Olympia II Pizza & Restaurant on South Street. He lifted his shirt to show gashes along his back and arm. He also had bruises on his forehead he said were from kicks and punches he suffered while trying to keep a rowdy crowd from entering the shop, where a fight was already under way.

“By the time you could hear them yelling, they were flooding the streets and the stores and the sidewalks,” Mr. Kaufman said. The ad hoc gangs have scared many pedestrians off the streets.

City residents are also starting to complain about the number of unsupervised children, and child advocates are asking if there are enough activities to keep young people busy after school.

“We definitely need more jobs for kids, we need more summer jobs for kids, we need more after-school programming, and we need more parent support,” said Shelly Yanoff, executive director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth, a children’s advocacy group in Philadelphia.

Ms. Yanoff added that libraries and after-school programs had been reduced and a program for youth offenders had been cut sharply. On Friday, officials said, two preteenagers assaulted a woman as part of a violent game called “Catch and Wreck,” in which children pick out people who appear homeless and then beat them and take any money they have.

The police, who say these assaults are unrelated to flash mobs, arrested an 11-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl in the attack. The police said they also planned to charge the boy in an attack on a 73-year-old man who was beaten and robbed in the same area on March 13.

The flash mobs have raised questions about race and class. Most of the teenagers who have taken part in them are black and from poor neighborhoods. Most of the areas hit have been predominantly white business districts. In the flash mob on Saturday, groups of teenagers were chanting “black boys” and “burn the city,” bystanders said.

In a Feb. 16 melee, 150 teenagers spilled out of the Gallery shopping mall east of City Hall during rush hour and rampaged through Macy’s, knocking down customers and damaging displays. The police arrested 15 of the teenagers and, according to one report, some had not been allowed to call their parents six hours after they were detained.

Clay Yeager, a juvenile justice consultant and former director of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in Pennsylvania, said he believed the flash mobs were partly a result of a decline in state money for youth violence prevention programs.

Financing for the programs has dropped 93 percent to $1.2 million in this year’s budget compared with $16 million in 2002. City financing for such programs has dropped to $1.9 million in the past three years compared with $4.1 million from 1999 through 2002, a 53 percent drop.

Mayor Nutter, who is black, rejected the notion that race or the city cut in services was a factor. “I don’t think people should be finding excuses for inappropriate behavior,” Mr. Nutter said. “There is no racial component to stupid behavior, and parents should not be looking to the government to provide entertainment for their children.” Violent crime in Philadelphia has dropped 12 percent and homicides have fallen 23 percent since 2008.

Bill Wasik, a senior editor at Harper’s who is credited with introducing the notion of a flash mob in 2003, said he was surprised by the new focus of some of the gatherings.

Mr. Wasik said the mobs started as a kind of playful social experiment meant to encourage spontaneity and big gatherings to temporarily take over commercial and public areas simply to show that they could. “It’s terrible that these Philly mobs have turned violent,” he said.

Source: <http://goo.gl/LHHu>

***How Old Is Old Enough?* By**[**CATHERINE RAMPELL**](https://www.nytimes.com/by/catherine-rampell), NOV. 14, 2009

This past week the [Supreme Court](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/supreme_court/index.html?inline=nyt-org) heard arguments about whether children should ever be sentenced to life without parole for crimes that don’t involve murder.

At the heart of the argument lies a vexing question: When should a person be treated as an adult?

The answer, generally, is 18 — the age when the United States, and the rest of the world, considers young people capable of accepting responsibility for their actions. But there are countless deviations from this benchmark, both around the world (the bar mitzvah, for instance), and within the United States.

For drinking, driving, fighting in the military, compulsory schooling, watching an R-rated movie, consenting to sex, getting married, having an abortion or even being responsible for your own finances, the dawn of adulthood in America is all over the place.

And if you think separating the men from the boys (or the women from the girls) is difficult today, tracing the history of America’s conception of childhood just complicates things further.

In the 19th century, teenagers were expected to raise their own children and work in the fields. This was true even though 19th-century teenagers were physically and intellectually less advanced than teenagers today. Thanks to better nutrition and more formal schooling, today’s children generally reach puberty earlier and are, at least in theory, more informed about the world around them.

In other words, the only thing that is consistent about our notions of when a child becomes an adult is our inconsistency, says Steven Mintz, a historian at Columbia University.

We like to think the threshold is set to protect the welfare of the child, as with statutory rape laws or even movie ratings. But sometimes the cutoff is set for utilitarian reasons: We don’t want to hurt young people, but we also don’t want young people to hurt us.

In Florida, for instance, the state got tough on teenage criminals when juvenile crime rates jumped during the 1990s, threatening not only residents and visitors, but Florida’s bedrock tourism industry itself. Two such juvenile offenders, one who raped a woman when he was 13, and another who committed armed robbery at 16, brought the appeals heard by the Supreme Court last week.

Sometimes adulthood is set inconsistently for pragmatic reasons. Maybe we accept that 19-year-olds are not yet fully responsible adults for the purpose of driving a rental car, but hey, we still need someone to drive our tanks in Afghanistan.

And often the categories are determined by economics, to benefit whoever is making the rules. Some institutions — say, a law school financial aid office — dictate that a young person is expected to lean on her parents financially until age 30. Others — say, a health insurance company — say that no, a young person is actually expected to stand on her own two feet at age 19.

These contradictions can be discomfiting. It seems unfair to grant a young person the responsibilities of a grownup without granting that young person the rights of a grownup, too. If the court treats a 13-year-old as an adult, should the DVD rental store, too? What about the local bars?

Over the years attempts have been made to align these various ages of majority. The voting age was lowered during the Vietnam War, for example, largely because Americans were uncomfortable with a democracy that forced 18-year-olds to die for their country but denied them suffrage.

But even if you want an elegant, bright line to separate adulthood from childhood, where should it be?

Since at least Aristotle, scholars have tried to answer this question. And as with so many things, the question has migrated largely from the realm of philosophers to that of scientists.

Neurological and behavioral research, led by Laurence Steinberg at Temple University, has been particularly influential in recent years.

Professor Steinberg, who last week won a $1 million research prize for his work on the development of young people, has found through laboratory experiments that young teenagers seek out risk and have trouble controlling their impulses. That’s a very bad combination when it comes to crime, and often a mitigating factor when it comes to judging those crimes.

These studies helped convince the Supreme Court in 2005 that executing convicts for offenses committed before age 18 was unconstitutional, and the same research is now a centerpiece in the current Supreme Court cases about life without parole.

But still, scientific research has in many ways further blurred, rather than clarified, the distinction between childhood and adulthood.

For one, it has shown different people mature at different rates. But more problematically, any given person’s abilities also mature at different rates. Young people develop logical reasoning before they develop impulse control, for example. That means kids can recognize bad behavior even before they can overcome the natural urges and social pressures to participate in it.

Because young people develop different skills incrementally, rather than all at once, Professor Steinberg says, it makes sense to dole out rights and responsibilities incrementally. Maybe competent voting is different from competent driving, which is different from competent drinking.

“Ask any parent you know,” Mr. Steinberg said, “they’ll tell you how confused they are that their kids are so smart in some ways, but still do such stupid, stupid things.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/weekinreview/15ramp.html>

**Should 11-year-olds be charged with adult crimes?**  By Philip Holloway

*(Philip Holloway, a CNN legal analyst, is a criminal defense lawyer who heads his own firm in Cobb County, Georgia. A former prosecutor and adjunct professor of criminal justice, he is former president of the Cobb County Bar Association's criminal law section. Follow him on Twitter:* [*@PhilHollowayEsq*](http://www.twitter.com/philhollowayesq) *The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.)*

(CNN)How young is "old enough" to be an adult criminal?

An 11-year-old boy in Tennessee is facing first-degree murder charges in the [death of an 8-year-old he shot](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/08/us/girl-killed-puppy-in-tennessee/index.html) after he asked to see her puppy and she said no. The boy used his father's 12-gauge shotgun, taking it from an unlocked closet, according to [a story](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/08/us/girl-killed-puppy-in-tennessee/) in the Washington Post. The local prosecutor will decide whether to charge the boy as an adult.

Nobody with a soul can seriously ignore the tragic nature of the death of any child. However, two wrongs do not make a right; prosecuting a very young child for murder and sending him to prison for life is tragic in and of itself. It essentially takes the life of another child and causes unimaginable heartache for others.

For centuries American and English common law held that children under age 14 were not legally capable of forming criminal intent. For any crime to occur, there must be the convergence of what is known as the "actus reus" (the guilty act) and the "mens rea" (the guilty mind, also known as criminal intent).

Without these two necessary pieces, a crime does not exist. State legislatures across America have largely changed the traditional common-law idea that children are unable to formulate criminal intent. There is no national standard in determining at what age a child can be treated as an adult in the criminal justice system. The result is that approximately 200,000 American children are charged and incarcerated every year -- as adults, [according to](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/stop-prosecuting-children-adults) the Open Society Foundations.

Fourteen states have no minimum age at which children can be prosecuted as adults, according to the Equal Justice Initiative. In some cases children younger than 10 have been prosecuted as adults.

I suggest that except for extraordinary circumstances, no child under the age of at least 17 should be sentenced to lengthy [incarceration in adult jails.](http://www.eji.org/childrenprison) It is beyond debate that the human [brain](http://mentalhealthdaily.com/2015/02/18/at-what-age-is-the-brain-fully-developed/) does not reach anything close to maturity until the early to mid 20s.

Therefore it stands to reason that an adolescent or prepubescent child cannot understand the nature and the consequences of their actions. Why, therefore, in a rational society would anyone think it is appropriate to apply adult consequences to the choices made by children?

The answer? Emotional knee-jerk reactions by politicians who pass laws without considering the bigger picture.

For example consider the case of little Amy Yates, age 8 at the time she died, strangled in Georgia in 2004.

At the time it was widely believed that her 12-year-old neighbor Jonathan Adams was guilty of the crime. According to Georgia law at the time the maximum penalty Adams could face was two years in confinement due to his age. He entered a plea without admitting guilt but it is now widely believed he was in fact [innocent.](https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/casedetail.aspx?caseid=2981)

Nevertheless, the Georgia Legislature responded almost immediately and unanimously out of emotion and passed what is known as "Amy's Law" which would have provided for five years incarceration.

Every state in the United States has some procedure in place to [prosecute](https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/232434.pdf) children as adults under certain circumstances.

And there can be no doubt that sometimes it is appropriate to do so -- especially in cases where the offender is somewhat older and it can be shown that person is not capable of rehabilitation and where there is strong evidence of planning. Sometimes there may be evidence the person knew and understood the nature and consequences of their actions, which could justify an adult prosecution

But the fact remains that children are children -- they are not adults and their brains do not work the same as an adult. Just ask any parent. Children cannot enlist in the military. Children -- indeed, adults under 21, cannot legally order a beer. Children cannot enter into contracts. Children cannot make legal decisions for themselves, but they CAN be held to adult standards if they are charged with crimes.

And almost beyond belief, children can be [executed](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/execution-juveniles-us-and-other-countries) for crimes they commit at very young ages.

Setting aside for the moment that the punishment may sometimes fit the crime, it is worth noting that children in adult prisons do you not fare well at all. Approximately 10,000 children are held in adult jails and prisons in the United States.

These are kids who are five times [more likely](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/06/05/when-to-punish-a-young-offender-and-when-to-rehabilitate/in-prison-teenagers-become-prey) to be raped or otherwise sexually assaulted than in juvenile facilities. The risk of suicide is likewise much higher for juveniles in adult jails. This raises the issue of whether prolonged incarceration of children violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

There is little if any evidence to suggest that treating juveniles as adults in the criminal justice system decreases crime or has any deterrent effect. In fact, what evidence does exist suggests the opposite. Studies show that incarcerating children more often than not results in higher rates of recidivism; essentially, it turns children into hardened criminals.

But I don't need studies to tell me this because I have seen it for myself.

I have worked in and around the criminal justice system for about 28 years. I was trained to believe that juvenile courts were courts of rehabilitation rather than punishment. I was trained to believe that children were salvageable whereas sometimes adults are not.

I still believe that to be the case, but in my lifetime there has been a drastic shift from notions of rehabilitation to quests for revenge and vengeance regardless of the age of the accused.

As a parent I know without question that children do not think about the world around them the way we adults do. They have little if any perspective and they often use poor judgment.

It may not be possible to come up with a bright line rule defining the age at which a child can be tried as an adult. It should depend on a case-by-case analysis based on the child's age and other relevant factors. This decision should be left to judges with the help of psychiatrists and psychologists rather than ad-hoc legislative determinations. After all, that's why we have judges -- to make decisions based on the totality of the circumstances.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/14/opinions/holloway-charging-juveniles-as-adults/>>

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**The Age of Reason; A Chilling Crime and a Question: What's in a Child's Mind?**

By SUSAN SACHS, Published: August 16, 1998 At the age of 7, a child is considered by the Roman Catholic Church to have reached the ''age of reason'' and is entitled to receive communion. Some evangelical churches hold that a child of 7 can make an independent spiritual choice. In Judaism and Islam, a boy of 7 is expected to begin his religious studies and participate, to some degree, in adult rituals like fasting and praying. Freud believed the super ego, or the conscience, develops by age 4 or 5. But is a child of such tender years a responsible being, capable of telling right from wrong and accountable, not just legally but morally, for his actions? Murder charges brought last week in Chicago against two boys, ages 7 and 8, raised the issue as more than an abstraction. The boys, according to the police, confessed to killing an 11-year-old girl, Ryan Harris, then stealing her bicycle. Youngsters kill – that’s been drilled into the national consciousness by a succession of school shootings. In those cases, the juvenile killers were adolescents. The two boys who were convicted last week of gunning down classmates and a teacher in their Jonesboro, Ark., schoolyard last March were then just 11 and 13. The boy charged in the school shootings in Springfield, Ore., last May is 15. Few would argue with the assumption that, at that stage in their lives, they ought to be capable of understanding their actions and the consequences. With a child of only 7, however, the assumptions are neither clear nor particularly comfortable. ''What do you do with children who may have arrived at the age of reason but whose psychological life is such that neither rationality nor moral reason operate in their behavior?'' asked Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist at Harvard University who has written several books on the moral development of children. No one, he said, is born bad. Yet, despite a lifetime of studying and listening to children, he was utterly confounded by the implications of the Chicago case. ''In the absence of that kind of psychological life – I mean the lack of controls to deal with the impulses of their lives, the lack of an operative consciousness – I can only throw up my hands,'' Dr. Coles said. Islam, too, holds that a prepubescent child is not ''fully in control of his senses and doesn't have the power of reasoning to really make an informed judgment,'' said Jamal Badawi, a Muslim scholar and chairman of the Islamic Information Foundation in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Neither religion has a concept of original sin. ''The human being is neither satanic nor angelic by nature,'' said Dr. Badawi, referring to the Koran. ''He simply has the potential to ascend to a level even higher than the angels or descend to a level lower than animals.''

How society will deal with the boys is now a question for the juvenile justice system, but there are no precedents; they are the youngest children ever charged with murder in this country. On Thursday, they were released to their mothers and ordered to wear electronic monitoring devices and stay in their homes.

Religion, a source of society's notions of justice, has been wrestling with moral codes for millennia. But cases of children committing capital crimes are rare, so they represent something of a black hole for theologians, a puzzle that neither faith nor doctrine anticipates.

Both Judaism and Islam, for example, set the age of majority, when children are liable for their actions, at 13 for boys and 12 for girls. ''It's the age of full responsibility and therefore full liability,'' said David Kraemer, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Younger children are considered to have the impulse to do good and evil, he added, ''but not the reason to control the impulse.''

One rabbinic teaching goes further. While rabbinical courts consider a 13-year-old liable for his actions, in the court of heaven the age of majority is 20. ''It was a recognition that the teen-age years were very tumultuous and that, although they are full-grown and can do damage, God recognizes that they can't really be held responsible,'' Dr. Kraemer said.

Christian theology on the nature of the child is more complex, encompassing a belief that everyone is tainted by original sin as well as accommodating the idea that everyone is made in the image of God.

Since the days of Pope Pius X nearly a century ago, the Catholic Church has attributed to children of 7 the capacity to understand the consequences of their actions. That is a prerequisite for their First Communion, when they are first given a wafer in the sacrament of the Eucharist. But strict doctrine has given way to pragmatism. ''It all depends on the context,'' said the Rev. Richard McCormick, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame. ''One of the criteria used in regard to the Eucharist is the ability to understand, in some very, very primordial sense, the difference between just plain bread and this bread that is really Jesus. As we all grow older, we understand and penetrate that a bit more.''

But children who may be old enough to take communion, he added, are not necessarily thought of as capable of understanding the nature of sin as a break with God. ''It's the conviction of virtually all people that children of that age are incapable of serious sin,'' Father McCormick said.

Ideas about the emergence of moral consciousness developed differently in Protestant churches. The Calvinist view was that ''the image of God in each of us is radically destroyed or altered by what is called original sin, that there is innate depravity in human beings,'' said John McDargh, an associate professor of theology at Boston College. Other Christian thinkers, he said, argued that the image of God should be seen as the human capacity for relationships and that original sin may obscure but not destroy that image.

In the United States, those divergent views produced not only the image of ''The Bad Seed,'' as popularized in William March's 1954 novel about a child who is simply born bad, but also the early Puritan notion that adults should deploy a harsh hand to break the will of the innately corrupted child.

Later movements, in a backlash, leaned more toward the Mark Twain view that the natural child, like the fictional Huckleberry Finn, is untainted except by society, and prescribed a lighter parental touch to nurture what was believed to be the child's innate capacity for empathy and charity.

Modern theorists of child development see children much as parents like to think of their offspring -- works in progress, with natural inclinations to empathize with others, to feel bad if someone is hurt, to tell right from wrong. The tricky part is figuring out how and when those values can be warped or enhanced by interactions with family, peers and society.

By an early age, any child will be tested. ''When you send a child off to school at 6, the child becomes a social being, responsible to society,'' said Dr. Coles, the child psychiatrist. And that's where the danger lies. ''Children who grow up with no sense of right and wrong are both vulnerable and dangerous – vulnerable to their impulses, dangerous to others,'' he said.

Reason, then, is not really the issue with a child of 7 or 8. ''It's not like a 4-year-old who happens to pull a trigger on a gun and doesn't understand that it kills, or doesn't understand what killing is about altogether, or what death is about,'' said Moshe Halbertal, a professor of Jewish thought at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. ''Here, at 7 or 8 or 9, they understand. We don't attribute to them responsibility, but we do attribute to them understanding.''

And by their very nature, he added, children bounce the question back to their elders. ''When we say that children are not fully legally responsible, one thing we mean by that is that they mirror the social life around them,'' Dr. Halbertal said. ''This is what's so shattering about crimes done by children. They are naive or, in some ways, transparent reflections of something in society – a certain violence, a certain cruelty. Without filtering, they represent what the society is about.''

Source: <http://goo.gl/ilOq21>