

of classmates, a poor body-image, athletic or romantic failures, unpopularity”—the consequences of their feelings sometimes can be explosive.

Let the troubled youths go, urges Toby. If they are too young to leave school, then get

them into alternative schools. If they are old enough, let them drop out. McDonald's may succeed where the high school failed. The dropouts can always finish high school later. "Formal education is not the only path to responsible adulthood," Toby notes.

Gender on the Bench

"Gender and Judicial Decisions: Do Female Judges Decide Cases Differently than Male Judges?" by Phyllis Coontz, in *Gender Issues* (Fall 2000), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers Univ., 35 Berrue Cir., Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

If men and women approach moral problems in different ways, as "difference" feminists maintain, then do male and female judges decide court decisions differently? Coontz, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a survey of state trial judges in Pennsylvania to find out.

The state has 366 trial court judges, of whom 28 are women. All 28, along with 167 male jurists, answered Coontz's questions about how they would decide hypothetical cases involving self-defense homicide, personal injury, divorce, and assault. Coontz found significant male-female differences in almost half of the judges' hypothetical decisions.

In the homicide case, a female defendant claimed to have been abused by her boyfriend and to have killed him in self-defense. Twenty-seven percent of the female judges found her guilty, compared with 13 percent of the male judges. In the personal injury case, a plaintiff was left paralyzed from the waist down by an auto accident. The female judges awarded an average sum that was less than half that awarded by their male counterparts. But a woman being

divorced by her husband fared slightly better before the female judges. All of them awarded her alimony, while three percent of the male judges did not.

Both male and female jurists were more likely to find a male defendant guilty of assault, in a scuffle growing out of a basketball game bet, than they were a female defendant. But that inclination was stronger in the women on the bench. The female judges also were more likely to impose a longer sentence in such an assault case and to award higher damages (\$955, compared with \$353). The male jurists were twice as likely (22 percent, compared with 11 percent) to award civil damages.

Coontz concludes that the women on the bench in Pennsylvania do indeed speak with "a different voice" from their male counterparts. This may be because of their different "lived experiences," she says. "We, of course, expect judges to set aside personal viewpoints when deciding cases, yet beneath the robe of justice is an individual whose perceptions of the world have been influenced by [his or her] experiences in it."

PRESS & MEDIA

News You Can Lose

"Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can Do about It" by Thomas E. Patterson, in a Shorenstein Center Report (Dec. 2000), Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Struggling against increased competition for readers and viewers, news organizations have been steadily substituting entertaining "soft" news for reporting on public affairs. The

remaining coverage of politics and government has grown relentlessly more critical. In the long run, this approach may only drive more people away, argues Patterson, a