

TECH TALK

Parental guidance suggested

Internet proves a dangerous playground for unsupervised children

No parent would allow their child to play in a park where a kid had a significant chance to get hurt. One I never see parents dropping kids off on a playground lit with broken glass, razors or dangerous chemicals. When it comes to the Internet, kids are often left to do as please. Although children likely to come across brass on the Internet, it can't a physical danger. As over the last few weeks have shown, the Internet is a dangerous playground. It is a playground needs to be safer for children. Fortunately, the Internet's ugly side has raised head in Texas A&M University's own back. Two weeks ago, Obed Sanchez Matus, 29, a late student and teaching assistant in the Department of Mathematics was arrested on charges of sexually assaulting a child. Matus is accused of seeing a 15-year-old girl from Limestone County. In an interview in the *Bryan-College Station*, Limestone County Sheriff's Capt. Dennis Wilaid Matus corresponded with the girl via the net, then traveled to Limestone County to have with her. Obviously, these charges are disturbing. The idea equal predator, from A&M no less, stalking a 15-old girl is despicable. That these events should happen at A&M should



JOHN LEMONS
columnist

make Aggies concerned with the consequences of the almost anarchic freedom on the Internet. Sadly, the Matus case is not the only recent story where contact with the Internet resulted in accusations of a 15-year-old being harmed. Last month, Michael Swailles, a teenager from Glendora, Calif., committed suicide by laying down in front of an oncoming train. Police investigating the case found print-outs from a Web page called the "Suicide FAQ" in Swailles' room. The "Suicide FAQ," found on a Web page owned by Duke University student, Chris Economakes, details the ins and outs of 40 suicide methods. Method number 14, "Jumping in Front of Trains" suggests that it is "probably better to put your neck on the lines, since a glancing blow would probably break your spine (and



cripple you). Although the Internet cannot be solely blamed for these terrible occurrences, they probably never would have happened without it. The Internet is a wild frontier with few rules or conventions. Any attempts at regulating it have met with harsh complaints of censorship and fascism. Indeed, freedom of speech is the cornerstone of Americans' rights. But, what is freedom on the Internet costing us? It seems these days, Americans are living under the tyranny of freedom. We have become so free as a society, that we have left ourselves open to be abused by others. Freedom has gone too far when maintaining it entails sexually abuse. That is not the pursuit of liberty, it is the pursuit of stupidity. Protecting children from the Internet will

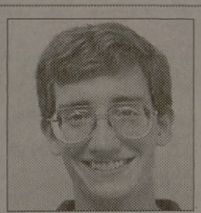
require two things — responsibility and regulation. Responsibility must start with individuals who post material on the Internet. There are some materials which should not be made easily available to children. For example, Economakes' posting the "Suicide FAQ" on his Web page borders on criminal negligence. Obviously, its posting led to tragic results. Regulation begins in the home. The dilemma of regulating the Internet is reminiscent of the debate surrounding the implementation of the V-chip, a device which filters out sex and violence from television shows. Despite the innovation of the technology, the best V-chips are parents who turn the television off rather than expose their children to objectionable material. Likewise, the best regulation of the Internet for children comes from parents who monitor their children's Internet use. The crucial question of these cases is where were the parents when these events were happening? Surely if the parents of the 15-year-olds involved in these cases had known what was going on, they could have avoided these tragedies. The Internet is a dangerous playground for America's children. To protect those children, it will be necessary for Americans to sacrifice some of their rights. After all, sacrificing rights is preferable to the alternative of dead or abused children, when one lives under the tyranny of freedom.

John Lemons is an electrical engineering graduate student.

CAMPUS CONNECTION

Aggie culture makes students easily recognizable

Despite the furor the cases, A&M brown di-cam-Aggies from and the I and back-nd imaginable. one can define what consti-an Aggie. A&M students share a non culture, but at the same they often have nothing in non with each other. ough anyone who has a con-on with College Station knows can't be described from the e, looking out, here are a few elines to help identify a true



DAVID JOHNSTON
columnist

- If you'd rather see your sports team beat t.u. than win a national championship, you've got to be an Aggie.
- If the letters "PTTS" make your blood pressure rise and fill your mind with conspiracy theories, you might be an Aggie.
- If you can't understand why McDonald's doesn't deliver any longer, you could be at A&M.
- If the word "bat" brings to mind something besides New Mexican caves, you might be an Aggie.
- If you sign up for credit cards just so you can push back laundry day, you could be an A&M student.
- If you've gone to a job interview and worried more about how to present your ring than how to present your résumé, you're probably an Aggie.
- If you've seen more than two U.S. Presidents on your college campus, it's a good bet you're in College Station.
- If you're not surprised when total strangers greet you as they walk past, you're probably an Aggie.
- You might be an Aggie if you own as many pairs of boots as you do ties.
- If you know how to pronounce Beutel and the word brings to mind at least two horror stories, you're an Aggie.
- If you can recite urban legends about the steam tunnels and the intended height of the library, you could be at A&M.
- If when you go to class you can tell which way the wind is blowing by which livestock you smell, welcome to the College Station campus.
- If you've ever gone to a football game just to see the band but you don't know why the other school wastes part of half-time, you could be an Aggie.
- If you use the phrase "old army" to describe anything other than your father's military experience, you're an Aggie.

David Johnston is a senior mathematics major.

PERSPECTIVES

Party lines should not determine choices

When the Founding Fathers weren't busy shopping for powdered wigs or chopping down cherry trees, they often passed the time by bashing political parties.



CALEB MCDANIEL
columnist

George Washington called political factions a form of "frightful despotism." To Alexander Hamilton, partisanship was synonymous with "poison." And Thomas Jefferson swore, "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." But less than two decades after the *Declaration of Independence* was signed, American politicians had pitched their tents in two partisan camps: the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. The same Jefferson who swore off heaven in the name of political unity was the leader of one of the country's earliest political parties. And Fisher Ames, a Federalist under the leadership of Alexander Hamilton, had taken to calling Jeffersonians "fire-eating salamanders" and "poison-sucking toads." And them's fightin' words. Today, more than two centuries after the same *Declaration of Independence* was signed, little has changed. Sure, today the Democrats believe that "Newts" are the derogatory amphibians of choice, rather than "salamanders" and "toads." But the point is, when it comes to politics, Americans are just as factious as they have ever been. Perhaps James Madison was right. He believed that the "latent causes of faction" are "sown in the nature of man." Today those latent causes have become all too potent. Factions have become a political fact of life. And judging from the celebration on Capitol Hill every time a bi-partisan initia-

tive is passed, one would think crossing the aisle to shake the hand of a partisan is as onerous as crossing the Delaware. But the fact that Americans have historically gravitated toward opposite ends of the political spectrum should not be surprising. People like to relate themselves to a larger group; they prefer to think of themselves as parts of some larger cause. That's why, in many ways, the middle ground is "no man's land" in politics. It is easy for people to categorically identify themselves as "Republicans" or "Democrats," because the parties already have platforms that they can simply agree with or object to; they don't have to make a platform of their own. It is much easier to call themselves "conservatives" or "liberals" than to admit that sometimes they aren't sure exactly what they believe. It is much simpler for members of Congress to give a standing ovation only to the parts of the State of the Union Address when Al Gore leaps to his feet, or to remain stoically seated only when Newt Gingrich smiles sardonically from his chair. In other words, it is easier to follow the leaders, and it is harder for individuals to think for themselves. This factious thinking can be destructive. Most policy is too complex to be tidily divided along party lines. Society is too heterogeneous to be summarily judged by partisan standards. And ethics are too valuable to be confused by political rhetoric. Complex issues require more complex thinking. Partisan debates are usually anything but complex. Party politics simplify issues into bandwagon bickering. Too often, one party opposes the plans of the other only because they are the other party, rather than because the proposal is really against the interest of the United States. Case in point: how did our illustrious Congress spend its first week in session? Tackling Social Security problems? Laboring

over education reform? Divvying up predicted budget surpluses? Nope. Debating over whether Ronald Reagan should have an airport in his honor. The debate, however, was not rooted in any really serious arguments about the Republican proposition — it was part and parcel a partisan dispute. But politicians are not the only Americans who are guilty of factious thinking. Citizens follow their lead. Rather than thinking analytically about what a politician is saying, people focus on who is saying it. But no truly concerned citizen should be a pure Republican or a pure Democrat. Instead, Americans ought to weigh policies and opinions based on their own merits, rather than their classification as "conservative" or "liberal." Americans ought to reason before they endorse the Republicans and carefully deliberate before they support the Democrats. Both parties have good things to say — neither is wholly evil. So Americans should critically review the proposals of both. Approve plans because they are right, not because they are Republican. Defend policies because they are desirable, not because they are Democratic. Our political ideal should not be bi-partisanship, but non-partisanship. Freedom of thought means freedom from factions. No one would advocate the abolition of political parties. But Americans must stop using them as instruments of division. The Founding Fathers who despised the idea of factions did not practice what they preached. But their mistakes do not have to perpetuate political disunity. Americans can work towards a government whose leaders are neither Republicans or Democrats, only thinking citizens who refuse to be classified as either elephants or donkeys, salamanders or toads.

Caleb McDaniel is a freshman history major.



MAIL CALL

Bracelets act as form of ministry, not as fad

In response to Joe Schumacher's Feb. 5 column: Sometimes it is best not to speak publically of things we do not know anything about. The "fad" What Would Jesus Do bracelets do not serve only as fair-weather Christians' outward display of "sainthood." Has it ever occurred to you that

some of those "fair-weather Christians" are people who asked what W.W.J.D. stood for and thus received a bracelet? These bracelets are a means of ministry to those who might not know Christ and His teachings. In a way, you are correct, not everyone who wears the bracelet is a Christian, but then they never claimed to be. Believe it or not, some of us do practice we preach and are anxious to share our faith with those who do not know Christ. I base my judgment of others on the Bible which says the Lord does not look at outward appearances, but at the heart. What do you base your judgment on? Also, Christianity is not based on trying your hardest to be "perfect."

Ana Garcia Class of '99

Accompanied by 6 signatures.

Bracelets act as reminders for wearers

In response to Lucas Wagner's Feb. 6th mail call: I am very sorry you have had a bad experience with someone who wears a What Would Jesus Do bracelet, but please do not assume that the majority of people who adorn these are hypocrites. In fact, your letter helps us remember the purpose of these bracelets: to be a reminder, and symbol of Jesus' love, and to remind us of the faith we should have in Him. Just because someone puts on one of these bracelets, they do not transform into a Christ-like example. That is what the bracelet is for: to help. So instead of condemning people, maybe you should also remember these bracelets' purpose. If you adorn one, and your wrist is singing of "goodness, moderation,

and praise", maybe you need to listen more closely, and try to help others. Because that's what Jesus would do.

Amy Thiessen Class of '00

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For more details on letter policy, please call 845-3313 and direct your question to the opinion editor.