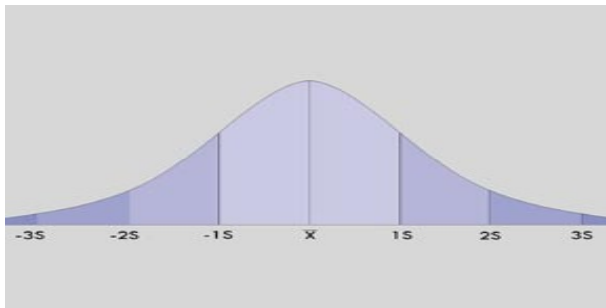


THE RULES OF SEX: *A Little Sex Education May Have Prevented a 100 Year Prison Sentence for a Teenager with Intellectual Disabilities*

By Nora J. Baladerian, Ph.D., C.S.T.

Aaron Hart is an 18 year old boy. Man. He has a measured IQ of 47. This places his skills and understanding of the world in the range of moderate mental retardation. This means, in general, that he will learn what he is taught directly. Most people with this level of intellectual functioning do not learn from inference. They are concrete thinkers. That means, they must be taught using concrete examples and demonstrations. At this level, he will need lifelong supervision and support.

To make clear where he lies on the scale of measured intelligence, IQ is demonstrated on a bell curve. Smack in the middle of the curve is a score of 100. Variations from “average intelligence” are categorized by standard deviations of 15 points. A score between 85 and 115 is considered in the “normal” range. Between 115-130 is considered “above average” intelligence, and 131-150 is considered “Superior”. Above 150 is considered a genius range. On the other end of the scale, scores etween 70-85 are considered “borderline mental retardation”. From 55-69 is categorized as “mild mental retardation” and 40-54 is categorized as “moderate mental retardation”. From 25-39 is “severe ental retardation” and 5-25 is called “profound mental retardation”.



Although Aaron may be able to dress himself, eat independently, walk, talk, complete tasks he has been taught, he will not be able to shop, use money, cook, do laundry, or carry out usual activities of daily living on his own. He cannot. Although I do not know Aaron, I know many others like him, whose parents will have lifelong responsibility for his daily needs, unless he goes to live in a group home, where hired staff take responsibility to ensure his daily needs.

Usually, people like Aaron are described as having a “mental age” equivalent. While this is not helpful in many instances, for example, encouraging those around him to treat him like a child when he in fact has had 18 years of life, the fact remains that he lives his life much as he did as a child. How would anyone ever be able to perceive themselves as an adult, when his life experience tells him otherwise?

It is no surprise that he engaged in some sexual horseplay with his peer...a 6 year old boy. Exploration of the body, and particularly the genitals is normal and natural. Although rarely discussed openly, most people can remember such events in their childhood...and many also remember parental censure or even punishment. Our culture has a sad but pervasive double standard when it comes to sexual matters. Frank discussion of sex is eschewed. Crude joking, however, is considered normal. We are bilingual when it comes to sex. We know all kinds of “dirty” words for sexual body parts, functions and activities. Not so for other bodily functions such as breathing!

We think sex is wonderful and shameful, dirty and sacred, necessary and useless. We cannot decide, in our country, how to feel. Sexual information is taboo. With all of this confusion, we are basically illiterate when it comes to an understanding of developmental sexuality, or normal sexual explorations, conducted in youth. And, when it comes time to provide factual sexuality education to individuals with developmental disabilities, such as Aaron, resources are few, and the will to provide such vital information is largely missing. People in general just hope that folks like Aaron will turn out, somehow, to be asexual. When I worked in family planning, we joked, "Hope is not a method". Well, it is no joke that at this time, Aaron just did what comes naturally, exploring with a peer what the bodies look like and feel.

Although I do not know for a fact, I believe it is a good guess that no one ever talked to Aaron about how to explore sexuality with others. I'm sure no one ever informed him about his sexual development, needs, feelings, desires. I don't know if anyone ever explained sexual exploitation or assault. And now, he is the victim of a rape. Multiple rapes by other prisoners. Where he sits in jail because he acted according to his mental age, as a normal kid, playing exploration games.

What he did, as an innocent stolen moment to explore with another human being, has now become a life sentence. He has been sentenced by a jury and judge to 100 years incarceration with possible release at age 68, in 50 years.

I have been giving this a great deal of thought. Today I read the L.A. Times. Phil Spector, a record manager, was convicted of murder. He received a life sentence with possibility of parole in 18 years. I'm working on a case here in Los Angeles of a public school teacher who taught special education students whom he sexually exploited and

abused for many many years. He pled nolo contendere, and received a 3 year sentence, minus time served. He was out in 18 months. I'm sure there are many more examples. In the above two examples, there were victims. One is dead. The others will suffer for many years, as memories of the sexual exploitation reverberate in their minds. And Aaron, who played "let me see yours and I'll show you mine" has received a virtual life sentence. For being normal.

We can do better in our country. And, we can do better for Aaron. I plan to. Will you join us? I want to undo the 100 year sentence. I want him to receive sexuality education, to learn what sex is, and to learn what sexual activities are OK and which are not. I have written a book on exactly this topic called, "The Rules of Sex: For Those Who Have Never Been Told". This book, in Plain English, describes what you are allowed to do. What is against the law. What is against social custom. I want him to receive psychological treatment for the rape he has now suffered. I want him to receive the medical intervention normally given to rape victims.

I want him to immediately be placed in protective custody, in a location for individuals with disabilities, not in the general population. I want a new hearing. I want people to understand who Aaron is, how he experiences the world, how he sees himself. Would you think a 6 year old should be sentenced to 100 years in prison for this? In my work, I call what happened, "age-discordant sex play". There is no victim here. There are 2 children, learning about their bodies.

I hope that you will let me know your thoughts about this. And I hope you will want to help Aaron. He deserves better from a society that is supposed to care about its citizens with disabilities.