

What follows are some extracts from a research report on ragging and an evolving conversation between Harsh Agarwal and Michael Britton in 2007 that began with Harsh's research report on "ragging" in colleges in India.

***Introduction:** Ragging, hazing, bullying, pledging, fagging etc. are traditional practice of humiliation and human rights abuse taking place in educational institutions all across the world, especially across South Asia.*

***Harsh** has worked with several leading organisations including the United Nations both in India and abroad, and has worked closely with young people from more than 40 different countries. He is a founding member of the youth social organisation called Coalition to Uproot Ragging (Hazing) from Education (CURE): www.noragging.com*

***Michael** is a psychologist and member of the Global Core Team of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network, and had read a research report Harsh had written on the subject of ragging.*

The study empirically examined some of the myths held by many regarding "ragging," a term used in India to refer to many activities some of which are only a matter of fun but, which in reality contains many elements more exactly like hazing and bullying. Harsh's report documents how these elements are more widespread than thought, more violent than thought, and far more consequential for their victims than many have thought. The report examined a number of very specific questions such as the types of college programs within which ragging occurs, how it embodies pre-existing conflicts between various cultural groups, the occurrence of sexual violence, among others, as well as the larger context of adults who look the other way or deny the devastation these practices cause. What follow are some excerpts and then the conversation between Harsh and Michael.

Following are some of the extracts taken from the Research report on Ragging

Extract I Historical aspect of Ragging, Hazing, Bullying etc.

Substantial ink has been spent in discussing the incidents and ill-effects of ragging but we have hardly ever tried to go deeper to the roots of this savage phenomenon which is rapidly eroding our education system.

Ragging, Hazing, Fagging, Bullying, Pledging, Horse-playing etc. are different terms used in different parts of the world but each signifying the same old practice of

welcoming the fresher in a barbaric manner.

This phenomenon can be traced back to as early as 7th or 8th century A.D. In Greek culture, new entrants to the sport community were subjected to all kinds of humiliations and teasing to inculcate a team spirit in them. Gradually with the passage of time this technique was subjected to myriad modifications and was later adopted by the military forces, from there it finally entered in the education system.

Since its inception in the educational arena, ragging underwent several modifications before morphing into an organized form of campus violence.

During the 18th century forming a student organization in colleges was very much in vogue particularly in the European countries. This concept was later adopted by the U.S. universities as well. In the period 1828-1845, several student organizations popped up in the U.S. campuses. These were named after Greek letters like Alpha, Phi, Beta, Kappa, Epsilon, Delta etc and were called as Greek Letter Organizations (GLO's) or Fraternities. The new entrants to these fraternities were known as PLEDGES. During this time ragging (called as Hazing in west) existed in its rudimentary form and was merely a ritual to test the courage of the pledge.

The first ragging related death occurred in 1873 when a freshman from Cornell University fell into a gorge as a consequence of ragging.

Ragging underwent a massive transformation after World-War 1. It was during this time that it started to acquire its real brutal form. Soldiers returning from war re-entered the college and brought with them the technique of Hazing (ragging) learned in military camp. These techniques were used to make individual fail as an individual and succeed as a team. This philosophy of team development continued to be used in different fraternities. Eventually when fewer military students entered college these techniques were passed onto others who did not understand their purpose or usage and ragging became a brutal and hazardous exercise. Gradually in the early 20th century ragging related violence started to escalate in the western countries.

In India the tradition of ragging was imported along with the English education. Though it existed in the Army and English public schools much before the country's independence, it became conspicuous only after independence. Ragging then meant seniors mocking and jesting at juniors.

In its several years of existence ragging has done more harm than good. It has claimed lives of several thousand innocent students all across the world. Today, ragging no longer exists in its brutal form at places where it actually originated but is rapidly proliferating in the under-developed and developing nations of the world. Presently Sri Lanka is the worst affected country in the world.

Has ragging reached its pinnacle or is the worst yet to come? How many more lives will it claim before our society wakes up? Perhaps only time shall answer these questions.

Extract II Psychological aspect

We must be sensitive to the fact that children, even till class XII (higher secondary), are accustomed to a lot more personal attention from their faculty than what college faculties deny them in the name of “no spoon-feeding. We must also observe that in places where the faculty is actively involved with the students, hardly any untoward incidents ever take place: on the contrary, students are able to experience some of the most cherished moments of their lives, on these campuses. Therefore, it naturally follows that at the root of this social-evil lies not a need for one-upmanship, or schadenfreude, but a gross neglect of students' emotional needs by the teachers. Those who disagree must ask themselves as to why there is no ragging at the intermediate level, in school. How do those angelic school-goers become monstrous tyrants in just one year? Institutions must realize that it is as much their responsibility to provide the healthy atmosphere.

Extract III: Ragging/Hazing - An Archaic method of familiarization.

We all move to different stages of life facing new set of people but never really understand the importance that the process of familiarization has for us in making those transitions. We hardly have to struggle with it until we attain adulthood or are exposed to the outside world, which is very much different from a small sheltered niche, well protected by our guardians, where individual's identity is reflected by the identity of the parents.

Without going through a process of familiarization, true human bonding is very difficult to establish or may take a longer time than normal: strangers may forever remain as strangers with no real connection between them. Therefore it is needless to say that familiarization assumes a great importance in our lives. Several different ways of familiarization have evolved, which we practice consciously or unconsciously. Ragging is one, but in today's era psychologists & human behavior experts in the west have worked upon familiarization techniques, and have evolved several new processes which create circumstances far different from ragging, with far superior results.

For most of us in India, our first encounter with any formal process of familiarization occurs when we step into the college life, but the process by which we are familiarized with the people already in college is the traditionally notorious phenomenon termed as ragging (or hazing). We often then hear a popular phrase that *ragging is a necessary evil*. I no doubt agree that it is an evil but is it really necessary? While familiarization is essential for human bonding, ragging is just one way to go about it, a way that has several obvious flaws and harmful side effects.

Ragging developed as a familiarization process long ago when knowledge of human behavior and psychological development was minimal. It has continued merely because no effort was made to find a better and a friendlier substitute to this infamous path to familiarization, which so often fails to be inclusive and has caused loss of lives and careers. But alternatives are now being developed.

Recently I worked on International workshops by the UN and it was here that I came across a 21st century familiarization process, devised by psycho synthesis experts and sans any sort of torture. In each of these workshops there were 40 odd participants from many different countries & cultures. In the absence of any proper familiarization, pre-existing prejudices and tensions might well have erupted in ugly ways. During the initial weeks we participated in exercises, including activities to memorize names, adventurous sports to build trust, sub-group mentorship, inter-personal communication, games involving physical contacts, dramas aimed at team building, informal dinners and dance parties in the evening etc. While some of us were not comfortable dancing in public, the best thing was that nobody forced this and, after seeing others, it automatically motivated all of us so much that even the hesitant gradually started enjoying it. These exercises were loaded with so much fun that even the shyest person participated whole-heartedly and by the end of the initiation week closeness was seen even between persons coming from very rival cultures. The best aspect of this process was that it had complete freedom of participation with no imposition on anyone & was able to achieve *absolute inclusiveness*.

The influence of ragging is still quite dominant and can blind us to the familiarization techniques being developed for the 21st century, thereby standing in the way of our adopting them. There is an apparent tendency to defend this evil just for the sake of familiarization without realizing the fact that better ways of familiarization are now available. There is hope now that we can save innocent lives from this evil by being more open & aware, willing to change and above all *being dynamic with time*. What I mean by that is that since ragging and hazing are the archaic methods of interaction and now we have better scientific methods of interaction which are not harmful and have better results, it doesn't make sense to continue with the archaic ones. We must be dynamic and adopt the latest methods of familiarization.

Following is an evolving conversation between Michael and Harsh.

Conversation part I

Michael: I am grateful indeed to have had the opportunity to read your remarkable piece of research, and feel very appreciative of the passion and care with which you and your team have approached this work. The richness with which you have painted the picture of what takes place, where, by whom, how it is and is not responded to, is most welcome, taking ragging from the realm of abstract "problem" to a more detailed sense of what is actually going on. I am also especially taken with some of your thinking about causality as you ask why this phenomenon should break out at just this juncture (college) in young people's lives and not before or later. You noted the abrupt difference between the care and interest shown young people in their schooling prior to college in contrast with their entry into the world of college in which such care and interest on the part of faculty and administration is mostly absent. I am so struck by this disappearance of caring by the adult world at this critical time when young people are so charged with the energy they will need to enter into the larger world and make adult lives. Surely they feel, consciously or unconsciously, the precariousness of "being on the brink" of that endeavor: will they succeed in working, in making a life, in making a good marriage and family -- or will they fail? It could go either way. Surely they need close attention and encouragement, and bridges into the adult world of work so that the future feels like a place in which they are welcomed and will do alright.

Harsh: First of all I would like to thank you a lot for your support and the appreciation you have made for this report. I am deeply touched upon by the careful observations which you have made out from this long report. This clearly shows the interest and the seriousness with which you have read this report. I especially liked the point you raised that the issue of growth of the young into the adult at its transitional stage needs a careful monitoring and must be debated globally. I feel this is a very serious issue and ragging (hazing, bullying) taking place across the world, is just a reflection of a far more dangerous issue of how the development of the youngsters into adults has taken a freaky path all around the world. I think if we come out with a successful solution to this problem, we would then have a far better and a more compassionate world than what we have it today.

Michael: I am led to wonder whether competition and the threat that one's livelihood could suddenly be lost plagues only a few adults or many in the adult world of work, and whether it is on the rise or the decline. If many, is the world of adulthood itself experienced by adults as harsh, with resentment at a sense that livelihood and ambition are in danger unconsciously vented by "letting" the young beat up the still-younger and more innocent? Is this society's way of having a drama go on that speaks about adults feeling that their innocence is a little too "beat up" by what they go through in adult economic and political life? I am wondering what you may think of these speculations.

Harsh: To a large extent you are right. And actually the adults feel that it's a kind of a practice which the youngsters get, preparing them for the harsh realities of the world which they will be facing soon. This phenomenon can be seen all across the world taking place under different names such as Hazing, Ragging, Bullying, Fagging etc. In developing countries like India and many other nations in South Asia where the

challenges and population is enormous the competition is obviously intense to secure your livelihood and therefore becomes more severe and evident in these places.

Michael: I am also wondering whether the conflict among language, caste and other groups you wrote about becomes intense because there is an acute sense of competition for scarce positions, for a scarcity of secure futures, if I may put it that way.

Harsh: Speaking in Indian context, I believe it has more to do with the cultural rivalry which is coming down from ages 1000-1500 years old, but I do feel that this rivalry might have originated out of insecurity or threat to its very existence. I feel the youngsters are just indoctrinated with the rivalry against their opposite culture and they simply manifest this while ragging their juniors.

But if we look at the global picture then this phenomenon is not just limited to India or South Asia. In the west hazing has always been used to take out revenge between the blacks and white, for example. Likewise in bullying you will see that students who are from minority background in the academic institution are bullied on their different ethnic origin, accent, economic background, culture, language, region, religion etc. Therefore you will see that everywhere in the world whether in the form of ragging, hazing, bullying etc. the basis of this evil practice has always been the discriminations that exist in the society.

Michael: If this has increased in more recent times, do you think it is also affected by globalization, with the discrepancy between the possibilities for doing very well and the possibilities of being left out, growing wider and therefore more stressful as young people about to enter the competition look at what lies ahead. If globalization has meant far more opportunity for all young people, I would think the stress -- and the beatings -- would recede. If the sense of relative riches to be had AND relative possibility of being left behind is intensified, I would think the stress and the aggression would increase. Again, I am wondering what you may think about these speculations as you are so closely observant of what is actually taking place.

Harsh: I agree with you to some extent. I can speak about the effect of globalisation as we have seen in India for the past one decade or so. I feel that Globalization has opened up a plethora of opportunities as well as challenges for the developing countries. But I must say that though the opportunities after globalization have undoubtedly increased, the number of people who can get benefit out of it is still very small. A second aspect to globalisation in a country like India is the fact that globalisation has actually helped those very few to make enormously big success. Now combining these two factors together has actually led to enormous frustration to a large section of the society. And a more serious fact is that now the country has started to divide into two on the basis of economic class like never before. But I am still not able to clearly make any direct connection between the effects of globalization and ragging. But perhaps you are right

that this frustration is reflected during ragging. May be time shall answer this question better.

Michael: I find myself so deeply saddened reading in your report about the plight of the lower caste young people whose families so want them to succeed and who find themselves unable to go back to their families and disappoint them when they are overwhelmed by ragging, but being unable to bear the ragging, find no way out except by killing themselves. The realities of poverty, of hopes for the future, of hopes for the future that are humiliated and broken, touch a great sadness within me.

And then there is your report on the deaths, the rapes, the broken bones as part of the ragging world. I wonder who are the resilient, who are not. How are the resilient able to be resilient? And I wonder if the breakers of bones and the rapists look back at some point with regret and remorse, or dismiss their past as part of what was/is "normal." I wonder what those who look back with regret do in their attempts to put their past right.

Harsh: I would blame the society to a large extent for this. Society has not yet taken this issue too seriously and ragging, hazing etc is still seen as a 'growing up pill' for the youngsters. It has never been portrayed as a social evil. Not many organized groups are seen across the world fighting against this cause. All these reasons combined together are largely responsible that these atrocities are still hidden. The perpetrators of the crime don't consider it wrong but rather see it as a tradition

Michael: I noticed your mention of the caliber of ragging changing as ex-military entered the student population and introduced ragging tactics they endured upon entering the military. This makes so much sense to me, now that you have pointed it out. Of course, young people who have been subjected to the intense ragging with which the military prepares them for combat would bring the anger raised within them by that indoctrination into any setting that seemed to them to give the green light to such behavior, to say in some way that "this will be useful for younger people to endure just as it was for me." This combination of arousing terrible anger in the young by humiliating them deeply, and then teaching them that this is how adults help younger people to be prepared for adult life, seems so easily to become hardened into an identification with the practice of mistreating the young -- and, as you point out, becomes something that is recalled with amusement later in life. It seems to suggest that when societies militarize, there may be a lag effect in which ragging will subsequently become more brutal in schools when ex- military return and go to school. That seems to me a valuable piece of information you have illuminated.

Harsh: You have made an excellent observation and interpretation of the article on History of ragging.

Michael: Your work makes me think of the studies going on in the US, and I imagine many parts of the world, about this phenomenon. You report that it is especially on the

increase in South Asia, and I am wondering if there is an exacerbation of future-worry, if I may put it so, among the young and among the adults, with greater chances for success and for being left behind -- or what it is that might explain both the increase in ragging and the "hands off" of the adult community. I think it would be wonderful if researchers and practitioners from many parts of the world who are focused as you are on this problem of the transition of the young into adult life and the emergence of ragging as a way to manage the tensions and anxieties of that transition would team up and let us all know more deeply what it is the young are doing and are needing from us. Clearly the government believes they need a firm hand that says this behavior will be punished, while you note that what the government actually does in practice is often limited to declaring a ban on the behavior, a ban that really reduces the noticing of the behavior by society rather than reducing the behavior itself, for all the reasons you cited.

I am wondering if we in the adult world are a little confused ourselves about the global world we are making together, the kinds of opportunities for making a good life available, and how best to help young almost-adults step across the threshold with our hands on their shoulders and encouraging them that they are going to do alright. I do not know if that is the best way to put it, but I would very much appreciate your thoughts as you write as someone who has a compassionate feel for the young and a sense of the empathic familiarization needed as they make the developmental journey from youth into adult living. I think it would be most wonderful to start a worldwide discussion, with real feel for these realities, about how we adults, in our many different cultures, can bring the young in our societies more securely into adult life. Why should it be a terrible gamble, a terrible worry calling for aggression that easily crosses the border into violence?

I think an important part of what the members of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network are concerned about is the kind of world we adults make for each other, and your work so wonderfully extends this into an inter-generational framework: what place do we make for the developmental needs of those on the threshold of that world? Do we leave them so on their own that their anxieties become unmanageable and they take to beating on their juniors? Or do they feel the anxiety of being about to craft an adult existence is manageable because adults who are good at it are right there with them, helping them into that world -- not just by providing information as in engineering or business school, but by providing empathy and guidance for their lives and their future, as you suggest in what you have written.

Harsh: I especially like the point you raise that the issue of growth of the young into the adult at its transitional stage needs a careful monitoring and must be debated globally. To reiterate what I said before, I feel this is a very serious issue and ragging is a reflection of a far more dangerous issue of how the development of the youngsters into adults has taken a freaky path all around the world. I think if we come out with a successful solution to this problem, we would then have a far better and a more compassionate world than what we have it today.

Michael: I noticed also you made reference to the sexual violence and to lack of sexual knowledge being given to young people. This leads me to think about the need in young

almost-adults for help in making the transition into adult life, not only for help in making it into the world of work, but also into the world of love, parenting and making of a family. What is sexuality all about, falling in love, being loved? What can you expect having children to be like? Being parents together? Is there an abandonment of at least some of this generation in regard to their need to be told about these things by caring adults who know what it takes to do well in love, being in love, and making a family? Again, I wonder what your thoughts are on this...

Harsh: Actually my observation is based on the fact that there is a lot of sexual repression in our society particularly in Asia. Basically most of the ragging incidents start with sexual abuses and when the fresher is reluctant to cooperate with the senior's demand it is only then that the ragging turns physical. Perhaps that is why sex-education is a must but more important is how this education is imparted so that it serves the purpose as you have highlighted above. The other observation is that in a majority of the colleges there is no personality development programme which is actually very essential for any individual at this stage in life. **(End of Part 1)**

Part II

Michael: I am most delighted to have the opportunity to read your work, and I am also inspired by your website. I have just downloaded the [CURE presentation](http://www.noragging.com/CURE1.pdf) on ragging <http://www.noragging.com/CURE1.pdf>. I feel very much a sense of respect for your careful investigation and your passionate taking up of action. I am very struck by your words: "I feel this is a very serious issue and ragging is just a reflection of a far more dangerous issue of how the development of the youngsters into adults has taken a freaky path all around the world. I think if we come out with a successful solution to this problem, we would then have a far better and a more compassionate world than what we have today." I see at once the wisdom and rightness of what you are saying. I see that you have observed this problem in many societies, which I have not done, so I would be very interested in any observations or writings you may have to share about this

Harsh: Yes you are right the phenomenon of ragging though termed differently is seen all across the world. If you go through the history of this evil practice then you will see that it spread all across the world. It is called with different names in different parts of the world, like Hazing, Bullying, Pledging, Fagging, Horse Playing, Ragging etc. Though it exists in every part of the world even today it is more concentrated in South Asia. By freaky path I meant that this phenomenon misguides the youth and takes them away from the right values in life. For example in India the students who get admission in the

Medical and Engineering Colleges (where ragging is worse) are very hard working and bright. Till the school age they remain averse to Drugs, alcohol, smoking etc. When they enter the college the students are forced to do drugs and consume alcohol etc and many get severely addicted to it. Not only this they are subjected to abusive words and humiliating language which they were never familiar with before but after ragging they gradually become insensitive to all these or perhaps they become insensitive to human rights abuse in general. And this not only affects their upbringing in a negative way but severely affects the society at large.

Michael: I also want to say I think you are very right, that this world today with all its globalization would become better and more compassionate were we adults to focus all together on our young as real in their own right, standing poised on the edge of the adult world, charged with dreams and energy for taking the step into that world and making it their own. Were we to be caught up in our love of them at just this place in life, wanting them to do well, and acting on that, we ourselves and the world we make with each other would be transformed as well. This is a lovely, worthy and magnificent line of thinking. I find your words inspiring indeed!

I have been thinking this week about resources I already know of that might address some corner of these larger matters. Your writing to me about the cultural rivalry that pre-exists current ragging in India reminded me of a movie I saw recently based on a real teacher in the US city of Los Angeles. Her classes, like the entire school, involved a mix of different cultural groups who were in intense conflict with each other: Hispanic, Black, Vietnamese, White, etc. This was at the high school level. She discovered she could not teach anything until she focused on the realities of their seeing each other through such hostile group eyes as enemies. She started using exercises in class that enabled them to discover the sufferings all of them had in common and could empathize with and so find respect for each other: sufferings based on the poverty and violence of the neighborhoods all of them lived in. She also created a means for them to express their experiences, their pain and their dreams, in a kind of private way at first, through journaling that only she would read, and only if they wanted her to, which they did. Her approach led to their becoming a good working group together and becoming successful students, and later successful in starting into adult life. The movie is "Freedom Writers." They now have a website, as she has created a program to teach teachers her methods: www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.

Harsh: Yes it's really a nice idea to eliminate the feeling of cultural rivalry. I liked it very much. There is lot of cultural rivalry in every part of the world. Thanks a lot for sending me the link to this informative website. Here are the links to an experiment done by one school teacher in the US to teach the students to respect the differences that we have in our society. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/> and here is the link to the explanation to it http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=864733 I hope you will find it interesting.

Michael: This leads me to think about the fact that some young people on our planet, already steeped in mutual dislike, distrust and hostility toward each other, are found by adults like you and that teacher, adults who intervene and help them discover each other in a new way, finding their common membership in the human world of struggles, sufferings, resourcefulness and contributions. I wonder about their experiences, what the similarities are in intervening, what the differences are, and what this group of adults around the planet has in common.

I read that there are two thousand cultural groups on the planet, though I suspect the number must be higher. I wonder about the ways adults in these many cultures go about bringing young almost-adults into the adult world. What do adults think the nature of their own world is? What character do they believe is called for to do well in that world? How do they try to shape the character of the young in that direction? I imagine different cultures "see" very different aspects of young adults in that transition -- and perhaps don't see other aspects. When it comes to teaching young people how to do well in love, in family, in work, in sharing responsibility with other adults for the whole of society, and so on, I wonder whether different cultures don't do better in some regards and less well in others. That would be mean we can learn a great deal from each other. We might have a great deal to appreciate each other for, across our cultural divides.

Harsh: Again I will appreciate the important observation which you have made. It is really very enlightening to think that we all can learn a lot from each other as different cultures have different things to learn and different learning to offer which other might not be having. And this whole integration and knowledge sharing between different cultures can lead to a better world for tomorrow.

Michael: To return to a theme you focused on, how society can look the other way when ragging goes on, finding it normal or even amusing, I think whatever part of its young a culture does not welcome into the world is treated as invisible or a liability and therefore to be neglected or abused. A person absorbs a certain harshness of the world that is not easily shaken off.

In the US, it appears to be considered enough to provide "knowledge" and, for some, contacts in the pursuit of a career. But many are left floundering because college was not connected to a place in the work world, while those on a more "successful path" are prepared for the work world while the larger issues of life are left out. What are their life dreams? Do those dreams not need to be examined and nurtured through the lens of cultural heritage, perceptions achieved in other cultures, and the new insights of today? What is it that young men and women think is required to do well in being human? In the US, this is left to the family and religion to take care of, both losing their influence, and to the media, which is neither a personal presence in a young person's life nor an influence particular committed to thoughtfulness about real life. I am pained to reflect that the entire journey into becoming a worthy human being, a mature citizen, someone

who does well in love as spouse and parent and friend, someone who can paint the horizons of his/her future with dreams that arise from deep in his/her soul, all such things are often given no personal attention or care by the adults in the college world. What of the culture of poets and artists and musicians, the writers? What of spiritual traditions? The best of teachers make these more than an object of study; make them an encounter with the breath-taking shoreline of adulthood's deep thinking, feeling, imagining and astounding productions. But this often does not happen here. The personality development program of which you write is indeed missing here at least as much as in any part of Southeast Asia.

Harsh: I am really very impressed to read your thoughts on this. You have beautifully expressed your feelings. You have elaborated and explained my point so wonderfully. This is so informative and has broadened my understanding a lot. I completely agree with what you say. I agree that the situation is same all around the world. It is very necessary that there must be a global debate on this preferably through the platform of the United Nations this message must be conveyed to the governments of the member state that they must focus on the development of the teenagers all across the world. Keeping in mind the fact we see that in most of the violent movement across the world whether its terrorism, naxalism, separatist movement, mob, violent political movements, suicide attacks, religious fundamentalism etc. it is the youth which is largely involved all across the world. This youth is basically the youth who has been completely neglected by the society and whose development at the transitional stage is affected or was not paid attention to. No doubt in the above mentioned examples it is the most extreme sort of negative behaviour that we see and we are able to easily identify it but more importantly due to lack of proper personality development programme, teaching life skills and values, in almost every part of the world, there are other milder violent behavior, negative effects which sets in with the majority of the youth but largely goes unnoticed and is reflected mildly in the form of hazing, ragging and bullying.

Michael: Your writing about care extended in school to the young that suddenly disappears at the higher level has reminded me of the daughter of friends of ours who is now in "middle school." She is tiny and very bright and all around a delight. She goes to a large public school. One of her friends is in a private school that is sheltered from the popular teen culture. One day that friend asked why this girl was talking and acting strangely, in the popular culture manner. The girl turned away, seemed about to cry, and then changed clothes into the kind she had worn before going to the middle school. She said it was so hard to be there, so lonely. She is so tiny amid many hundreds of larger children. She said she has to act like they do to be seen at all, to be connected with anyone. She said she appreciated being reminded of who she really is, because she was becoming lost in the act.

I thought to myself: The number of teachers in this sea of youngsters is relatively very small. Our little friend is cast into a sea of children: where are the grown-ups who have the time to notice what is happening to her? The time to notice that something of her is growing invisible, being replaced by an act? The time to attend to the personal experience of her and of all the other children going to this school?

Harsh: Yes you are right. Recently we all heard of the campus shoot out in Virginia Tech University, in which the youth shot dead 33 people. This case is a big example for all of us. In this case also he was alone and no one was paying attention to him. This was the biggest reason which led to this shoot out. Here also we see that the teacher and the student had a big gap

Michael: In the US, tending the thread of a child's personal life is left to the adults at home. This gets children ready for a work world in which their personal lives is irrelevant, so it is thought. Your words about care in India's schools prior to college makes me wonder whether the American approach to those younger years is something all the world does in different ways. I wonder whether we in the US have a blind spot. And I wonder whether we in the US are in danger of exporting our blind spot about the world of work and the world of children to the rest of the planet through "globalization" of our work practices.

As I think about school children in the US, the only adults I see in the schools by and large are the teachers. The adults engaged in the work world they need to become enchanted by, the world they need to be dreaming their way into, aren't there. The only career represented is that of teacher. How do the students imagine themselves becoming one or another kind of grown-up? What is there for their imaginations to work with if the adult world is only an abstraction, its reality only as diverse as parents, teachers and friends of parents? What great cultural tasks can seize the idealism of a youngster so powerfully that they have confidence in becoming this or that kind of adult, confidence that the world will need them and pay them to be the kind of adult they are drawn to becoming, the kind who works on this or that exciting matter that adults wrestle with, the kind who loves life the way they do? How can a little mind become intrigued by the depth and skill and passion of larger adult minds if the adults are all busy elsewhere?

Harsh: Exactly. I agree with you completely. No in India also the situation is almost the same. Schools don't exactly serve the purpose of giving education about the work world and this task is left onto the parents and close relatives, sometimes the successful relatives in the family are portrayed as the role model for them, and in some way coerced by their parents to take that similar profession. However as compared to colleges, schools in India, especially the private ones still serves the purpose of giving some personal attention to the children and imparting knowledge and education even outside the realms of the academic world. But I very much liked your observation that by not exposing the children to adults from other career option/ profession is certainly an obstacle in their overall development. This is something which is more necessary for the overall growth of a child and prepares him for the work world rather that ragging hazing or bullying. I appreciate your view that schools and colleges must have a holistic curriculum for the overall development of the child.

Michael: Here we have created suburbs and, beyond them, "exurbs." The world of work is hidden from everyday childhood, the world of prayer gone elsewhere, the community woven of business people and artisans and poets and thinkers and all the rest nowhere to be found by children on foot. Where is the adult world that is pulling for them to be part of it? For us in the US, we have disappeared it from the lives of most of our children. I think children and young almost-adults need mature adults nearby, to get a feel for what maturity in action is like -- in all its diversity, not just as two parents and some teachers may present. I think children need to have their possibilities, their trying-out of intentions and skills, noticed in a personal way as mattering, as showing promise, as deserving of being taught how to do life well as the kind of person they are. To be taught how to become a good adult by people regarded as doing adulthood well: that is a cultural and societal wealth without which the young have a very hard time flourishing. I think there has to be a community round about that notices its children with interest and affection, and which the children grow to know as theirs. With so much of humankind moving now into cities, and so much of America's people moving out of real cities into exurbs, I wonder how settlement patterns affect the patterns of noticing and caring between generations, not just inside families but outside families as well, and what role this plays in the "freaky path" adolescent development has been taking, as you wrote.

I think in our adult struggles to make a decent world for ourselves (whether it is a traditional world, a modern world, a global one), the challenge of shaping the world and trying to keep it from being misshapen can be so pressing that attention and care for the coming of age of young people can become neglected -- or abusively misdirected, as in totalitarian youth movements, entertainment culture, and so on. So much of humankind is now so young. I think we adults have to know what kind of a world we want to make among ourselves, the ways in which it is one we all can love or no. We need to come to a sense of the ways of making a world that all can love into which we can bring this great swelling of young people around the planet. I wonder, were globalization to become interested in actually caring in this way about the young of the planet, perhaps globalization itself might change to be more compassionate and mutually supportive rather than so threatening to so many while providing opportunities for lesser numbers. I think this is what you were saying so exactly in what you wrote.

I think my culture has some things to contribute in thinking about this; I think all cultures must have contributions. I think there must be many people who care about this, think about it, work at it. There must be many different insights all over our planet that could together make a richer understanding than any of us have in our separate worlds. Were we to pool our experience and discoveries and values, we might learn a great deal from each other, discovering in each others' ways of welcoming the young into adulthood ways of enriching our own approach to helping the young join us in adult life. Focusing on the positive we can learn from each other, I think our diversity might be something we all could appreciate about each other, recognizing our different forms of insightfulness --

and those insights we all share -- as resources to treasure in thinking out how we ourselves make a life. Thinking about this, I find myself with questions: how to reach out to such people globally as would join helpfully in such a dialogue, what questions or thoughts to put out to them, and what practical way to go about such sharing.

Harsh: I feel privileged to read your observations. I really got a wonderful chance to learn a lot from you from this conversation and I am extremely thankful to you for this.