

HEARTS OF THE CITY

Exploring
attitudes and
issues behind
the news.



The Beat

Today's Centerpiece focuses on the **Wagner Program**, a human services training program for volunteer paraprofessional counselors. For more information about the program, which is based at the University of Judaism, call (310) 476-9777, Ext. 215.



A rotating panel of experts from the worlds of philosophy, psychology and religion offer their perspective on the dilemmas that come with living in Southern California.

Today's question: A 12-year-old boy is a suspect in the fatal shooting of an elderly Watts woman, and he and several other juveniles face charges of raping a 13-year-old girl. With criminal suspects becoming younger and their crimes more heinous, what standards should apply when deciding whether to release the names of such juveniles to the public? When do public safety issues outweigh protecting a juvenile's identity—and possibly his chances for rehabilitation?

Navigating the Real World

Richard J. Mouw

President, Fuller Theological Seminary and author of "Uncommon Decency, Christian Civility in an Uncivil World"

We are putting increasing pressure on children these days to perform as adults. The entertainment industry portrays them as sexual sophisticates and athletic superstars. Why, then, should we protect them from publicity when they rape and murder? Whatever our philosophy of treating criminals—"eye for an eye" or deterrence—it doesn't make sense to insist on anonymity for children. If (as I believe) criminals owe a debt to society, then the child who murders should bear a very visible "mark of Cain." And the hope for rehabilitation cannot be divorced from our right to know that the nice man at the candy store once brutally defiled the life of another human being.

Orli Peter

Associate professor of psychology; director of marriage, family and child counseling, Mount St. Mary's College

Society needs to publicize the identities of those who have been convicted of crimes, regardless of their ages. This information helps us to focus our efforts to protect ourselves, reducing the chances of others being victimized. Public knowledge also helps focus efforts to treat and rehabilitate perpetrators, and it may reduce their denial of the seriousness of their crimes. However, those who have only been accused of crime deserve a measure of confidentiality. If the accusation proves unjust, it can be impossible to repair all the harm that the innocent suspect may suffer. Children, whose identities are still forming, may be particularly vulnerable to long-term psychological damage by becoming the focus of public hysteria, hostility and rejection.

Rev. Ken Uyeda Fong

Pastor, Evergreen Baptist Church, Rosemead

We've long protected the identities of juvenile delinquents, assuming this is an added incentive for them to pursue rehabilitation. We've also weighed difficult circumstances that might have contributed to their committing the crimes. These continue to be critical concerns. However, let's not forget to be just as concerned for their victims. When a 12-year-old murders an old woman, she's just as dead as if an adult had pulled the trigger. And that girl is certainly no less traumatized because her rapists were underage. If it can be determined that some young perpetrators committed their crimes because they believed our system would protect them, then in these cases we must eliminate this protection. Don't just name them. Try them as adults.

—Compiled by K. CONNIE KANG,
Times staff writer

Have a question or problem in everyday ethics or public civility that you would like our panelists to address? Other comments or ideas? Send to:

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