

# OPPORTUNITIES

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...[O]ur society is accepting a damaging, degrading, and dehumanizing mythology about children's mental health. Children are often seen as collections of symptoms and diagnoses rather than as human beings responding to their environment and inner experience[s], trying to cope and make sense of their world.

Donald L. Rosenblitt, MD

"Where Do You Want the Killing Done?  
An Exploration of Hatred of Children"

*Annual of Psychoanalysis*

Vol. 36

2008

For most student teachers, in-service teachers, or administrators, the only psychology to which they are generally exposed is exclusively cognitive/behavioral... We educators tend to think of psychology as a branch of problem-solving. The student does this; you do that. Problem solved. Psychology is purely instrumental: it is the tool, the means to elicit submissive behavior.

John Samuel Tieman, PhD

"The Ghost in the Schoolroom: A Primer in the  
Lessons of Shame"

*Schools*

Vol. 4, No. 2

Fall 2007

Ellen's mother always had to improve her daughter's achievement, in fact making it her own. She did this not only with Ellen's body, such as adjusting her clothes and adding decorative items, but also with Ellen's activities, such as adding items to her picture to make it look better or fitting in some of the pieces in Ellen's puzzle. Mother's pride in the final result was matched by Ellen's dissatisfaction and often led to her actually destroying the product because it had become mother's, Ellen's own part seeming inadequate.

Erna Furman:

Chapter Five:

"Self-Care and the

Mother-Child Relationship,"

*Toddlers and Their Mothers:*

*A Study in Early*

*Personality Development,*

1992

Our reputations depend on the opinions of the ill-informed. We all have better moments than anybody ever knows, and so do all the others. We are, each one of us, books that are reviewed by critics who only glanced at the chapter headings and the jacket flap. We are a great mystery. Each one of us is a secret and on that basis we ought to treat each other with the deepest respect.

Garrison Keillor

Consumer capitalism has conspired to persuade us that we are phobic of frustration, that frustration is the last thing we want. All the difficulties of modern parenting are to do with how and why and whether and of what children need to be frustrated. And, unsurprisingly perhaps, the way adults deal with these issues is bound up with the history of their own relationship with frustration.

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The child has the tantrum often over some apparently trivial thing, though the thing represents a catalogue of pent-up frustrations. It is the magical act of a desperate person: if I get enraged enough I will get what I want, or I will destroy myself and the world in which I have to suffer such torments. The child needs to know that there is someone stronger than his rage who can hold him and his world together: he needs to have that experience. Afraid of being too powerful, of being able to destroy his world, the child needs the adult above all to show him that there are brakes on his fantasy life, in which all violence is murder and all appetite voracious. The parent who punishes the child for his tantrum – punishment being itself a kind of tantrum, a despair about the rules rather than their enforcement – says to the child: my tantrum is more powerful than yours, but tantrums are all we have got. The child is made to suffer for his suffering, as if to say: suffering inspires suffering, rage and frustration create nothing but rage and frustration. The child who is punished for his frustration learns that frustration is contagious, and has to be evacuated as rage. Frustration is not a raw material to be transformed but a foreign body to be expelled. The punitive parent is giving the child what we have learned to call a double message: he is being told by someone who is enraged by their frustration that he should not be enraged by his frustration.

Adam Phillips  
“The Magical Act of a Desperate Person”  
*London Review of Books*,  
Vol. 35 No. 5  
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