

Devices for controlling deviance

Nora Joung

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[www.centralbanken.no](http://www.centralbanken.no)

1955: 95. 1956: 175. 1957: 210.

The above are figures showing a steep increase in the use of solitary confinement as a form of disciplinary action, from a Norwegian reform home for girl children in the 1950s- and 60s. 95, 175, and 210 respectively, are the number of days annually the children had been sent to solitary confinement.

But I am actually here to discuss a different kind of pedagogical tool than physical and psychological torture – namely the flannelgraph. I register – but cannot document – that the flannelgraph was allegedly introduced to the market in 1900, marketed as a toy, in the US. The flannelgraph was popular among Evangelical Christians, and used eagerly in the Bible-studies for children. Missionaries do just that. Hence, many a non-Americans have experience with the format, too.

A flannelgraph is, in brief a picture frame, often made by wool felt, where figures in ditto material can be moved around, making animations in real-time. Teachers could ask students to step up to the flannelgraph and test their knowledge of the Bible in general, or arbitrary, deeply serious questions, such as: How could Job accept God Almighty's goodness, and therefore enjoyed his penance, rather than lamenting it? Or: Are *you* a David, or a Goliath? The most uncouth wanted to animate Book of Esther. Apocryphal in most Norwegian Bible translations, and filled with «romance». Attempting to use scripture, however apocryphal, to tickle tender, young hearts, was reprimanded.

Back at the reform homes, the girl children could be sent to solitary confinement for example for escaping the facility, something that was not uncommon. Other reasons that could land a girl in the cage, was being too slow in the mandatory labor, or even bagatellish, unproblematic behavior such as greeting one another, or laughing together at the meals, which were to be taken in absolute silence.

Fortunately for us, Jesus died on the cross to save us all from original sin and the sins we, contrary to expectations, may or may not commit in the span of a life, or a day. In secular states with free courts, one is supposed to be considered innocent until proven guilty, and not be sent to solitary confinement for greeting – or be subject to forced sterilization for being «dumb». The children in this reform home, as it happens, were not even convicted of any crimes. They had not received a sentence, and therefore did not know when they would be released. You could be unlucky and poor, or sassy, or roam the streets at night, or socialize with boys. The children could also be taken to

reform homes for being *debile, imbecile, or idiots* – and suggested forcibly sterilized, should one fall into the latter category.

The mission of the reform homes was also to protect the public. A preventative measure. Journals and psychiatrist's reports describe the children as zoologists, these wild animals could bring respectable citizens with them. Society had to be shielded, in particular men – especially the married ones with children of their own – against these *other* children, both morally and legally, a medical doctor at the home, is quoted as saying. Nicole Hennem's study on child protective services in Oslo as late as 1991 shows that criminal behaviour was rarely mentioned as a problematic in girl children. Hennem found that it was the girl's sexuality that was cited as the cause of conflict between the children, the state, and institutions. The purpose of the reform schools was to reform, cleanse, and save the children. The desire to control girl's sexuality, to surveil and police their self-expression, was not only motivated by social normativity. Religious demands for virtuousness, virginity, and piety, could be taught by family and society from long before a child can fully grasp it, other than in colourful, pedagogical, toy pictures. The flanelgraph cannot be blamed for its baggage. But baggage can be played with.

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