

Catch da Flava

10 Year Anniversary Edition

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Youth and Community Newspaper Produced by the Regent Park Focus

The Best of Catch da Flava

Celebrating 10 Years of Youth Journalism



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This summer marks the 10-year anniversary of Catch da Flava newspaper, Toronto's oldest youth newspaper. This special edition of Catch da Flava features some of the best work our talented writers have produced as they spoke about controversial issues that still concern young people today.



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Neighbourhoodism

Regent Park is Canada's oldest and largest housing project, and as such has been the victim of a form of discrimination and negative stereotyping called neighbourhoodism. For years, our writers have been speaking out against the disparaging portrayal of this area by the media and society at large. Although this problem has improved over time, it is far from being eradicated.

The Origin of "Neighbourhoodism"

Neighbourhoodism is a word that is used by members of the Coalition Against Neighbourhoodism (CAN) to describe a form of prejudice based on racism, classism and one's area of residency. The word "neighbourhoodism" was coined by the group's leading spokesperson, Dr. Ruth Morris, who while working with the Jane and Finch community, realised that this and other neighbourhoods were being unduly stigmatised. In discussing the issue with others, community representatives from Jane and Finch, Regent Park, Parkdale, O'Connor, Warden Woods and Lawrence Heights found that no matter how healthy, resourceful and strong their communities were or what these communities did to promote their assets, their efforts would always be undermined by stereotypical

and racist perceptions about low-income people and people of colour.

Taking the lessons of the black Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, the Women's Movement and the Gay Rights Movements - that you can't fight racism, sexism or homophobia unless you are prepared to label and challenge it for what it is - the community representatives formed a coalition and adopted the word "neighbourhoodism" as part of a larger strategy to confront negative and inaccurate portrayals of our communities.

*by Adonis Huggins, Co-ordinator of the
Media Arts Program at
Regent Park Focus
(Reprinted from Fall 1998)*



So You Think You're Tough 'Cuz You Live In...?



When I say "Regent Park" what comes to your mind? What did you associate the name with? If violence, hunger, crack-heads and prostitutes came to your mind, that's unfortunate. It's unfortunate because you're not alone. It's unfortunate because you chose to associate Regent Park with all the negative stereotypes. And finally, it is unfortunate because people like me live here,

and if those were your initial thoughts then you would probably associate me with the rest of your jumbled and inaccurate views about communities like mine.

Regent Park is an area that people fear and are reluctant to visit. Even when people don't know very much about this community, it can still magically instill fear in them at the mere mention of its name. And this is all because of rumours!

I wasn't around when this community was first formed so I can't

say for sure that this area has always been a nice and peaceful place. But I have lived here for the past eight years and I know that from the time I moved here until now, I have seen no crack-heads or gang fights or anything of that nature. Sure, this community is not perfect, but what community is? Which community doesn't have its own challenges?

It really is a shame that so few can appreciate this community. For all those who think negatively about my community, I would like to tell you to give it a chance. I'm sure that if you were to spend some "real" time here you would come to like the area. "Real" time implies actually getting out of your car and taking a stroll through the park on an early summer evening to see the families and the rich cultures that make up my neighbourhood. "Real" time is not merely gazing out at the uninviting buildings as you roll up your windows and power-lock all four car doors while driving quicker through the intersections.

As easy as it would be to lay all the blame for Regent Park's problems on those who don't reside in this community, I realise that there are problems and attitudes from within that add to Regent Park's notorious reputation. I remember one time at school, some guys were acting tough and one of them declared that he lives in a dangerous part of town so you "wouldn't want to mess with him." A friend of mine who lives in the community retorted proudly, "Well, come to Regent Park and you'll get busted up so bad...you haven't seen anything till you come to Regent Park." At that point I thought to myself that Regent Park really wasn't as awful as

he had suggested, and that it is these kinds of comments that perpetuate the area's bad reputation. These rumours make people afraid of this area. These rumours which come from residents make it even more difficult to break down the stereotypes that are generated through media hype. The kind of barbaric pride that makes youth compete about who comes from which rougher, tougher inner-city jungle only leads to more trouble, and sometimes even violence.

Since we cannot always control what the media says about us, we must be smart and take control wherever we can. We can control what we say about ourselves and what we say to each other, so let's do it! I know that my friend was just trying to impress his peers and make himself look tough, but by telling others that he lives in a dangerous area he was confirming rumours that we need to abolish. My friend felt that he had to express how strong he was by exaggerating the number of survival skills he needed to live in Regent Park's danger zone. Maybe we can start expressing our strengths by speaking about our community positively and being proud of who we are and where we live.

*da Flava's Vinh Duong,
Central Technical High School
(reprinted from Fall 1998)*

Neighbourhoodism

I Am Woman, Hear Me ROAR!

Regent Park has been a target of the media for a long time. Most comments made by the media have focused solely on the weaknesses of the community. This kind of media attack has the power to shape the attitudes of the whole society toward all of Regent Park inhabitants. This is accomplished first by convincing outsiders that the community is worthless, inadequate and problematic. After successfully convincing the non-residents of all of this, those negative attitudes encroach upon the residents themselves, thereby breaking down their own self-esteem and systematically disempowering a whole community.

Since the media can be so powerful in portraying communities, I think it is essential that the residents of Regent Park (especially the children) learn through their communities that there is hope, no matter where one is situated. As a resident of Regent Park for over 15 years I have heard all the negatives there are to hear about my community. As a young child growing up in Regent Park, people assumed that I would not amount to much because of the community I lived in. Now, as a young adult attending Ryerson University and enrolled in the Social Work program, I have the opportunity to share with my classmates and with others my determination to succeed. Not only that, I also have the opportunity to say to others, "Look, my community helped me to get to the position I am in today and this is how it happened!"



Despite what the media claims, Regent Park is not the crime-infested, demoralizing neighbourhood outsiders think it is.

The vast majority of people in Toronto view Regent Park as one big problem area. We hear about the beggars at the corner, the drug dealers and the prostitutes. We also hear that the problem with Regent Park is that people don't want to get off their butts to work. But I say that

the problem with Regent Park is not the people. Thinking back on my life, I wonder, where would I be today without the community centre across the street? Where would I be without the people in the community who took their time (without pay) to teach me and encourage me? Where would I be if these people did not

instill hope in me for a better tomorrow? I am proud to call Regent Park my home no matter what the stereotypes and myths surrounding it are. I thank God every day that I was able to experience the "good side" of my community. And believe it or not, there are a lot of positive vibes in Regent Park that outsiders need to learn about! I'm not downplaying the fact that Regent Park has its problems. However, I am bringing to light that the residents of Regent Park are not as bad as the media makes them out to be! Martin Luther King had a dream. His dream was to see people of different races and economic statuses get along. I, too, have a dream. My dream is to finish my degree at Ryerson, then go for my masters at the University of Toronto. After accomplishing both, I plan to go into community development to help strengthen communities. And of course, Regent Park is the first community that I plan to help strengthen. After all, it is my community! I long to see the children of Regent Park have the same opportunities that I did, so that they will never have to give up hope. Out of gratitude I need to give back to the community that has nurtured and shaped me into the woman I am today. I am proud of who I have become: a strong woman!

Thank you, Regent Park!

*by Joanne Warner, Ryerson University
(Reprinted from Fall 1998)*

My Community, My Home

I live in a wonderful community called Regent Park. It has a recreation centre, community centre, swimming pools, two baseball diamonds, and several outdoor basketball courts where I can go to have fun. There are tons of activities going on in my community and most of them are for kids. I also love my community because it is comprised of different races, backgrounds and religions. People in my community do not judge each other and even though we are all different, we cooperate to create a happy and peaceful neighbourhood.

My community is safe despite what many outsiders say. They think that Regent Park is a zone for crimes and violence. They think that our youth are gang members and drug dealers. They think that's how my community operates just because it is poor. Just because we are poor doesn't mean that we go around committing

crimes in order to survive. We still follow laws like everyone else. There might be criminals living in my community, but they don't represent all of us.

I feel safe in Regent Park. I'm not afraid of walking around at night on my streets. Of all the places I've lived, I like



Regent Park the most. I think it's a great place. I've made good friends here.

I was laughing and at the same time angry when I watched a recent news report on Regent Park. The report made my community look like a dangerous place popu-

lated by gangsters and drug dealers. They made my community look unsafe. They made my community look like a place where people are afraid to go outdoors, which is not true because as I'm writing this, I'm looking out my window and I'm seeing tons of kids playing and having fun. You won't know how a community is unless you are living in it. Needless to say, the news report was way off.

The only comments about Regent Park that matter to me have to come from a person who is living in the area. I am confident that if I ask anyone about Regent Park who is living here, they would say that they love it here. It is a great community with great people and I am glad to be part of it.

*da Flava's Minh Hoang,
Central Technical High School
(Reprinted from Fall 1998)*

Police-Youth Relations

In the past, minority youth - especially young black males - from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods have had a tenuous relationship with the Toronto police. *Catch da Flava* recaps some of the challenges that young people and the police force have faced over the past decade, and hope to have overcome today.

To Serve and Protect Who? Exploring Police and Youth Relationships

In a city as ethnically and culturally diverse as Toronto, it is often difficult to find ties that bind the different groups. However, there is one aspect of the city that almost all minorities can relate to and that is discrimination, specifically from the police.

While racism and discrimination can be found in places such as the corporate world and even at schools, the effect of police discrimination can lead to especially tragic consequences. The problem is not unique to minorities, as youth of all races are targeted by the city's police. Over the past month, I had the opportunity to talk with youth of various backgrounds about the relationship between minority youth and the police.

"[The police] automatically have the suspicion that kids are up to something," says Kate Davis, a student at Western Tech. "They go for the kids who are into the small things, instead of the adults who are really bringing in the problems."

"It's how society works. From a policeman's perspective a youth can only be up to no good, so in their eyes what they're doing is justified," says Noel Shebib, a white adolescent from Parkdale who claims to have had no problems with the police.

Many feel that the police are not randomly discriminating, but instead focusing on certain groups based on stereotypes. Matt Clark, a black youth who lives in High Park (a predominately white area) explains, "If you have long hair or braids they assume one thing. If you wear baggy clothes they assume something else. A lot of it is based on appearance."

Otello Panaro, a security guard at a west-end high school with a racist reputation believes that youth of colour have it even worse. "Unfortunately it's not a healthy

relationship. They're definitely harder on minorities," he says; "if there are a couple of white guys on the corner, cops will just drive by, but if they're black the cops will stop. It's society in general. With adults, if there's a group of whites walking down the street they'll just keep walking, but if



Police discrimination: who is ultimately responsible?

it's a group of black guys walking towards them they're more likely to cross the street."

Some people feel that there is more to police discrimination than what meets the eye. "They're trying to make criminals out of innocent people," says Mike Macintosh, a black male who lives in Parkdale and works at the Masyrk Cowan Community Centre. "We're second class citizens to them, and it's been manifesting over generations and centuries."

Miguel Ransome, another employee at the Masyrk Cowan Community Centre, believes that police discrimination doesn't end at cops harassing certain groups, but can also be seen when the police are called for help. "They're not going to give us the same help they give white people.

nize it because they have the guns. If you even look at a cop the wrong way you're going to jail."

Sadly it seems as if the respondents have accepted being unfairly targeted by the police as a part of life. Instead of being trusted and counted on, the police are feared and despised. The fact that a racist police force is so readily allowed to exist and be accepted by society says more about the world we live in than it does about the city's police or its relationship with youth and minorities.

According to the law (the Ontario Human Rights Code), you have the right to get equal treatment from the police. For example, as a young black person, you are not supposed to be harassed just because of your race. The police are not allowed to discriminate against you because of personal characteristics that have nothing to do with crime and policing. The law calls these personal characteristics "prohibited grounds."

To file a complaint contact

Ontario Human Rights Commission

Local: (416) 326-9511
Toll Free: 1-800-387-9080
TTY (Local) (416) 314-6526
TTY (Toll Free) 1-800-308-5561
E-mail: info@ohrc.on.ca

OR

Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services

25 Governor St. 1st Floor
Toronto Ontario M7A 1Y6
Tel: (416) 326-1189; Fax: (416) 314-2036
A complaint must be filed within 6 months of an incident

*da Flava's Shameer Ansari, 18
(Reprinted from April 2001)*



Radio with an Urban Youth Perspective....

Tune in to *Catch da Flava* Youth Radio on CKLN 88.1 FM
every Tuesday @ 7:30 p.m.

Police-Youth Relations

In Conversation With Barry Thomas

What is community Policing? Catch da Flava's Riel Moxon-Emre had the chance to speak with Barry Thomas from the Urban Alliance on Race Relations to find out.

Catch da Flava: Could you tell us a little bit about the Urban Alliance on Race Relations?

Barry Thomas: The Urban Alliance's basic mandate is to work on issues of racism and work on it from the perspective of research, advocacy, and public relations. That's what the Urban Alliance has been doing for the past 25 years.

Catch da Flava: How would you define community policing?

Barry Thomas: Real, true, and honest community policing is an agreement between the police, who are responsible for policing a particular community and that particular community on the basis of safety and security issues and how we ought got to go about resolving or solving or preventing those problems. If you want to think about it in terms of Regent Park, it should be a partnership with the community saying to the police, "These are the list of our priority, safety and security concerns," and the police saying, "Yes we recognize them and we may not agree with you, but because you live in this community we are your servants, we shall therefore abide by your priorities and police that way." The reality is of course is quite the opposite; community policing in practice is that the Toronto police out of 51 division decide whatever it is the hell they want to do depending on who the unit commander is at the moment and they go ahead and do it whether the communities like it or not.

Catch da Flava: What is the difference between target policing and community policing?

Barry Thomas: Target policing, as it was practised and defined by the Metro Police when it first came out 2 or 3 years ago, was nothing more than a strategic redistribution of police officers to clean up so-called hotspots or hot crime spots or visible eye sores in the community. It has nothing to do with community policing. It's an oxymoron to even pretend that they are the same thing. Target policing was decided and co-ordinated, implemented by the police for the city, for the politicians and that's it. It had nothing to do with safety and security for specific communities. Another way of understanding

target policing is to understand it in the context of displacement policing. This kind of policing is likely what you find in Regent Park and displacement policing as it relates to drugs for example is, if the police were serious about doing something about drugs, street level dealing, they would not apply displacement policing. Displacement policing is essentially, the police decide to make a raid on Regent Park and bust all the visible dealers who are standing out on street corners and backyards. Those same dealers are back on the streets within 24 hours because they get bail anyway, but they for



If there were more community policing, you'd see fewer of these on the streets.

a moment, for a couple of months or so don't deal visibly in the same spot, but they move to Sherbourne and Queen Streets. That's displacement policing. It just displaces the problem, it doesn't solve or eradicate the problem.

Catch da Flava: Is there such thing as community policing in Toronto?

Barry Thomas: There are some and I repeat some very good community police officers in Toronto. There are fewer but equally good community police commanders. But there is no community in Toronto that is the recipient or practising community policing. The only real community policing that is happening in Toronto is the lip service of community policing. There's a lot of community policing talk but there is no real community policing happening in Toronto. And there is definitely no community policing happening

in Regent Park. All overtures [...] to the unit commander at 51 to the chief in December of 2000 has been met by just lip service and not even very nice lip service at that. The community having to resort to walking their own children home just to get them home safely is a result of not just an absence of community policing in Regent Park, but absence of policing period in Regent Park. Regent Park only gets rapid response policing and the response is not that rapid.

Catch da Flava: Can you explain the issues between the police and minority

nity policing the whole station policed Regent Park better. His successes have not had the same interest in community. As a consequence, you can probably walk to the police station 50 times and back before a cop shows up based on a 911 call. And the police can run to the crime scene faster than they can get into their cars. And yet, the irony is that right in front of the police station, Sackville Green, that is the worst place in the Park. So what is the point of having that police station there?

Catch da Flava: How can the relationship between the community and police improve?

Barry Thomas: It can only improve once police are held accountable; frontline police are held accountable by their commanders, by the city politicians and by the mayor. It can only improve once that message goes all the way through, that frontline police understand that community policing is a form of policing that is as important as rapid response policing, as forensic policing and the homicide guy. The point is that police report major decreases in criminality, major increases in morale on the police force, and real dialogue, and communication, and real respect between the communities and the police who are policing those communities.

Catch da Flava: How do you feel about the lack of diversity on police force?

Barry Thomas: It's a reflection on their lack of commitment to the issue. The fact that the Toronto police force does not reflect the demographic profile of Toronto, is a sin, is a crime, it should be punishable by the loss of a job. But the fact of the matter is that there is not enough political will to make a big deal over it.

Catch da Flava: How much do police invest in community policing?

Barry Thomas: Ask chief Fantino or ask the unit commander in 51 division how much they spend on community policing based on their own budgets on an annual basis, and I guarantee you, you won't find a line item for that. And there lies your answer about the Toronto police's commitment to community policing, if you don't have a line item it's nonexistent.

*by da Flava's Riel Moxon-Emre, age 20
(Reprinted from April 2001)*

Racism

Although this country has progressed a lot since the days of racial segregation and racist immigration laws, racism is a plague that has not gone away, but merely manifests itself in subtler ways. The issues presented in the following articles are just as important today as they were when they first went to press.

The Fairest of Them All Black Women and Internalized Racism

When sixteen-year-old Grace Asamoah wakes up in the morning, she stands in front of the mirror hanging on the wall in her room. The image she sees staring back is a disgrace to her. Her kinky permed-straight hair pinched back into a ponytail, her broad nose, her thick lips, her dark brown eyes and her dark skin scream "You're ugly" to her. And Grace believes it. She sees this reflection every time she opens her foundation kit to apply the ivory powder on her ebony skin. Each time Grace sees this image, she is reminded that she is black, she is undesirable and her wish to be light-skinned, or even better white, has not and will never come true.

Grace admits that she has low self-esteem, but her desire to have light skin, which is based on the belief that the lighter you are the more beautiful you are, is a case of internalized racism. "Gorilla." "Tar baby." These were names that Grace was called in elementary school. When boys in her class would rate the girls on their beauty, she remembers them giving her a -1000 because she was so dark. Now in high school, Grace is also called "white-washed" by her peers because she "acts white" and only has light or white friends. Regardless, Grace believes that being called "whitewashed" is far better than the other names she has heard and that nothing could ever be worse than the time a boy told her she looked like, and was just as funny as, Whoopi Goldberg.

"It really hurt, I cried myself to sleep," says Grace. "She's successful and all but when people say you look like her, you know you don't look good. I want to look like Halle Berry. She doesn't get made fun of."

In her book, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, Kathy Russel describes this as the "Whoopi Goldberg Effect," and claims that it is experienced by many dark-skinned women. One study she cites asked participants to characterize black women. The results were as follows: "[...] participants nearly always rated the dark-skinned women as less successful, less happy in love, less popular, less physically attractive, less physically and emotionally healthy and less intelligent than their

light-skinned counterparts. The only quality in which dark-skinned females were not rated lower was sense of humor [...]"

The Whoopi Goldberg Effect suggests that a sure way to be accepted as a dark-skinned woman is to crack a lot of good jokes. But what this study means, at the very least, is that dark-skinned women must work harder than light-skinned



It isn't always easy for black women to fit in when the media worships pale skin and European features.

women to develop a positive sense of self in a society that continues to devalue their looks. However, Grace believes that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. She has given in to the dominant belief in our society that the European aesthetic is ideal and chooses to isolate herself from the black community. Grace says it was her mother who taught her to hate her blackness and dark-skinned people.

Grace and her mother moved to Toronto from Togo, Ghana in 1992 to be with her father. Grace claims that because of the struggles her mother experienced while married to her father and divorcing him, her mother hates him and his "kind" even more. "She tells me that dark-skinned men are no good," reveals Grace. "She sees how happy her friends are with their

white husbands and she wants to be like them; she wants to have money and status without the struggle. Being as black as we are, the only way to do that is to marry a white man."

Grace says that her mother is now with a white man and they are planning to have a baby. Her mother tells her that in order to be successful, she must do the same. "My

mother told me she wouldn't come to my wedding if I married a black man," says Grace; "she says I need to lighten up our family and our race. She's doing it with her fiancé and I will be so jealous when the baby comes [...] it will have light skin; it will be living my fantasy."

Don't be surprised at Grace's wishes or her family's beliefs; this is the reality for a significant number of black people. Notisha Massaquoi is a health promoter at Women's Health in Women's Hands (WHIWM), a health centre in Toronto that provides medical and mental services specifically for women of colour. Massaquoi is finding that more and more women who come into the centre for support are bleaching their skin. According to Massaquoi, a number of African women

have low self-esteem before they move to Toronto so the added stress of trying to adjust to a new society drives some of them to take extreme measures in order to fit in. "Some African women do it all over their face, neck, arms, and hands," she says.

The health care workers at WHIWM take skin bleaching as an indicator that there are underlying issues in these women's lives such as stress and low self-esteem, and they address these issues through various services, support groups and creative therapy sessions. Massaquoi says that educating women about skin bleaching is very hard to do because not much research has been conducted on the topic. However, from what she does know, the effects are detrimental. "I know it burns off the top layer of the skin making it hard for cuts to heal. It has mercury in it which can penetrate the skin and get into the bloodstream. This means that mothers who bleach their skin and breastfeed can poison their children."

Grace has visited the guidance counsellor at her high school to help her find ways to raise her self-esteem. She says that the best advice the counsellor gave her was to love herself completely; "He made me look in the mirror and told me that I need to accept myself. I have to start believing that I'm beautiful and only then will I be a beautiful person."

It's nice to think that ending internalized racism is as easy as looking in the mirror and liking one's image, but that would be unreasonable optimism. These days, the person staring back at Grace when she looks in the mirror isn't any more beautiful than before. "I have to wear a lot of white foundation to cover up my dark skin," she says. "When I wash the makeup off before I go to bed I think to myself, 'Oh my God, I'm so ugly,' I wish it never had to come off." But no matter how much she wishes that it weren't so, when Grace washes that powder off and looks at her face in the mirror the truth is exposed. That mirror, mirror on the wall reveals that no amount of powder can make her the fairest woman of them all.

*da Flava's Brandi Costain, 19,
Ryerson University
(Reprinted from June 2002)*

Racism

Islam: The Misunderstood Religion



Islam is a promoter and propagator of peace. But because of our sophisticated media-driven society, a large segment of our population has gained misconceptions and misunderstanding about this beautiful way of life. I invite the reader to consider several rumours about Islam: the stereotypes you hear about Muslims (more specifically what you hear about Muslims being terrorists), how women are treated in Islam and the concept of Jihad.

Many view Muslims (i.e. those who submit themselves to the will of Allah) as terrorists, but the truth is that they follow a way of life called Islam. Islam means peace and submission to the will of Allah to achieve inner peace and peace within the world. There are many historical examples of this in Islam. For example, the prophet Mohammed told his people before going to a war to not hurt any children, women, elderly and unarmed persons. He also told his followers (the Muslims) not to destroy places of worship such as churches, temples, synagogues and mosques. The noble Qu'ran, a book not written only for the Muslims but for all of humanity, was revealed to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel sent by God more than fourteen thousand years ago. In 60:9 of the Qu'ran it is written: "Allah forbids you only from those who fought against you because of religion or drove you out of your homes or helped others to drive you out, that you should



befriend them, and whoever befriends them - it is they who are unjust." Also, verse 5:32 of the Qu'ran says, "If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, and/or to spread mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved all of mankind."

After knowing all this, a person cannot say that Muslims are terrorists, because a terrorist is a person that kills without just cause. This is not to say that Muslims will kill if they find a reason to. A Muslim will only hurt someone if a person brings harm to them or their family, whereas a terrorist kills for political reasons, for money and/or for power. It is not fair to paint the whole Muslim population with the same brush just because a few Muslims have chosen to kill innocent people as a way to prove their political position. Muslims are people and they would not, for example, consider all Christians terrorists and killers when referring to clashes between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. Similarly, they would not judge all Christians as evil murderers after Timothy McVeigh bombed the Oklahoma City federal building in 1995.

Another misunderstanding that the Western world has about Islam is the role and status of women in the religion. Many believe that Islam does not allow women to have any rights. The reality is that a Muslim woman has just as many rights as a non-Muslim woman in Western society does. In fact, Muslim women have had these rights for far longer than non-Muslim women. Whereas non-Muslim women in North America had to go to courts and rally for the rights they now enjoy, Muslim women have had their rights from the very beginning of Islam more than 1400 years ago.

Some common stereotypes of Muslim women include submissiveness, and it is a common belief in the Western world that Muslim women do not have the power to make choices in their lives. This is untrue. A Muslim woman can choose whether or not she wants to work. If a Muslim woman chooses not to work, her father, brothers or husband will take care of her. A Muslim woman does not have to marry someone she dislikes and she has the right to divorce. If a Muslim woman is forced by her parents to marry someone she is not compatible with, the marriage is not legal in Islam. A Muslim woman has the right to an education and she can be a part of any profession she chooses. The misconceptions Westerners have usually

come from their ignorance and what they see happening in isolated Muslim countries. For example, in some Muslim countries it is customary that women walk behind their husbands. Another example is that in Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to drive. People must keep in mind that these customs are cultural and are not based on Islam. Therefore it is the Saudi Arabian culture that says women cannot drive, not Islam. The Muslim woman also has the right to inherit. Additionally, women of Islam have the right to vote. Up until the 20th century it was considered unconstitutional for American women to vote, but the Muslim woman has had this right since the beginning of Islam.

Jihad! Well, when an American hears this



If you think that this is an oppressed woman, think again. Muslim women have enjoyed rights for centuries that North American women have only recently been granted.

word the first thing that comes to their mind is "Islamic holy war." The term "Jihad" and what is understood of it in North America is false. The word "Jihad," which is an Arabic word, means "struggling and striving to please God." Once, the prophet Mohammed came back from a battle along with his companions and before going back to their family, the prophet gathered them all together and told them, "We came from the small Jihad to the bigger Jihad." The companions were surprised at the expression of the prophet because they were fighting for days, hungry, deprived from sleep and were almost killed, all for the greater good and so that God's will could be manifested in the land. And yet the prophet called this a small Jihad. The companions of the prophet asked: "What is the bigger Jihad?" The prophet responded by saying:

"Jihad against one's ego."

There are many examples of how one can do Jihad. For instance when a writer writes an article to proclaim the truth, he or she is doing Jihad. A sincere lawyer who is striving in the court to reach justice, is doing Jihad. A doctor who sacrifices a huge salary in the West to go and do humanitarian work in the slums of a poor country because he is striving to bring better health care to the impoverished, is doing Jihad. The fact that I am writing this article to address the misunderstandings of Islam is a form of Jihad. Muslims do not fight just anyone and they are not required to do so unless they are driven away from their homes or to protect themselves from an attacker. Even if they have to fight, Muslims have to fol-

low the Prophet's commands.

These three examples of misunderstandings of Islam are by no means the end of the list. I encourage all those who have questions about Islam to read about this way of life before they come to conclusions and generalisations about the people who follow it. There are many resources online where you can begin your journey to understanding the fundamentals of Islam.

Listed below are some good starting points: www.whyislam.org, www.muslimheritage.com, Islamic Society of North America: www.isna.net.

*da Flava's Farid Jabil, 17
(Reprinted from December, 2003)*

Drugs

Everyone has been offered drugs at some point in their lives, but not everyone knows the facts about today's most popular psychoactive substances. Catch da Flava has always been dedicated to informing the public about the latest facts and research on all drugs, legal or otherwise. (Disclaimer: Catch da Flava provides information about - but does not condone - the use of illicit substances.)

Alcohol: More Than Just A Beverage

If a public survey was conducted asking people what drug has the highest addiction rate in Canada, chances are that less than 40% of the people would answer correctly. What's even more surprising is that of the same group of people, 70 % partake in the use of this drug on a regular basis. The drug is alcohol, and while most of us see it as merely an adult problem, alcohol is responsible for more than one third of all teenage fatalities in motor vehicle crashes (MADD online). Additionally, youth who drink alcohol are more likely to have serious health problems which are related to their alcohol use.

An increasing number of youth under the age of 19 are taking up drinking as a pastime. This habit can have a major effect on a young person's life. Apart from the fact that it is illegal for youth under the age of 19 to purchase, alcohol acts as a gateway to more serious drugs and many social problems. While under the influence some youth become overly aggressive and are therefore more likely to instigate a fight. A kid once told me, "When I'm drunk, I'll fight anybody. I don't care who they are."

Although some people erroneously refer to alcohol as a stimulant, it is actually a depressant. During the initial stage of alcohol consumption, you become socially and emotionally disinhibited - but if you continue drinking you will get tired, disoriented, and crash. In the worst case

scenario, you could get alcohol poisoning which is life-threatening because you

could choke on your own vomit and damage vital organs.



Alcohol is responsible for more than one third of all teenage fatalities in motor vehicle crashes.

Alcohol decreases one's ability to concentrate, and for those who are in school, alcohol can stand in the way of success. While there may be exceptions, the student who consumes alcohol is less likely to perform to their full potential. A stu-

dent's grades can drop slowly from a B to a C until all dreams of post-secondary education slowly fade away. The effects of alcohol have a huge impact on the outcome of a person's life, as well as the lives of those who live with an alcoholic.

If you question the reality of teen alcoholism, simply ask any alcoholic what age they started drinking. Even though youths should be held responsible for

their own actions, there are other factors that contribute to the problem of youth alcoholism. Some youth would tell you that they get the liquor from their parents' cabinet, others would admit that it is difficult for a 17-year-old to go to The Beer Store to pick up a two-four. Accessibility is a major issue that must be rectified if youth are expected to abstain from alcohol. The heart of the problem? Adults and their decisions regarding youth facilities, programs, and resources. After 9pm there is usually nowhere for young people to go and just hang out. So youth in many cases pick up the habit of drinking simply because there is nothing else to do.

It is ironic that, where I come from, drinking alcohol is called "beating juice." Alcohol elicits violent behaviour and its victims are youth, not unlike me, who are starved for attention and community resources. It is up to the communities to enforce drinking laws and to provide accessible recreation centres as a productive alternative to drinking.

So kids, next time you crack open that bottle of Heinie, bear in mind that what you are about to drink is a drug as deadly as any other if taken in excess. You may be able to control your drinking, but then again, you may not. Do you really want to risk it?

*da Flava's Kai James, 18
(Reprinted from Winter 1999)*

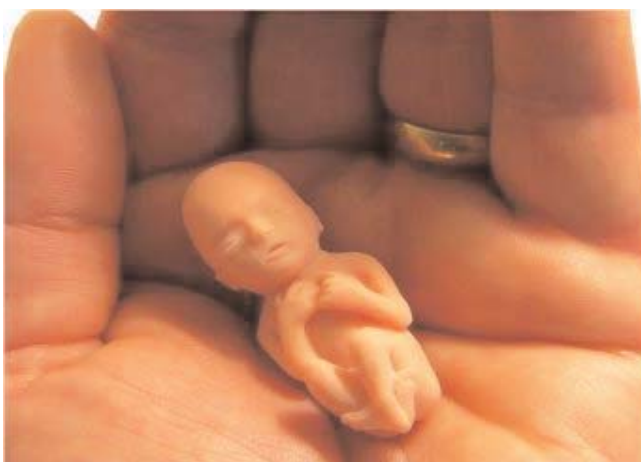
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

It's summertime and for some, this means party time, staying out late and maybe drinking. But if you're a pregnant teen, you've got a lot to think about before you go out and drink, including fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).

FAS is the manifestation of growth, mental and physical birth defects associated with a pregnant woman's high level of alcohol consumption. Since a safe amount of alcohol-drinking has not yet been established, any pregnant woman who drinks any amount of alcohol is unfortunately at risk of endangering her baby. Furthermore, it has been found that consuming increased amounts of alcohol while pregnant leads to an increased number of problems.

Timing is also very important. Drinking alcohol during an earlier trimester is more endangering than doing so in the next one. However, this does not mean that it is safe to drink later on in your pregnancy.

Alcohol can affect the baby whether it is



consumed before, during or even after the pregnancy. If a mother drinks alcohol and breastfeeds her baby, the alcohol can block the milk-flow and cause the

baby to consume more alcohol than milk.

The effects of FAS are many, including slow development with decreased mental

functioning, facial abnormalities, a small head, small upper jaw, short upturned nose, smooth groove in the upper lip, smooth and thin upper lip, narrow and small eyes, heart defects, and abnormalities in limbs, joints, feet, fingers and toes. Every one of these possible outcomes is a reason not to drink while pregnant. The incidence of FAS ranges from 1 out of every 1,500 to 1 out of every 600 live births. This wide range is due to variations in drinking practices.

Drinking while you're pregnant isn't a mistake, it's a choice. Make the right one.

*da Flava's Renee Reid, 13
(Reprinted from Fall 2001)*

Drugs

The Demon Weed

The Case For Decriminalizing Marijuana



Marijuana has long been considered by the general public as the demon weed. As young people we were told that this drug would ruin your life, make you brain-dead or lead you to do heroin and other drugs. But is it really that bad? Cannabis sativa, commonly referred to as marijuana, is the only plant known to "naturally" produce tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is considered a hallucinogenic substance and is the source of the "high" that is commonly

associated with marijuana. THC is found in the bud of the plant and this is the part that is smoked.

The marijuana plant usually takes six to seven months to start budding. If the plant is not grown properly the THC level is dramatically reduced. According to the American Medical Association the THC in marijuana causes minor hallucinations. It is also a depressant that slows down the functioning of the heart, liver and mind. This means that as long as THC is in your system it is likely to slow down your reaction time and affect your memory, as well as your ability to perform cognitive tasks such as reasoning, reading and speaking. In addition, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) reports on its website (www.camh.net) that there are negative health implications associated with frequent long-term use of marijuana including respiratory damage and immune and cardio-vascular system defects. However, if you continue to read the fine print, CAMH goes on to state that since cannabis use is usually sporadic or experimental, users are unlikely to suffer such

negative consequences.

Is marijuana an addictive drug? Unlike heroin, crack and nicotine which are chemically addictive drugs requiring frequent users to take the drug constantly or else suffer complaints from their bodies, THC is not a chemically addictive drug. Can you die of an overdose of marijuana? Most scientists agree that although you may pass out, it is humanly impossible to smoke enough marijuana fast enough to die from overdosing. In fact, some scientists estimate that the only way to die from an overdose is by smoking three quarters of a ton of it in fifteen minutes! And no that was not a misprint.

What about traffic deaths? Unlike alcohol, which is responsible for 340,000-390,000 traffic deaths each year, very few deaths have been related to the driving of a vehicle or the operation of machinery while under the influence of marijuana. So why, in the light of all the information we know about the drug, is marijuana still considered the demon weed? Why does the government persist in spending millions of

dollars trying to control the substance and stop its use and distribution? And why, considering its relative harmlessness, are thousands of marijuana users criminalised each year for simple possession?

Can it be that marijuana users consist mostly of young and relatively powerless people while alcohol and tobacco companies are among society's most powerful corporate elite? According to information released by Statistics Canada, in 1997 more than 7 out of every 10 drug offences in Canada were related to marijuana and two-thirds of them were for simple possession. Among those charged, 86% were under the age of 25. Isn't it time we stop criminalising otherwise law-abiding citizens? By the way, famous Americans who had been rumoured to smoke marijuana include Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and John F. Kennedy Jr.

*da Flava's Vinh Duong, 17,
Central Technical High School
(Reprinted from October 2000)*

All About Ecstasy



The following Q and A has been put together in an attempt to inform readers who may regularly be in an environment where Ecstasy is readily available.

What is Ecstasy?

Properly called by its chemical name, methylenedioxymethamphetamine or MDMA, Ecstasy is an illegal and potentially dangerous drug that is manufactured at clandestine labs and imported from various countries. It is commonly sold as a tablet or powdered in a capsule. Around the rave scene you are more likely to hear

it called "XTC," "Vitamin E" or just "E."

Is Ecstasy addictive?

Although it is not as physically addictive as heroin, crack, and nicotine, it is still more addictive than marijuana and LSD. It is also highly psychologically addictive. In the same way that some people form a psychological addiction to gambling you can develop problematic and habit-forming behaviours with Ecstasy that is hard to distinguish from the way addicts use other drugs. Furthermore, it is easy to develop a tolerance and unpleasant withdrawal symptoms from the drug after repeated use.

What are its effects?

As with most drugs, the effects of MDMA are affected by your size, weight, health, mood, dosage, frequency of use, and method of intake. Generally speaking, Ecstasy is a stimulant (increases blood pressure and heart rate) and takes about a half to one hour to begin having an effect that lasts four to six hours. According to a 1998 study of MDMA on naive healthy volunteers done by the Drug Dependence Research Center in California, oral doses of 1.7 mg/kg of MDMA was found to "enhance mood and well-being associated

with derealisation and depersonalisation." This concurs with other information released about MDMA in which users are reported to experience pleasurable altered (hallucinogenic) states and act friendlier and more confident than they normally would. Some people reported feeling sick after taking Ecstasy. Feelings of anxiety and paranoia are also known to occur and appear to be more likely to happen if the user is in a bad mood or not feeling relaxed. Ecstasy users often report coming down a day or two later, sometimes feeling a little bit depressed, tired or irritable.

What are the health risks associated with Ecstasy?

While some people have experienced severe reactions, most of the dangers associated with Ecstasy stem from overdosing or using too much too often. The main risk with Ecstasy is that it can make your body's cooling system fail and you could collapse from heat stroke/heat exhaustion. This is the main way in which people have died from using Ecstasy. As far as long term health risks goes, a 1998 study headed by Dr. George Ricaurte, Assistant Professor of Neurology at John Hopkins University, demonstrated for the first time that long-term users of MDMA

are permanently altering the structure of their brains. Using brain-scan technology that can produce detailed images of active areas of the brain, Dr. Ricaurte revealed that regular Ecstasy users (participants who had generally used Ecstasy on more than 200 occasions over a four to five year period) lacked significant numbers of serotonin-generating synapses. The study also indicated that there was no improvement in functioning despite a period of abstinence. The important implication of these findings is that serotonin modulates how happy we feel, and repeated use of Ecstasy leaves the brain drained of an essential chemical, which in the long term can lead to depression and suicide. Dr. Ricaurte's findings are consistent with other studies using questionnaires that have shown that regular users of Ecstasy tend to be more depressed than non-users. Some speculate that after a lengthy period of abstinence from MDMA the brain is capable of restoring this damage. In short, regular use of Ecstasy produces long-lasting changes in your brain that could harm you psychologically and physically.

*by Adonis Huggins
(Reprinted from March 2000)*

Sex and Relationships

Issues pertaining to sex and relationships concern all teens, especially in today's sex-saturated society. Here are a few timeless tidbits about everything you've ever wanted to know about birth control and internet dating.

The Dangers and Delights of Internet Dating

Picking someone up on the internet these days is just as casual and common as meeting someone at a party, a recreation centre or any other public place. Heck, Web communities and internet dating is so hot right now that hip hop sensation Kanye West rhymes about it in one of his songs.

Popular Web communities are the perfect venues to connect with people who may interest you, whether it's your goal to find love or just friendship.

Gone are the days where one has to dress up, pay money to get into a club and then build up all their courage and strength to approach someone. No more having to rehearse your best pick up lines or worry that you'll mess up or get rejected. Now, it's all about plopping your butt down in front of a computer in your comfortable house clothes and clicking, typing and chatting to as many potential mates or dates as your heart desires.

There's no easier way to talk with people. All you have to do is open your browser, type in the Web address of your favourite cyber spot to connect and interact with people. Then, you log in with your attention-grabbing username, do a search for the requirements that match your criteria and start clicking on the names that catch your eye. BAM! You're on that person's page and if their looks and what they say on their page excites you, then you drop them a line or two. You may even leave your MSN messenger address so the person can add you to their instant messenger list and you can speed up the communication process.

Depending on how lonely or how outgoing you are, you may feel like jumping the gun and meeting someone you chatted with online right away. This isn't a smart move. Connecting with people online may be simple, but if the right precautions aren't taken then this simple situation can turn scary.

Talking with someone online isn't like talking with them face-to-face and even then, it's hard enough to figure out the truth about someone. The internet is very much like your community: there are some good people and there are also some bad ones. Some people thrive on the anonymity of the internet and use this to prey on people. So, when meeting someone on the internet, one must take mea-

sures to maximize safety and minimize disappointment. Here are some safety tips that will guide you through the internet dating process.

1. Never give out any personal details until you are completely confident and certain that the person you are commu-



Chatting online could spell trouble if you aren't careful.

nicating with is genuine. People on the internet can easily lie to you about their sex, age, weight, name, school, location, anything! Exchange e-mails or have a few online chats before you move to a phone conversation. If the person you're chatting with seems more interested in your personal details than swapping e-mails then you should think about stopping communication with them.

2. Be anonymous when e-mailing. Set up an e-mail account that is fun and that can't be tied to your identity. Keep this email separate from your more serious and/or professional one you use for close friends, family and/or business. Also remember to change the name attached to your e-mails so people won't be able to see your real name when they get mail from you.

3. Pictures are worth a thousand words. And they can save a lot of your time if you exchange pics with the person you're chatting with. Pictures help you determine whether the person is physically your type

physically. The tricky thing with pictures is that sometimes people will send you ones that were taken years ago. We all know how much a person can change in a year or less. So, ask the person for a recent photo. Your best bet for avoiding any surprises is to ask for a picture with a date stamp on it.

4. Never arrange to meet anyone until you have exchanged telephone numbers and have spoken to each other at least 3 times. If you are a woman, ask for the man's number and block your number when you call, at least for the first few times you talk on the phone. This will give you enough time to feel the person out and decide whether or not you want to continue communicating with them. It's important for everyone to trust their instincts when they talk to a person on the phone. If someone makes you uneasy or turns you off in any way, a good idea would be to cease communication with them. Meeting a person who makes you uneasy over the phone won't make a real-life encounter any better. Find someone else to chat with; there are plenty of spiders on the Web.

5. Safety remains first when making that first live contact. For the initial inperson encounter, pick a public place that you are familiar with so you can get there by yourself and don't have to rely on

your date to take you there. Be sure to set the conditions of the meeting beforehand and don't let your new friend change them. A good idea is to give the details of your date and the person you're meeting to a friend or family member. Another idea is to go on a double-date so you can bring your friend along for security. If you decide to just keep it at two, then make sure you stay near other people and in well-lit areas throughout the meeting. Lastly, if anything should go wrong, make sure you can positively identify the person to the police.

All these tips and safety precautions makes it seems like internet dating is more negative than positive. But I'm sure all the people who have found true love and had online success stories would beg to differ. The internet has been the meeting place for many long-lasting relationships as well as many scary and shocking dating disasters. Our readers share their experiences.

"I met the hottest chick I've seen in my life on the net. When I met her face-to-face she was so damn fine, but she was kinda stiff and uncomfortable. Me being a good guy, I asked to hold her coat when we went inside the mall, but she wouldn't let me. She kept hiding her arm under her coat and got really mad when I insisted on taking it. Later on that night, I took the coat from her and saw that she had no hand! Her fingers were missing and everything. I freaked out and I didn't know what to say. She was a really nice girl and beautiful too, but I felt like she should have told me so I could have been ready for what I was about to see. We chilled for the rest of the night, but it was really weird after the discovery. We never talked again." ~Stumped, 23, Scarborough.

"Finding love and friendships online has been nothing but the most positive experience for me. In fact, when it comes to finding relationships, it's all I know. I found my first, second and third loves online. I also met most of my friends online as well. Yea, I don't go out much and that's by choice. But why should I? I have the world right in my living room on my computer!" ~Love on the line, 22, Toronto.

*by da Flava's Sexpert
(Reprinted from August 2004)*

Sex and Relationships

The Complete Guide to Safer Sex

Do you have one?

One what?

You know...

Oh a Jimmy, ah, aren't you on the pill?

Protection is an important part of healthy sexuality. It includes the knowledge of what to use, its effects, and how to use it correctly. Don't know what's out there? Don't know what best suits you? Well here's a little information that can help you get started.

The birth control pill is taken orally, every day for either 21/28 days or 28/28 days. The Pill is very discreet and only you know that you're on it. The purpose of the Pill is to make your body think it's pregnant, so it doesn't release an egg. The pill also regulates menstruation so it arrives at the same time every month for as long as you're on the Pill. The Pill is **ONLY** effective if taken **IF TAKEN CORRECTLY AND CONSISTENTLY**. Many users are not aware of what they should do if they forget to take a pill or delay taking it. If users forget to take the pill, then the loss of efficacy may last for the next 7 days or more if the pills were skipped early in the packet. If you miss a pill then take it as soon as you remember, and continue the next dosage on time. **HOWEVER**, if you miss 2 pills in a row don't take the missed pills unless otherwise instructed by your doctor. The Pill does **NOT** protect you against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Side effects of the pill can include headaches, dizziness, lengthened periods and nausea. These symptoms can last for the first 3 months, however if it continues beyond that then see your doctor for help. There is a common fear that the Pill is a risk factor for cancer in women, but sev-

eral studies have shown that the Pill has a marked protective effect against ovarian and endometrial cancer. There is an overwhelming amount of information available; the Pill may be the best-studied medication around, so talk to your physician if you have questions.



Think this is the only way to have safer sex? There are more alternatives than you may think.

One of the newest methods of birth control are injections. The 2 most commonly used intramuscular injectable preparations are a tri-monthly needle injection called Depo-Provera, and a bimonthly needle injection called Net-Oen. Both needles are very discreet and not painful. Side effects are similar to those of the Pill. Depo-Provera has an exceptionally low failure rate (under 1%) but also takes some time to leave the body after the last injection. There is also some delay in the return of fertility, although there is no evidence of

long-term impairment. The Pill or injection should not be taken if there is suspicion of pregnancy. Injections do **NOT** protect against STDs.

The most commonly known type of contraception is the male condom. These are

inexpensive, easy to use and very accessible. There are a few things to remember when using them, though: when opening the package try not to tear the condom, only put the condom on when the penis is erect, and pinch the tip and roll out any air that may be in the condom. After the man releases, immediately take off the condom and dispose of it. Most couples choose not to use condoms because they feel it dampens the mood. There are however condoms available which are made to maximise the sensation of the penis. It's also important to remember that latex is very

easily damaged by petroleum-based or other greasy lubricants. Condoms not only offer protection from pregnancy but are the **ONLY** form of birth control - aside from abstinence - that protects against HIV and other STDs.

The female condom is another type of barrier contraceptive. Instead of covering the penis like an ordinary condom, the female condom gently lines the vagina. It is inserted like a tampon and is held in place at the upper end of the vagina by a small ring inside the sheath. A ring at the open end lies against the vulva during intercourse and prevents the whole sheath from slipping inside. The female condom is the first widely available condom-shaped rubber device that is inserted into the vagina and covers the cervix.

Vaginal barriers such as the diaphragm or cervical cap require professional advice for size selection and training in fitting. As with the cervical cap, spermicide is applied before using the diaphragm. The diaphragm is very discreet, and if cleaned properly can be used more than once. If the diaphragm is not inserted correctly, it can cause discomfort. The diaphragm does **NOT** protect against STDs.

Three final words of advice. First of all, no type of protection is 100% safe so always double up. Secondly, always depend on yourself for protection - that way you're not relying on your partner and there is no chance of unprotected sex, pregnancy and/or STDs. Finally, be aware of what you're using, and use it properly.

*by Lisa Peters
(Reprinted from Fall 1997)*

Not Enough Sex in the Home



Sex. It's everywhere and it seems like just about everyone is having it. But yet, as always, most parents still feel uncomfortable talking about sex with their children and children still learn about sex mostly in school.

In spite of this, Miriam Kaufman, a sex educator at the Hospital for Sick Children,

says that today's parents are more educated than they were twenty years ago and in turn are more likely to talk about sex with their children.

I remember when I would ask my parents about sex and they would always answer by asking me if I had something better to do, just to avoid the question.

Alex McKeal, a mother of two, is the contrary. She always discusses sex with her children and would be comfortable if her kids came to her for advice. "Parents should feel comfortable talking to their kids about sex," she says. "Knowledge makes a difference; it may also prevent a

sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy in the future."

Gloria Armstrong, a fifteen-year-old mother, blames her mother for her pregnancy. She says, "If my mother would have talked with me about sex, I would not have gotten pregnant in my teens." Now, the hardest thing Gloria will have to face in the years to come won't be telling her daughter about sex, but telling her daughter that she doesn't know who her father is.

The only advice Gloria can give to teenagers is to ask questions about sex. If your parents are uncomfortable answering

you, then find someone you trust and talk to them. And, of course, Gloria also advises that you wait for the right time to have sex, and the right person to have sex with.

The advice I give to parents is to talk with their children about everything, especially sex. Times have changed and there is a lot that teens have to deal with. The best place for children to learn about these things is not in a classroom or a clinic, but at home, from those who are closest to them.

*da Flava's Grace Asamoah, 16,
Eastern Collegiate Institute
(Reprinted from Fall 2001)*

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