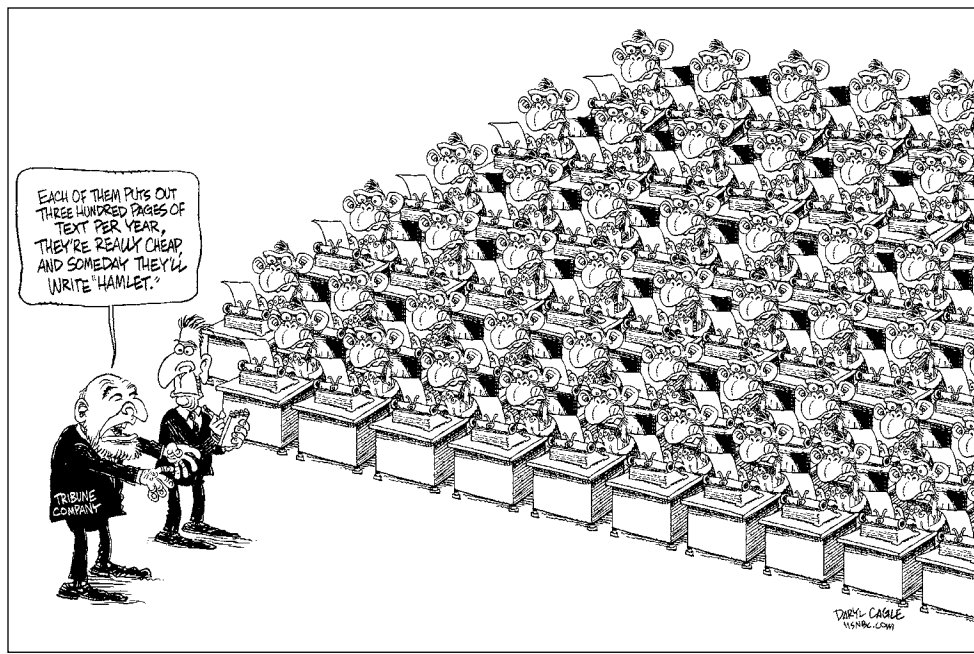


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OTHER CAMPUSES EDITORIAL BOARD, THE ORACLE (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA)

Media fanning false fears

“Drunkorexia,” a term coined by the media to describe habitually starving oneself or vomiting to offset the calories ingested by drinking, has been pounced on by mainstream media outlets such as The Today Show and the New York Times as yet another symptom of today’s troubled youth.

This newest epidemic is a prime example of the media creating a topic and then sensationalizing it to attract an audience via moral panic. Recall other so-called social ills conjured by the media in recent years, like the infamous “rainbow party” scare. Media outlets across the nation warned of parties in which young women would supposedly apply different colored lipsticks and shamelessly perform oral sex on various males, who competed to rack up as many colors as possible.

As it turned out, the allegedly widespread rainbow parties were a lot of hype without a lot of substance. In 2004, an NBC-People survey revealed that only 12 percent of girls aged 13 to 16 had performed oral sex, and a scant 4 percent of those had attended an oral sex party. Deborah Tolman, director of the San Francisco State University Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality, said the rainbow party “phenomenon” created by the media displayed “all the classic signs of moral panic ... despite any actual evidence.”

What these topics have in common is that they were touted by the media as indicators of the recklessness and danger that supposedly define contemporary youth - specifically girls - with no scientific or statistical bases.

The troubled youth subtext of these media-created urban myths is used to

lure readers and viewers. It appeals to the basic fear that children and young adults are running rampant and being tarnished by the lurid elements surrounding them that threaten to corrupt - or, fear of fears, even dissolve - traditional American family values.

The media capitalizes on this fear by advertising the problems as pervasive and hidden - parents, it could be happening right under your noses! - and inciting moral panic in the audience. Catchy little buzzwords for the problems are even created so that news outlets can refer to the epidemics in future stories.

In the 24-hour news culture that characterizes much of the mainstream media, there is no such thing as an absurd or superfluous story. However, the bottom line is that drunkorexia is simply a media play-on-words to describe a pre-existing relationship.

Eating disorders and binge drinking/alcoholism both involve behaviors that are often used as coping mechanisms. It is no surprise that someone who is coping with an eating disorder would be driven to numb his or her pain or anxiety with a substance such as alcohol. It is similarly unsurprising that an alcoholic or habitual binge drinker would have other self-destructive behaviors, such as eating disorders.

Such behaviors have always been linked, long before the media decided to exploit them, assign a cute nickname to the combination and tout it as a “new” danger. In fact, sensationalizing “drunkorexia” as an emergent social ill detracts from the attention that should be paid to the diseases in which it is rooted - anorexia, bulimia and alcoholism.

A bucket for Barack Obama

Hillary Clinton has left the race. Now what?

Now that Barack Obama has secured the Democratic nomination for president, his focus can shift to the next major task: Petitioning Microsoft Word to include his name in spell check.

He can also choose a running mate. The Vice Presidency is a prestigious position held only by individuals who can “balance the ticket,” which is a roundabout way of saying “be a different kind of white guy.” For example, in 2000 Dick Cheney balanced George W. Bush’s ticket by having male pattern baldness.

But Obama made the bold decision to not be a white guy, so nobody knows how he will balance his ticket. Should he pick a different kind of black guy? A woman? A sassy, back-talking 10-year-old played by Gary Coleman? Dick Cheney? Demographics are key. Someone like New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson would help appeal to Hispanic voters, while North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il would help appeal to evil voters.

The other thing Obama will want in a running mate is someone who is not a total boob. This should go without saying, but Vice Presidential candidates have a history of testing very high in the boobdom department. Who can forget when Dan Quayle, guest judging an elementary school’s spelling bee in 1992, famously misspelled “Barack Obama”?

Of course, Obama has to be careful not to offer the position to anyone who wouldn’t accept it. Former Vice President John Nance Garner reportedly said the office was “not worth a bucket of warm spit,” though in 1941 this was actually a compliment, as World War II rationing left the nation with a shortage of warm spit and buckets.

Hillary Clinton is a person who would happily accept the position. She said she is “open to the possibility” of being Obama’s



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Vice President, in the same sense that I would be open to the possibility of winning a \$100 million Powerball jackpot. History may work against Clinton, though, because the only other major-party female running mate, Geraldine Ferraro, was part of Walter Mondale’s losing ticket in 1984.

But so what? Ferraro and Clinton have almost nothing in common. Ferraro was a New York congressperson serving as running mate to a U.S. senator from a Midwestern state, whereas Clinton is a New York congressperson seeking to become the running mate to a U.S. senator from a completely different Midwestern state.

Still, the Vice President is said to be a heartbeat away from the Presidency, so Obama might instead want someone with a heart. Fortunately he has appointed a committee to lead his search, a blue-ribbon

panel that will no doubt come up with a recommendation just as soon as Obama cuts off its expense account.

Ultimately it will come down to targeting key voter blocs. If Obama wants to appeal to women, he’ll pick Clinton. If he wants to appeal to Hispanics, he’ll pick Bill Richardson. And if he wants to get into spell check, he’ll pick Bill Gates.

Scott is a third-year law student. He recently purchased a bucket of warm spit on eBay.

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Readers' opinions

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