

## THIS WEEK ONLINE

WEB EVENTS - MAY 28-JUNE 1

**5.28** To celebrate Memorial Day, check out our multimedia special on **PEARL HARBOR**.

**5.29** Where in the world are **THE MAC-PHERSONS**? Log on to find out.

**5.30** **COVER TALK** at noon, EDT. How will Washington change with the Democrats controlling the Senate? Ask Jonathan Alter.

**5.31** Log on for **RANDOM ACCESS ONLINE**, Steven Levy's new column of weekly dispatches from his two-month stay in Japan.

**6.1** Tune in to **MSNBC** cable for **NEWSWEEK**'s new weekend spot, an interview with one of the magazine's top critics. That's every Friday, around 2:30 p.m., EDT.

## WEB EXCLUSIVE

The Beatles | *Here, There and Everywhere*

**5.24** Being a fan of the Fab Four used to mean subsisting solely on ever-aging recordings. No more. In recent years Paul, George, Ringo and even John have let loose with a flood of greatest-hits CDs, books, poetry and other memorabilia. The outpouring was at first exhilarating, then daunting, then wearying and now maybe just a little bit crass. Suddenly it seems possible to be sick of a band that hasn't actually existed for 30 years. (Log on to *Arts Extra* for Jeff Giles's full story.)

## QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS

## Sounding Off on Britney and Bob Dole

**NEWSWEEK:** Your organization's been offended by a lot of TV lately.

**HEATHER CIRMO,** Family Research Council

**Council:** On every show with a homosexual character, he or she is often the most stable person. That's kind of strange. At the same time, marriages on TV are either falling apart or unbelievable.

**You've also got feelings about Britney Spears and her mix of sexuality and abstinence.**

I commend her for being outspoken



about her virginity and her desire to wait until she's married. But her dress and music stands in stark contrast to what she says she's living out ... I'm thinking specifically of the Pepsi commercial with Bob Dole. She's taking off her clothes and dancing on-stage. Then there's Bob Dole, a

Viagra spokesperson, watching the ad and going "Easy, boy," supposedly to his dog. You know, that's just really rank. (Log on for B. J. Sigmund's full Q&A.)

TEST  
YOURSELF

**THINK YOU KNOW WHAT'S NEWS?** Take our quiz to see how well you're keeping up with world events. The multiple-choice answers are on [Newsweek.MSNBC.com](http://Newsweek.MSNBC.com).

**1]** What was the name of the Senate singing group featuring Trent Lott, John Ashcroft, Larry Craig and Jim Jeffords?

**2]** Which exiled former leader was charged in his native country last week with murder?

**3]** Afghanistan's ruling Taliban faction said it intended to require members of which religion to wear yellow ID tags?

**4]** In the face of a lawsuit, which ingredient did McDonald's say it was sorry for using?

**5]** What have scientists named the newly discovered, paper-clip-size creature that may shed light on the ancestry of mammals?

**6]** The directors of "Pearl Harbor" incorporated authentic footage from which real-life war?

TO TAKE THE QUIZ, LOG ON TO [NEWSWEEK.MSNBC.COM](http://NEWSWEEK.MSNBC.COM)



*A passion for softball and politics*

## BYLINES

## The Senator Who Threw 'Em a Screwball

In the early 1980s, **Jonathan Alter** played on a softball team with Sen. Jim Jeffords, who was then a young congressman. "He was out there at second base every single game, and would often have a cheeseburger with us afterward at a Capitol Hill dive called The Tune Inn," Alter says. "And if the House was in session, he would sling a ratty sport coat and tie across a tree branch so that he could come off the diamond, put them on and then trot off to vote." Last week, of course, Jeffords switched teams of a different kind. Alter profiles him for this week's cover package. (Page 20)

## A Lesson for Life

## Barbara Kantrowitz

owes a lot to a 10th-grade teacher. "One day she had me read something aloud that I'd written," she recalls, "and it got everyone's attention. I decided on the spot to become a writer." Kantrowitz



Teacher Ben Klein

oversaw this week's feature on first-year educators. "Teachers live in a world that doesn't respect them," she says. "That means we're not respecting the future." (Page 42)

## Fools for Stock Funds

**The Motley Fool** guys (actually Tom and David Gardner) don't just know finance; they write about it with finesse. Their irreverent advice reaches 30 million people a month via Web sites, books, radio shows, columns—and periodic editorial sections of **NEWSWEEK**. This week the



Fools explain how to be your own CEO, why you need a rainy-day fund—and that it's safe to stick with stocks. (Page 58)

*The Motley Fools*

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"To see this become a reality on 'Dawson's Creek,' which caters to teens, is disturbing," says Cirmo

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## Kiss the Girls (And Boys)

**A rep from the conservative Family Research Council sounds off on the "Dawson's Creek" kiss, the current TV landscape, Britney and even Bob Dole**

By B. J. Sigesmund  
NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

The Family Research Council has taken offense at everything from "Friends" to "American Pie"—in short, some of the most successful pop culture in recent years. But according to the conservative Washington-based public-policy organization, there's just way too much sex in these and other TV shows and movies catering to teenagers. And don't even get them *started* about all the gay people on television.

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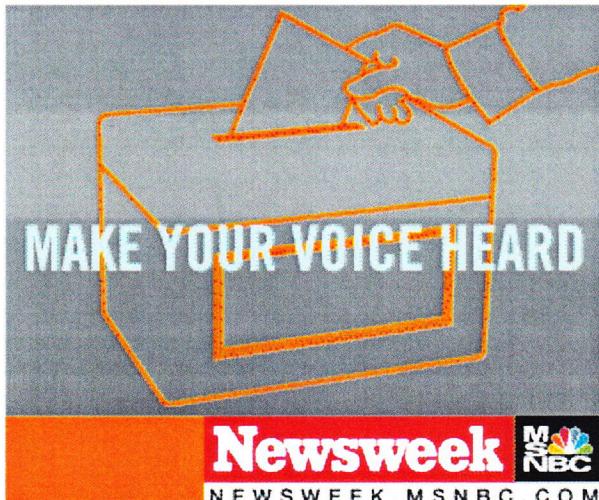
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**Newsweek**  
B.J. Sigesmund  
GENERAL EDITOR

SO IT SHOULD come as no surprise that the group has reacted loudly to the May 2 episode of "Dawson's Creek," in which gay high-school senior Jack (Kerr Smith) took a male date to the prom—and got an on-camera kiss at the end of the night. It was actually the second boy-boy buss in the history of the WB show, and this time, the FRC was *really* steamed. NEWSWEEK's B. J. Sigesmund talked with the group's associate director of media, Heather Cirmo, about the "Dawson's Creek" kiss, Britney Spears's mixed messages—and MTV (which she says now stands for "Malignant Television").

**NEWSWEEK: Please give us the Family Research Council's take on the "Dawson's Creek" kiss.**

**Heather Cirmo:** The first kiss was disturbing enough, but to push the envelope again by having a graphic, longer kiss is particularly disturbing, considering the audience, which is comprised largely of impressionable teens who are confused about who they are. Now that's fine; that's what it means to be a teenager. But I'm afraid that "Dawson's Creek" is really an indoctrination tool for homosexual activists. The creator of the show, Kevin Williamson, has said he wanted to see a time when a homosexual kiss would be portrayed on TV in a noncomedic way. To see this become a reality on "Dawson's Creek," which caters to teens, is disturbing.

**What is your organization's fear about the kiss?**

"A lot of people go to the movies and watch TV and listen to music," says Cirmo. "It's from those mediums that



It's a very different time for teenagers today than it was even 10

they decide what their views are and what life is."

years ago for me. There are a lot of gay and lesbian clubs on campus. There is a lot more conversation taking place on school campuses about so-called sexual orientation. And I don't know what I would have thought if those clubs had been around when I was in high school. It's a confusing time, and it's unfortunate that we're not communicating the truth to high-school kids. The truth is that it is not a scientific fact that you are born homosexual. And yet that is the message that's communicated in shows like "Dawson's Creek" and in a lots of these gay-straight clubs in high school and in the pop culture at large.

### **What is the FRC's view on what causes homosexuality?**

Science is inconclusive as to whether you're born homosexual or whether it's environmental. But the thousands upon thousands of people who've left the homosexual lifestyle demonstrate that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice rather than an inborn characteristic.

### **Does your organization do a lot of research in this area?**

A staff member who's a former lesbian—she's now married and pregnant—wrote a paper for us called "The Gay Gene: Going, Going ...Gone," which is on our Web site (<http://www.frc.org/iss/hsx/retrieve.cfm?get=IS00D2>). Her name's Yvette C. Schneider. It goes through all the various research that's been done, debunking the myth that homosexuality is something that's inborn. It's not conclusive at all.

### **What else does her paper say?**

Being a former lesbian, she has first-hand knowledge of the process of getting involved in the lifestyle—and the process of getting out of the lifestyle. She's said she cannot herself remember a time when she didn't have same-sex attractions. But looking back upon her life she realized there were environmental factors that led her into that lifestyle. It was a long process to try to get out. So there's hope for someone who feels compelled to be in this lifestyle when they'd rather not be. There's hope, but it's not an easy process. When do you ever see *that* portrayed on TV? All we see now is glorification of the lifestyle without showing the many, many problems associated with it. That also goes for heterosexuality practiced outside of marriage, too. You don't see the problems with that on TV, either.

### **If you ran a network, how would you like to see homosexuality portrayed on TV?**

We definitely wouldn't want to glorify the lifestyle. Every program that has a homosexual character in the show, he or she is often the most stable character. He or she is not promiscuous or entangled in a bad relationship most of the time. A lot of times, he or she is the most comedic person. That's kind of strange. It's interesting that the homosexual character is the most likable character. And at the same time, marriage is portrayed so negatively. We'd prefer to see marriage portrayed in a lot more positive light. What we have right now is a lot of sexual relationships on TV happening outside of marriage. The marriages that are portrayed on TV are either falling apart or are just unbelievable.

**Can you give us some examples?**

Let's compare TV today with 15 years ago. We had "The Cosby Show," "Family Ties," "Silver Spoons." These were the shows I grew up watching. You had families intact, together, loving each other. It wasn't sexual, but you knew they were happy together. We don't see a lot of shows like that today. We see a lot more of the "Friends"-type fare, with people jumping from one bed to another. There's nary a mention of marriage. If there is, it's usually after you live together for a while. I don't watch a lot of these shows regularly, and I wouldn't want my children watching them ... [but] there are encouraging signs things are changing today, like the Damon Wayans show, "My Wife and Kids." He and his wife get along well. They're an intact family. But I'm hard-pressed to point to other families. You could maybe say "Malcolm in the Middle," in a strange way. It's a quirky family, a little bit of dysfunction, but they love each other. "7th Heaven" is another example. These are encouraging signs. They're relatively popular shows.

**But how do you answer the argument that TV shows like "Friends" and others actually reflect the lifestyle habits of many Americans? Many people are sexually active before marriage.**

It's the age-old question of whether Hollywood is reflecting America or influencing America. I think it's a little bit of both. But ask a person on the street, "Do you like 'Friends' or 'Sex and the City'?" They'd say they can understand the characters, but we're not having all that sex. The reason we watch some of these shows is we see a little bit of ourselves in them. But then Hollywood runs with it, and then we no longer relate.

**And your organization sees danger in that?**

When you're looking at society at large, it's the old thing, what goes in is what comes out. What you fill your mind with is going to affect you. It doesn't mean you're going to be a bed-hopping fool, but it quite possibly will influence the way you see life and other people. In fact, I was just researching a 1999 University of Michigan survey today. The percent of students who said that having a good marriage and family life was extremely important was 83 percent for girls and 73 percent for boys. But compare that to the percent of girls who think their marriages will last a lifetime: girls, 64 percent; boys, 59 percent. Last, and most gripping, was the percentage that agree "most people will have fuller and happier lives if they choose legal marriage rather than staying single or living with somebody." Girls, 30 percent; boys, 40 percent. I just have to ask the question, what role does pop culture play in these boys and girls having these opinions? Marriage has lost its luster in many ways. Marriage is a building block of any civilized society and you've got to nurture that institution. If our pop culture is any indication [of the] state of marriage today, our civilization may be on the verge of collapse.

**What is pop culture's role in society?**

Obviously, I don't want to be seen as against pop culture. I understand it and its role in society. That's why we try to monitor it and encourage our society to produce better material. Pop culture influences opinions, and therefore we think it's important to try to influence pop culture for the good. Not everybody's going to go to FRC's Web site to see what we think. The reality is a lot of people go to the movies and watch TV and listen to music. It's from those mediums that they decide what their views are and what life is.

**Let's talk about Britney Spears. I know you'll have a thing to two to say about her mix of sexuality and abstinence.**

I commend Britney Spears for being outspoken about her virginity and her desire to wait until she's married, but I have to say her dress and music stands in stark contrast to what she says she's living out. That's confusing for kids. When they're mimicking Britney Spears, they're thinking first and foremost, how can I *look* like her, rather than *be* like her? To clarify that, it's her persona they're attracted to. Also, we have to remember that teenage boys are very visual. All men are visual. But boys are particularly hormonal, and that's who Britney Spears is speaking to. Teenage guys are looking at her, too. And they're seeing a *lot* of skin.

I'm thinking specifically of the Pepsi commercial with Bob Dole and how so distasteful that is. She's taking off her clothes, dancing on stage, having all these guys have their jaws [open] while they're watching her. Bob Dole being a Viagra spokesperson, watching the commercial and going "Easy, boy," supposedly to his dog. You know, that's just really rank. And to have Britney Spears, who's supposed to represent purity, be paid millions of dollars to be in this commercial, you know, something has to give. She could clean up her act and be a more effective spokesperson on that issue.

**Before we go, can you touch on MTV's "Jackass"?**

Sure. The question really isn't whether MTV can air a show like "Jackass." The question is whether it should. There was a day when MTV stood for Music Television. I think a better way to describe it now is Malignant Television.

They seem more intent on pushing the envelope than bringing the next hottest video to their audience. There's something to be said for appealing to a teen audience, but MTV could definitely do it in a more responsible way. I'd like to pose a question to MTV: Is "Jackass" making a positive contribution to society, considering that teens who watch the show are not able to discern between reality and fantasy? Even with *all* the caveats MTV places on the show, the warning labels? Teens, when they see real people trying the impossible, think they can do it as well. The big question to ask—not only MTV, but to the pop culture at large—is what kind of contribution are you making? You cannot belittle the role that pop culture has. It *does* influence our society.

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