



## Navigating the Real World

A rotating panel of experts from the worlds of philosophy, psychology and religion offer their perspective on the dilemmas that come with living in Southern California.

**Today's question:** The state of Texas denied the request of a convicted child molester to be castrated before he was fully released from jail, but a victims group has raised money for the operation. Larry Don McQuay, claiming that he sexually molested 240 children, said he would be unable to handle his impulses upon release and would kill youngsters to keep them quiet. Do you think that voluntary castration should be permitted or encouraged in such cases?

### R. Patricia Walsh

Professor of psychology, Loyola Marymount University

Yes, the state should pay for voluntary castration for sexual offenders if no independent group offers to finance the operation. While there is no guarantee that castration always cures aberrant sexual behavior, it does tend to substantially lower the sex drive of most men. There is a precedent for this, because the state already pays for therapies to alter abnormal behavior. For example, Medi-Cal pays for drugs to reduce the symptoms of indigent psychotics. Moreover, the cost/benefit ratio for this treatment would be very favorable. The cost of the castration surgery would be much lower than the cost of just one future arrest for molestation.

Compiled by JOHN DART / Times staff writer

### Dr. Hassan Hathout

Physician and author of books on Islamic ethics and biomedical ethics; director of outreach, Islamic Center of Southern California

A society that already accommodates voluntary sterilization and sex-reversal operations should not be surprised at voluntary castration. If it really holds a cure for that man's condition (an assumption that I doubt), then its performance as a preventive measure should be acceptable. This is better than waiting for harm to occur and responding by one prison sentence after another as the number of victims soars. Prevention is better than cure, especially when there is no alternative cure, and provided that the man will not take testosterone to foil the effect of surgery.

### Orli J. Peter

Associate professor of psychology and director of Marriage, Family & Child Counseling Program, Mt. St. Mary's College

Society already permits operations that remove or alter sex organs, such as sex change operations and vasectomies. A number of studies have shown that a combination of psychological treatments (behavioral and cognitive) and criminal punishment is needed to reduce the recidivism rate among child molesters. However, currently the prospects for curing or deterring compulsive, coercive molesters, such as Larry Don McQuay, are exceedingly slim. Society needs strong external controls to protect children from such predators. It may be worth exploring voluntary castration as an adjunct to these other interventions. Of course, these decisions may be modified by religious beliefs.