

Comment on the Ethical Jury Workshop held at the AHS Convention 2013

(This has been added as an epilogue to the report on the [Daughter's School Party](#) , Ethical Jury - 26th January 2011)

On Sunday 03 March 2013, I presented an account the Daughter's School Party ethical jury in a workshop at the AHS Convention after which the students had about ten minutes to think about how they would have judged the situation. I was surprised by the reactions of this “new jury”, none of whom thought that they would have asked “bad” girl” B to leave, and I subsequently discussed it with the dilemma owner M.

What seems to have been demonstrated was the importance of the dilemma owner being there to make sure the jury has an accurate understanding of what was going on. In this case there was an error in that I failed to mention two things that were in the report. Firstly, M did not speak directly to B but rather persuaded her friend H to get B to leave the party. In fact H spoke to B directly and persuaded her to leave, after establishing that most of the other parents were also furious although not prepared to act themselves. Secondly, B had stolen an important and valuable family heirloom from M’s grandmother by taking it and then claiming to have lost it.

Much more importantly, there was an omission from both the report and the presentation. It needs to be understood that this was the first time such a party had been arranged and that it had been paid for by the parents. Significantly, about a third of the children could not attend because their parents could not afford to pay and this had caused a lot of distress (probably then a bad idea to go ahead with the party but it happened). The arrival of any gate-crasher, who had not paid, would have been felt as an insult to those who had not been able to come. When this was someone whose family was very rich and could easily have paid for the whole party, the insult was magnified. When this was someone who had bullied and stolen from the other children, it was intolerable.

So would the student jury have decided any differently? Longer reflection upon the principles involved may have changed things but I suspect that it would not have made much difference. This is very worrying. If she had not been ejected, B would have learned that her parents were right and she could abuse the people around her freely. The other girls would have learned that their elders would not support them if they tried to resist this bully. If we don’t all have in mind a line in the sand beyond which we are prepared to take the risks of opposing bullies, they grow ever bolder and we grow ever weaker. Resistance does not need to be shrill and dramatic but it does need to be stubborn. A pride in the British dislike for “making a fuss” should not be an excuse for failing to act when needed. The risks are only terrifying in a culture where too many are quick to look the other way.

Philip Veasey 07 March 2013