

★★★
SUNDAY
OCTOBER 31, 2010
HOUSTON CHRONICLE
chron.com/opinion

OUTLOOK

EDITORIALS | COMMENTARY | OPINION | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | POLITICAL CARTOONS | VOICES

RACE RELATIONS

'N' word remains far too pervasive

■ Join campaign to eliminate use of the slur



By TAMMIE LANG CAMPBELL

A string of incidents this year has made it clear that the offensive and destructive use of the "N" word, once thought to be on the wane, remains far too prevalent in our society.

■ In August, Dr. Laura Schlessinger used the word 11 times in a five-minute rant on her radio show as she tried to make a point about racism to an African-American caller.

■ In May, CNN played a song that included the N word as a tribute to a 103-year-old black woman.

■ In April, a black teacher's aide at Sterling High School was sent home after using the N word in response to a student's comment.

■ In March, protesters opposed to health care reform reportedly called U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., the N word.

■ In February, filmmaker Spike Lee used the N word during his presentation at Houston Community College's Black History Scholarship Banquet.

■ In February, a fifth-grade black male student at Quail Valley Elementary School in the Fort Bend Independent School District found the N word in a book he got from the school library called *Catch a Tiger by the Toe*.

Some people refuse to let the N word die. Hate is the culprit that keeps the word alive.

On Sept. 11, the ninth anniversary of the terrorist attack against our country in 2001, I was reminded of how hate destroys everything that it comes in contact with, including the hater. I chose that day to renew a campaign against the use of the slur.

This year's string of N-word incidents only scraped the surface of how blacks are still being victimized by racial hate. From the days of slavery to the present day, the N word has been a code for perpetrating hate upon blacks. One of the most disturbing racial stereotypes is evident in the way dictionaries and other reference books defined the word over the years. Twenty years ago, for example, this is how the Merriam Webster dictionary defined the N word: "usu- ally offensive; 1: a black person, 2: a member of any dark-skinned race, 3: a member of a socially disadvantaged class of persons; ('It's time for somebody to lead all of America's niggers ... all the people who feel left out of the political process.' — Ron Dellums.)"

We've made some progress. A usage note that accompanies the word in today's Random House Dictionary describes the N word as "now probably the most offensive word in English. Its degree of offensiveness has increased markedly in recent years, although it has been used in a derogatory manner since at least the Revolutionary War." It goes on to describe the "deeply disparaging" nature of the term, and to note that it is used "when the speaker deliberately wishes to cause great offense."

It certainly does cause great offense. But I'm looking forward to the day that the word has fallen so far out of usage that dictionaries no longer include it.

Defining black people as the N word is a character assassination of our good name. It reinforces racial stereotypes and diminishes our contributions. Being called the N word even affected one of America's greatest leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 1966, during

GAFFE: Dr. Laura Schlessinger uttered the racial slur during one of her radio shows. She later ended the show.

marches in Chicago, King said that being called the N word so many times made him wonder if he had a new name.

Since 1991, I have been on a mission to eradicate the N word. I started by petitioning Merriam-Webster and Random House to redefine or

Please see SLUR, Page B11

TECHNOLOGY

STUXNET VIRUS EXPOSES RISKS

Security is critical when smart systems are added to key infrastructure controls

By CHRIS BRONK

VER the past month, considerable attention has been directed at reports of a major cyberattack against the Iranian nuclear program. Allegedly, a highly complex piece of computer malware, called Stuxnet, affected the operations of the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr and/or the uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. While we cannot be sure of details regarding possible accident scenarios

at either of these facilities, reports have surfaced in the computer security community that the Iranian government is actively seeking talent familiar with the configuration and deployment of the process control computer systems. The pay: \$20,000 a week.

So what is Stuxnet and why should we care (setting aside our Iran concerns)? Blogger Bryan McGrath has declared it "the first cyber smart bomb" and "600 kilobytes of War 2.0." Much like a real smart bomb, Stuxnet was directed at a single target, limiting the potential for collateral damage. According to computer security software maker Symantec, nearly 60 percent of all Stuxnet infections were registered in a single

country: Iran.

Stuxnet is a very small program, no bigger than a spreadsheet or document you might attach to an e-mail, but it does many things. It is able to rewrite instructions on programmable logic controller (PLC) computers, which are the brains of supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) process control systems. What does this mean? Take the analogy of the family automobile. Imagine someone was able to adjust the speed at which the belts or timing chain ran or shut off some of the fuel injectors or some other function of the engine by tampering with the onboard computer under the hood. Depending on how the car's computer was tweaked, eventually you'd find yourself at the shop, maybe with the engine completely machine-gunned. Stuxnet does the same for computers attached to pipelines or assembly lines.

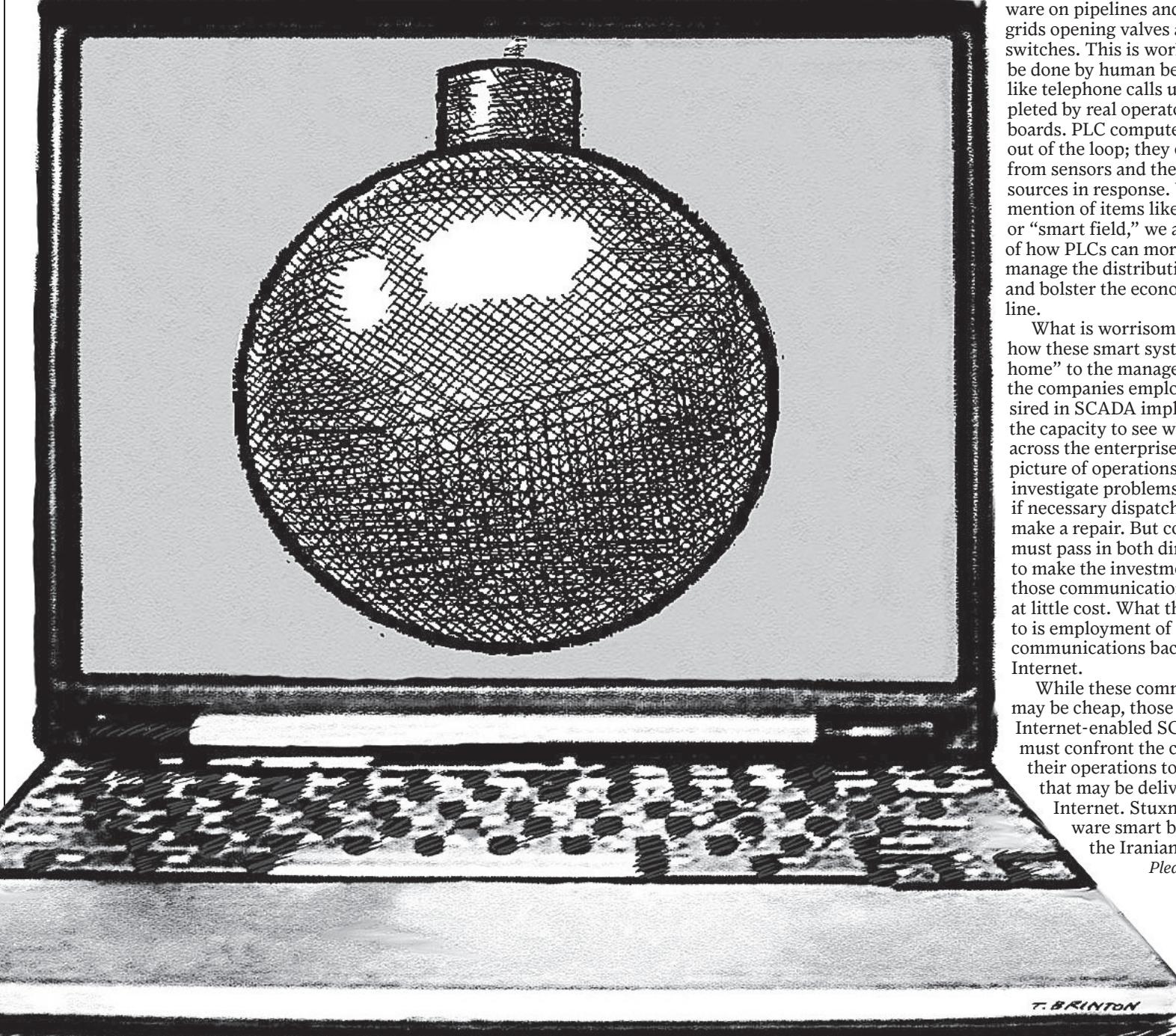
Industrial computer systems deliver instructions to real pieces of hardware on pipelines and electrical grids opening valves and flipping switches. This is work that used to be done by human beings, much like telephone calls used to be completed by real operators at switchboards. PLC computers take people out of the loop; they collect data from sensors and then activate resources in response. When we hear mention of items like "smart grid" or "smart field," we are being told of how PLCs can more efficiently manage the distribution of resources and bolster the economic bottom line.

What is worrisome is to consider how these smart systems "phone home" to the management offices of the companies employing them. Desired in SCADA implementations is the capacity to see what is going on across the enterprise, to hold a clear picture of operations. Managers can investigate problems virtually and if necessary dispatch technicians to make a repair. But communications must pass in both directions, and to make the investment worth it, those communications should come at little cost. What this translates to is employment of the world's communications backbone, the Internet.

While these communications may be cheap, those implementing Internet-enabled SCADA systems must confront the cost of opening their operations to the threats that may be delivered via the Internet. Stuxnet, the malware smart bomb giving the Iranians fits, may be

Please see STUXNET, Page B11

TIM BRINTON



SOCIAL SERVICES

Lack of mental health treatment capacity plagues county

■ Young people can benefit from early treatment

By ED EMMETT,
STEPHEN B. SCHNEE and
STEPHEN L. WILLIAMS

L ORI, a 19-year-old single mother, had recently broken up with her boyfriend and was caring for their 1-year-old son when she learned she was pregnant with their second child. Her father threw her out of his home, and she was living with a family friend. Lori felt overwhelmed and apprehensive and struggled with fears of not being a good daughter or mother. After a friend referred her to Family Services of Greater Houston, Lori began meeting with a counselor there who provided support and education in child development and helped her begin to reconcile with her father.

She's now in school to become a medical aide and has a strong relationship with her father and her brother. Together they are providing her children with a more stable foundation.

Another Houston mother with older children was in desperate need of help for her daughters. One had been diagnosed with depression and the other was having trouble in school. She found support for her family, including psychotherapy and

counseling, at Harris County Systems of Hope. Both girls have graduated with honors, and one is attending college while the other is serving in the U.S. Army.

Local organizations like Family Services of Greater Houston and Systems

of Hope are doing everything they can to help meet the mental health needs of families and children — and clearly they are making a difference in the lives of local families. But capacity issues in the mental health system plague Harris County.

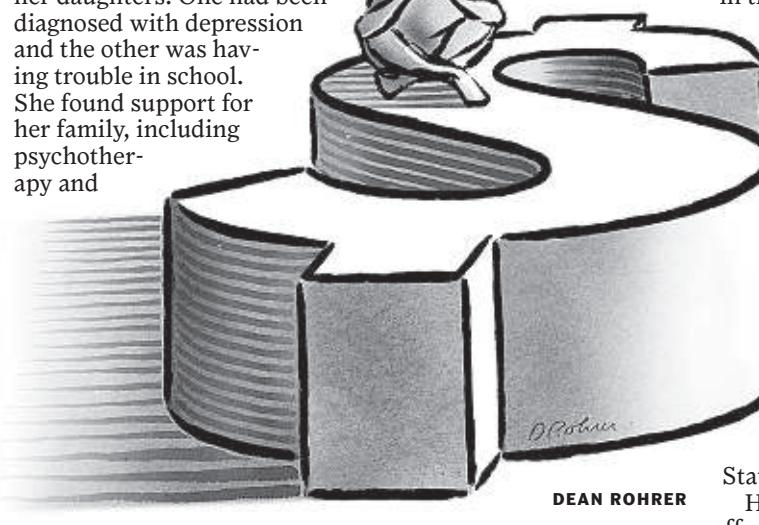
More than 101,000 kids in the Houston area have a mental disorder that results in at least mild impairment and 71,000 others have more severe conditions, according to a 2009 report by the Mental Health Policy Analysis Collaborative. Furthermore, one-fourth of the 1.5 million Texas kids who lack health insurance live in the Houston metropolitan area, according to the Texas State Data Center.

How do these numbers affect our community? The fiscal cost to society of mental illness, substance abuse and behavior problems in children and young adults is enormous — \$2 billion per year in Houston alone, according to the collaborative's report. The cost to young lives is tragic and can be measured in a number of alarming statistics such as high school dropout rates, juvenile detention numbers, and child and teen suicide statistics.

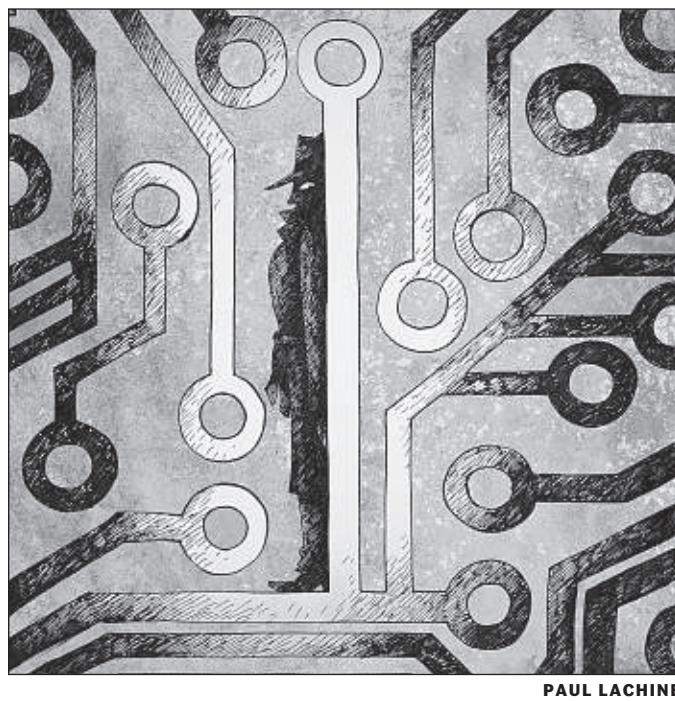
Experts agree that kids with behavioral, emotional or mental health disorders do better long-term when they are diagnosed and treated early on. Kids who benefit from early intervention programs are more likely to do well as adults. However, our local public mental health system doesn't have the funding or the resources to treat all of the children who desperately need care.

Texas simply doesn't put

Please see HEALTH, Page B11



DEAN ROHRER



PAUL LACHINE

STUXNET: Virus poses smart system risks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10

deposited in two ways — by USB memory stick or propagation across the Internet. The instance of Stuxnet that hit the Iranians was most likely delivered by the former method, with some guileful clandestine operative plugging the USB stick into the effected PLCs. That should make for a good movie plot.

What will also make for good cinema, but a bad day for anyone affected, is when the next Stuxnet crashes out an electrical grid, upstream oil-and-gas operation or hospital medical data system here. We are taking critical infrastructure online, and

while my colleagues and I argued some time ago in this newspaper that hacking the electrical grid was unlikely, the time for complacency has passed. Adding "smart" to our critical infrastructures does not necessarily make us safe. We should be prepared to put a great deal of thought and investment into the security of these systems as they are exposed to the risks involved in touching the Internet.

Bronk is a fellow in technology, society and public policy at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

HEALTH: County lacks treatment capacity

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10

enough state funding into health and human services, even in healthier economic times, leaving families and children with few places to go for mental health services. This is especially true for those who don't have insurance to help shoulder the cost of care.

Mental health care providers also point to the need for more family assessment and services when children are diagnosed with a mental disorder. Far too often, the lack of resources and poor design of the public mental health system lead to treating the child alone, when unresolved issues at home may be a major contributing factor to the child's symptoms.

Isolating and treating a child for mental illness may help in the short term, but problems are likely to resurface if family issues are not resolved. Environmental circumstances that can devastate families, such as poverty, hunger and substance and alcohol abuse, must be addressed in conjunction with mental health concerns before a child can make significant progress.

While many of the barriers to developing adequate capacity in the mental health system cannot be fixed overnight, organizations like Family Services of Greater Houston and Systems of Hope are helping Harris County families through parent and family education programs, and early intervention and mental health treatment services.

Other charitable organizations are working with public schools, day care centers, health clinics and homeless shelters to offer children and their families services that are more convenient, affordable and accessible because they are woven into the fabric of the neighborhood.

But capacity issues affect us all. Even when families have access to private insur-



DEAN ROHRER

these are critical to supporting our most vulnerable children and youth at times when they need it most. Houston is fortunate to have many qualified and dedicated nonprofits that serve this purpose.

But they need your help, especially in these difficult economic times. You can make a difference in our community by helping to support organizations that serve the mental health needs of our children, youth and families. Talk to legislators about the importance of these services in our community. Donate money so that more children and families can access the help they need. Give back by volunteering your time to support local agencies. Raising our children to become healthy, successful and contributing adults is in everyone's best interest.

Emmett is Harris County judge; Schnee is the executive director of MHMRA of Harris County; and Williams is the director of the city of Houston Department of Health and Human Services.

CONNECTING

Cruelty crisis underlies prevalence of bullying

Adult addiction to reality TV tied to behavior of children

By BRENE BROWN

EXCLUSION, humiliation, gossiping, name-calling and cutthroat alliances — we can't get enough. We panic when these behaviors are directed at our own children and we express outrage when the consequences turn deadly, but over the past few years, we, the adults, have turned cruelty into entertainment and sport.

According to the Nielsen ratings, reality television topped the most-watched TV list in 2009 and analysts expect the trend to continue through 2010. From *The Real Housewives of Orange County* to *Jersey Shore*, reality TV draws audiences by delivering performances that mirror the exact behaviors that we define as bullying. We tune in to watch hostile confrontations, belittling, collusion, backstabbing and public ridicule. We're drawn in by the promise of mean-spiritedness and we're seduced by the idea that we get to watch people's most intimate and private moments made public. Sound painfully familiar?

Gossiping, one of the most glorified behaviors on TV and a popular weapon in the bully arsenal, is another behavior that falls into the "do as we say, not as we do" category. As adults, how many times have we stood around with a group of friends or colleagues and criticized or made fun of someone? It happens every day in carpool lines, in the back of churches, in front yards and around the water cooler. We wonder why the awkward first-grader is being excluded from birthday parties when our Parent Teacher Organization clique is constantly whispering about his weird mother and would never consider inviting her to coffee.

When it comes to managing conflict and difference, we're not exactly modeling the behaviors that we want to see in our children. Whether it's politics, religion or social issues, the more uncertain we feel, the more certain we act. Finger-pointing, screaming and in-your-face personal attacks have replaced respectful and necessary debate and discourse. We see this everywhere, from political talk shows and school meetings to the sidelines of kids' soccer games. I've heard people define bullying as "angry, aggressive acting out in children." I would argue that a lot of bullying is simply kids acting like aggressive parents acting out and behaving like angry children.

I spent the past decade studying vulnerability, shame,

authenticity and belonging. I've interviewed research participants and collected thousands of stories about how we live, love, parent, work and navigate our increasingly anxious world. Over the past 10 years, I've witnessed a profoundly dangerous pattern of behavior emerge in our culture:

As our fear, uncertainty and feelings of vulnerability increase, cruelty becomes an acceptable way for us to discharge our pain and discomfort. Rather than doing the difficult work of embracing our own vulnerabilities and imperfections, we expose, attack or ridicule what is vulnerable and imperfect about others.

In our culture, vulnerability is synonymous with weakness, and imperfect means inadequate. Rather than acknowledging that we are all vulnerable and imperfect, we buy into the painful idea that we are less than; that we aren't worthy of belonging. It is the struggle for worthiness and belonging that leads to bullying.

Belonging is the innate human need to be a part of something larger than us; we are hard-wired for it. Cruelty is a predictable outcome in a culture that tells us that invul-

nability and perfection are prerequisites for belonging. We are never more dangerous than when we are backed into a corner of never (good/rich/thin/successful/admired/certain/extrordinary/safe/in control/powerful/etc.) enough.

In a world that is plagued by war, economic hardship and pervasive self-doubt, we rage and humiliate to alleviate our own misery. It's simply easier to attack and berate others or watch it happen on TV, than it is to risk having honest conversations about our struggles with worthiness. Why lean into our own feelings of scarcity and shame, when we can watch strangers get booted off stage or voted off the island? It feels good to watch others suffer.

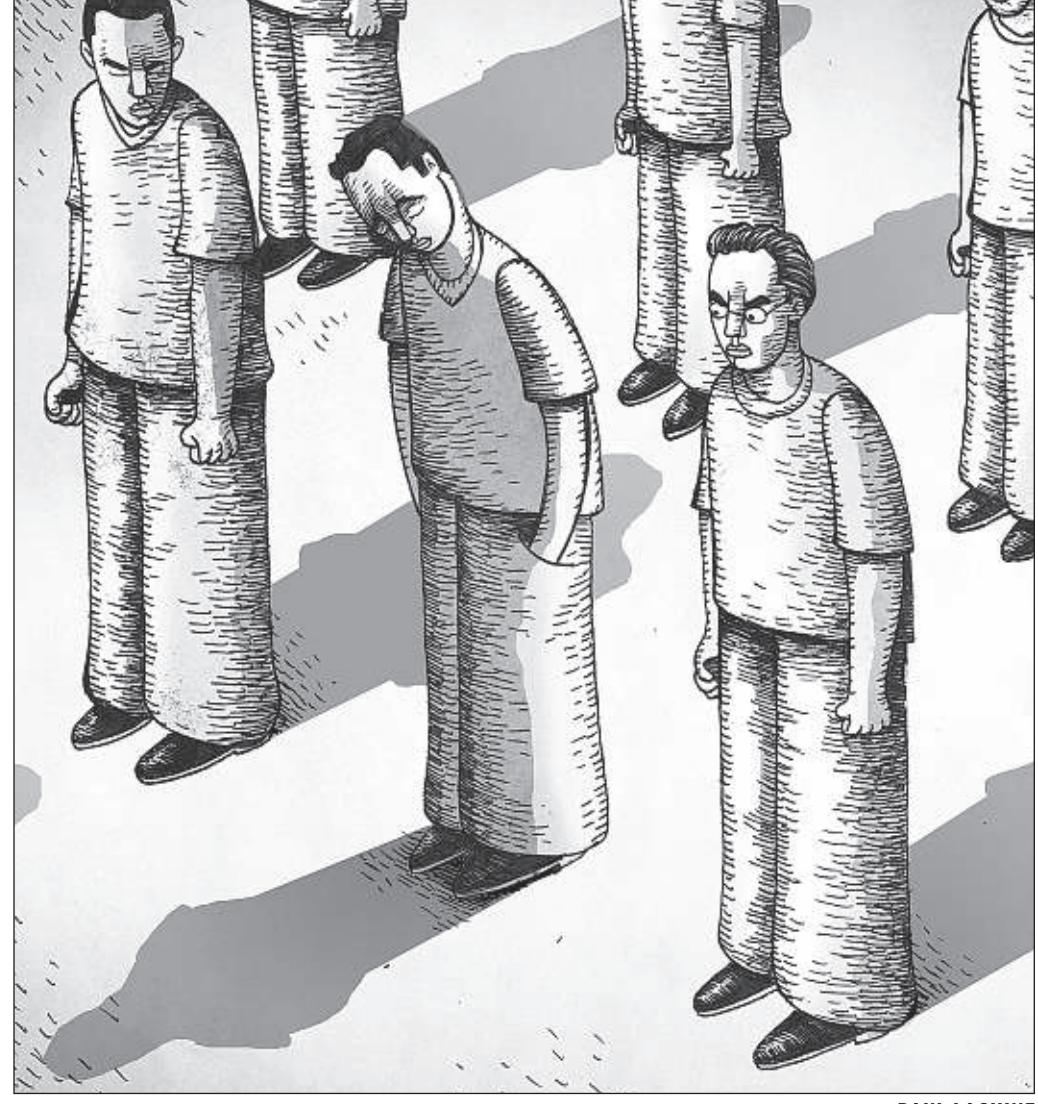
If we want to reclaim courage and compassion in our families, schools, organizations and communities, we must open our hearts and minds to a new way of thinking about vulnerability and imperfection. Our imperfections are not flaws; they are what connect us to each other and to our humanity. Vulnerability may be at the core of fear and uncertainty, but it is also the birthplace of courage and compassion — exactly what we need to help us stop lashing out and start engaging with the world from a place of worthiness; a place where empathy and kindness matter.

Whether we are a sweaty-

paled seventh-grader navigating a hostile cafeteria, or a laid-off worker trying to make a mortgage payment, or a young mother waiting for mammogram results, feeling vulnerable, imperfect and afraid is human. It is when we lose our capacity to hold space for these struggles that we become dangerous. We can legislate behavior all day long, but true compassion comes from a tender and vulnerable place where we understand how inextricably connected we are.

Courage and compassion are not ideals; they are daily practices. The TV shows that we allow in our homes, the way we discuss politics and social issues, the way we handle altercations at the grocery store — these are choices with real consequences. Bullying is a serious problem in schools, but we are all accountable for the cruelty crisis that is fueling these behaviors. The answer to the bullying problem starts with this question: Do we have the courage to be the adults that our children need us to be?

Brown is a research professor at The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. Her research on vulnerability, shame and authenticity has been featured on PBS, CNN and NPR. She also is the author of *The Gifts of Imperfection*.



PAUL LACHINE

SLUR: Use of word remains far too common

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10

remove this offensive racial slur from their dictionaries. On July 7, 2007, I buried the N word during a symbolic service in Pearland. Unfortunately, some people have refused to let it die.

In Proverbs 22:1, King Solomon stated, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." To reclaim blacks' good name/character, I renewed my anti-N-word campaign in September. This campaign, which is supported by Houston Area Urban League President Judson Robinson and Hawaii NAACP President Alphonso Braggs, is designed to liberate minds from this racial slur and promote healing and mutual respect among all.

Acknowledging that humanity must join forces to stop the destructive N word, John Mizuno, a Hawaii state representative, is introducing a resolution to ban it and stated that this racial slur does not need to be in the dictionary or used in our society.

To probe into America's psyche regarding the racial incidents mentioned above, I conducted an online survey called "What's in a Name?"

The Lethal Side Effects of the N word."

The survey asked participants to rank several recent racially charged statements or actions. The demographics of participants were: African-American, 72.2 percent; Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.2 percent; Latino, 5 percent; Native American, 0.3 percent; Caucasian, 10.6 percent; multiracial, 8.4 percent; and other, 1.3 percent. Of 320 respondents, some selected "most offensive" for more than one statement.

The survey resulted in the following statements being independently rated as "most offensive":

■ 49.7 percent: Houston Independent School

District's double standard of purchasing reference books that define blacks as the N word while firing a Sterling High School black teacher's aide for saying, "N-----, please."

■ 35.9 percent: Mel Gibson's racial rant about the mother of his child dressing to solicit "rape by a pack of n----s."

■ 26.3 percent: Sandra Bullock's ex-husband using the N word and attempting to adopt a black baby.

■ 22.2 percent: CNN's standard apology for an N-word-laced song tribute to a 103-year-old black woman.

■ 13.8 percent: Black rappers using the word as a term of endearment.

■ 7.8 percent: Spike

Lee saying "N-----, please" during Houston Community College's Black History program.

Even though the above incidents make the state of race relations in our country seem bleak, they are not as bleak as they once were. America is making great strides in race relations. In the past, incidents like these wouldn't have had a negative impact upon the perpetrators, wouldn't have been mentioned in the media and my call to action for the eradication of the N word wouldn't have attracted any attention.

Won't you please join in this campaign?

Campbell is the founder and executive director of the Honey Brown Hope Foundation and a former president of Missouri City NAACP. For additional information about her work, visit the foundation's Web site at www.honeybrownhope.org.

CODE WORD: Filmmaker Spike Lee uttered the slur during an appearance at Houston Community College's Black History Scholarship Banquet.



ANDREW H. WALKER : GETTY IMAGES