

FREEDOMISM

Randomly generated opinions

While it may be appropriate in some cases, schools in the United States are becoming much too censor-happy when it comes to issues concerning what their students are allowed to express. It's completely reasonable to ban gang symbols, obscene t-shirts and the like, but recently public schools have taken extra steps to restrict items that most would find completely harmless. In the news in the past month have been two fads: the breast cancer awareness "I ♥ Boobies" wristband, and the new "Silly Bandz", animal-shaped rubber bands that have become a sudden fashion statement. Both of these things aren't really offensive — the "I ♥ Boobies" bracelets raise money for a noble cause (breast cancer awareness and prevention) and should be encouraged at the least, not looked down upon.

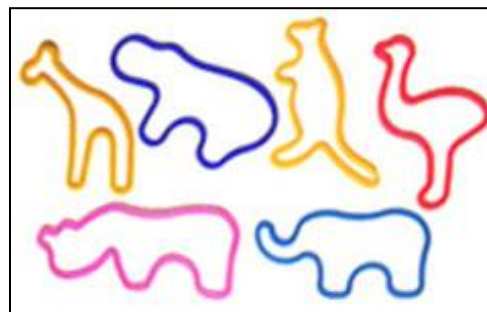
The Supreme Court has established that students possess freedom of expression and other first amendment rights while attending public schools, and that school officials may regulate some forms of speech — but there is a very thin legal line between appropriate censorship for the safety of students and oppressing their rights. Cracking down on incredibly harmless and ignorable things like wristbands may just violate Supreme Court rulings such as *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) which ruled that a Iowa school could not punish students for wearing anti-Vietnam wristbands to school. The argument by the school district in the case is the same as the one being made today about these wristbands: that making such a statement would "disrupt the school environment". However, the Supreme Court ruled that the controversy and unpopularity of the silent expression was not enough to merit it as "disruptive", and that students' first amendment rights are held higher than the mere discomfort one would feel after seeing the wristband.

Citing this case, it is arguable that the "I ♥ Boobies" bracelets are protected speech — they are a *silent* form of expression that don't do much more than make adults cringe at the word "boobies", which is harmless in itself. While it would be entirely appropriate to limit the wearing of these wristbands for younger audiences (such as in elementary schools) because they have yet to learn the human anatomy and "slang" such as "boobies", banning such wristbands at middle and high schools is pointless. Students there already know much more than just the concept of "boobies", thanks to *school-sponsored* sex and health education. There is no real point in censoring students from harmless words that they already know of anyway, other than to fulfill some sort of smug sense of authority. In addition, the funds raised from the sale of the wristbands go to a cause which a majority of adults would approve of greatly — breast cancer awareness for young people. Why would a school go so far to limit both the rights of students under the first amendment and impair such a noble cause such as breast cancer awareness and detection? Because they dislike the word "boobies"? Being "offended" at words, which can be easily ignored and have no real effect whatsoever, is extremely weak. Schools censor the "I ♥ Boobies" bracelets not because they are protecting students, but because they enjoy limiting what students can express. It is a well known fact that public school administrations tend to abuse their power over students by censoring all sorts of harmless things. This brings us to the other issue at hand: Silly Bandz.

Silly Bandz are so incredibly undisruptive and harmless that it is amazing that schools are banning them in the first place. What danger comes from a student wearing a rubber band on their wrist? Such minimal things can't be held to the level of other banned items, such as a t-shirt with gang symbols plastered all over it, because there is no inherent threat in said items. Silly Bandz can hardly be labeled "disruptive" either. They express no statement whatsoever, they do not make loud noises or flash bright



"I ♥ Boobies" bracelets, sold by the [Keep-A-Breast Foundation](#).



"Silly Bandz", sold by [BCP Imports](#).

colors or anything of that sort. They aren't at risk of theft, because their value is so incredibly minimal — only a dollar or two. Since the bands don't fall within any of the categories that make them worthy of banishment, why are schools wasting time restricting them in the first place? I believe, once again, that it is the misguided philosophy of "we can do whatever we want" that too many administrations across the United States believe in. Schools must learn that they *cannot* do whatever they desire to their students. There are limits on power, and many districts have learned that the hard way — yet we continue to see schools oppressing their students, limiting their rights, for no legitimate reason other than that smug sense of authority. And time and time again, these schools are forced to pay the students they victimized thousands of dollars in court cases that they most often lose badly. The Constitution has no age limits, it applies to every citizen and resident of this nation, and it will stay that way. Schools need to remind themselves of that, for the good of themselves and their students.