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SMOKING AND SEX

One day I asked my children, "Why is it that none of the six of you is a smoker? Is it because your dad and mother don't smoke? Or is it because you were dissuaded by our repeated sermons on the health risks of smoking?"

"Neither," one of my children replied. "It's because it isn't 'cool' to smoke any more. Maybe it was 'in' to smoke when you were young, but it just isn't fashionable any more."

The Wall Street Journal just announced its discovery of this phenomenon in a page-one news story. Smoking is not only becoming socially non-acceptable; non-smoking is becoming more identified with career success at the high-income business and professional levels.

The Journal even quoted a professor at the University of California at San Diego who predicts that cigarette smoking will continue to decline and will "disappear in the next 20 to 25 years." It will become, he says, "like cigar smoking -- unusual."

The decline is particularly marked among teenagers. That's also particularly significant because those who don't begin smoking before age 21 seldom start at all.

What is so fascinating about this topic is the cause of the decline. It appears to be much more a matter of fad and fashion than of logic, health, morals, or money.

If anyone had predicted 25 years ago that the percentage of smokers would voluntarily and massively decline, despite high-powered advertising and teenage peer pressure, the prophet probably would have been laughed at. Common wisdom tells us that we can't stop teenagers from experimenting; and that's when their addiction starts.

It's true that any addiction is hard to stop once it takes hold. But each year several million youngsters become teenagers, and they are not yet enslaved to the same addictions afflicting last year's teenagers.

This surprising turnaround in smoking habits makes me wonder if the current popularity of teenage fornication could likewise become unfashionable. Could style bring about a change that sermonizing and risk-warnings have failed to do?

Promiscuity, like smoking, should carry the warning "dangerous to your health." It spreads incurable venereal diseases and can irreparably damage future babies not yet even conceived.

The profiteers of promiscuity have a much larger advertising budget and more effective advertising techniques than the tobacco companies. The powerful forces making money out of the playboy lifestyle include the commercial industries selling abortion, contraceptives, divorce, pornography, and entertainment.

Some of these profiteers of promiscuity sell their wares through the powerful medium of television (now banned to tobacco companies). The big majority of dramatizations about sex on primetime television involve sex outside of marriage.

Some of these profiteers of promiscuity even sell their wares in the public schools. Most so-called sexuality education classes are sales meetings for contraceptives and abortion services, and the "teen clinics" that some people are now trying to put into the public schools would be exactly that.

For the last 15 years, the promiscuity propaganda has been falsely telling young women that they are just the same as men, just as sexually driven, and have just as much right as men to be promiscuous and independent of family and children. The trouble is that sex is not equal as between men and women.

The playboy lifestyle is the real exploitation of women. The pregnancy is borne by the woman, not the man. The contraceptives with their side effects and the abortion with its trauma are thrust upon the woman, not the man. The out-of-wedlock births usually mean permanent poverty for the mothers. Venereal diseases are more hurtful to the woman than the man and can be deadly to her future babies.

Easy divorce, heralded in the early 1970s as legislation to liberate women, has caused economic devastation to women. The divorced woman's financial status is usually cut in half while her ex-husband's lot is significantly improved.

Can we hope that teenage promiscuity, like smoking, might go out of style and that virginity until marriage might again become fashionable? Brooke Shields' new message to teenage girls is to remind them of their right to say "no," and, "if the situation gets out of control, leave. You'll probably gain his respect." And Dan Rather, on the last Friday in June, proclaimed that weddings, complete with white bridal gown, are back again, even for women marrying for the first time in their thirties.