The Consequences of Sex Education

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The Washington Post shook up its readers last week with a front page news story about sex practices in an affluent Virginia middle school. The school principal notified the parents that 13 and 14 year olds were getting together for sexual activity in local parks, in one another's homes, and even inside the school and on the school bus.

What the kids were doing isn't fit to be described in a family newspaper, but readers can figure it out from the comment of one of the girls. "What's the big deal? President Clinton did it."

Is this Bill Clinton's legacy? Has he become a role-model for young teen immorality? And has he coarsened our culture so much that we have to talk about it?

There are many surprising nuggets in this front page story. For starters, the Post admitted that this "news" was a year old. Why did it take a year to find its way into print?

Other shockers in the Post story include the age of the children (13 and 14), the fact that they were A and B students from upper-income homes, their totally casual attitude toward sex among classmates, their lack of shame at being caught, their exhibitionism about sex, and the way the girls pursued the boys to "hook up".

It's clear from the Post's interviews with the students that these youngsters have bought into the notion that the only sex that is wrong is the kind that produces a live baby. Indeed, that is the sex- education message taught in most public schools and advocated by SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) and Planned Parenthood.

For example, in the September/October 1988 SIECUS Report, SIECUS president Debra Haffner's article, called "Safe Sex and Teens," includes this instruction. "We should teach teens about oral sex and mutual masturbation in order to help them delay the onset of sexual intercourse and its resulting consequences."

SIECUS guidelines for sex education in schools include the following. Beginning at age 5, teaching that masturbation feels good; starting at age 9, teaching there are many ways to give and receive sexual pleasure without having intercourse; at age 12, more on the joys of masturbation alone or with a partner, as an alternative to intercourse; and at age 16, common sexual behaviors including use of pornography, bathing/showering together, and oral, vaginal or anal intercourse.

On CNN's Crossfire on May 8, 1997, Ms. Haffner summed up SIECUS's philosophy like this. "The average age of marriage is between 25 and 27 now. It is completely unrealistic . . . to say to young people, you need 13, 14 years of sexual unemployment."

"Unemployment"? Another shocker in the Washington Post news story was that some middle school students were soliciting for "oral sex as a way to make money."

When SIECUS celebrated its 35th anniversary earlier this year, it invited visitors to its website to vote for ten out of a list of 100 persons whom SIECUS believes have "brought about a positive change in the way America thinks and talks about sexuality issues." The top ten were Judy Blume, Mary Calderone (SIECUS co-founder), Ellen DeGeneres, Joycelyn Elders, Hugh Hefner, Anita Hill, Magic Johnson, Madonna, Gloria Steinem, and Ruth Westheimer.

That list makes the "educational" bias of SIECUS's materials obvious. No wonder SIECUS is such a fierce opponent of abstinence- until-marriage courses in the schools.

Planned Parenthood has an active website specifically for youngsters (www.teenwire.com), which contains a lot of provocative sex chatter that teens can use as "how to" information. The website creatively redefines such words as sex, virginity, and abstinence, and encourages teens to engage in "outercourse."

The public schools have given us 25 years of SIECUS/Planned Parenthood-style "comprehensive education about sexuality." The results are rampant immorality, illegitimacy, abortions, venereal diseases, infertility, and teenage emotional trauma that often follows them through their entire life.

Now we find that over half of all infants born to girls younger than age 18 are fathered by adult men. There's an ugly word for that: statutory rape.

Why isn't this crime prosecuted? Pregnancy in underage unmarried girls is obvious evidence of possible sexual abuse. The possibility of that crime should be routinely investigated every time a pregnant adolescent girl comes into a clinic.

Medical professionals are obligated under law to report suspected sexual abuse of minors, with the precise legal requirements varying by state. Almost every state imposes prison or fines on those who intentionally fail to report, and these mandatory reporting laws usually supersede the privilege of confidential patent-physician communications.

Yet, these laws are routinely ignored. Surveys indicate that youth service providers are ambivalent about reporting relationships between young teen girls and their adult boyfriends.

When are parents going to start keeping track of where their children are at all times? And demanding that the classroom sex ed teach abstinence-until-marriage as the expected behavior instead of "comprehensive" immorality? And insisting that the laws against sexual abuse of minors and statutory rape be enforced?