

ESSAY, 3rd place: Tyler Eaton

Teacher: Kelli Rollins-Stidham, Paragould High School

Sexual Education in the Academic Environment

There is a wildfire raging in academia that seems to go unnoticed by those who have the ability to prevent it: the complete and total lack of sexual education in both secondary school and collegiate settings. Many adults in positions of power over school districts believe that the very personal and intimate action of human intercourse is something that should be kept to yourself; however 48% of students in both high school and college admit to practicing unsafe sex due to ignorance to sex education. (“Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics”). This is incredibly unsafe for both them and potential future partners through the danger of transmitting STDs such as gonorrhea or chlamydia. It not only threatens the lives of them but their partners as well, and some of the most common ones are chronic and incurable. Another consequence of practicing unsafe sex is that some of this reckless behavior can provide opportunity for even more abominable behaviors in the future. There’s no beating around the bush, whether we like it or not, we can’t stop them; the best parents and educators can do is to make sure they have both the knowledge and resources to protect themselves from harm.

There is a clear danger of sexual violence on college campuses. Over 30% of students in college experience sexual assault at some point, and while there may be measures put in place to prevent this, it still happens. (“High School Sex Education Prevents Assault in College”). Studies show that if students are educated on healthy relationships and boundaries earlier, then the prevention rates are dramatically higher. Establishing a solid, standardized, sexual education program would allow students to be more knowledgeable about what they are doing as well as deter future offenders. Simply having consent does not, on its own, stop the transmission of STDs. Sexual violence contributes to approximately 12% of the total transmission of STDs (“Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Victims of Rape”).

The idea that abstinence is the only method we can utilize to teach teenagers relating to sex education is archaic at the least; while it does have a 100% prevention rate for pregnancy and STDs, actually teaching them is a much more academic strategy. School-sponsored abstinence programs do not work, students who participate in them are just as likely to have sex as those who don’t. (“Sex Education Timeline”). The prevalence of STDs in schools is unacceptable in this day and age with the resources we are supposed to have. Teenagers are contracting diseases that they know nothing about, and it stays with them for life, but what also stays with them is the stigma. Despite the continued efforts of many organizations to provide help for those suffering from STDs, it is still an extreme blot on one’s escutcheon to admit to having or otherwise seek help for this crisis, inevitably leading to further spread and public disdain towards this problem.

Schools, as an institution designed to help teenagers in any way they can, inadequately provide for their students in the under-discussed area of intercourse. This can take form in limited to no opportunities to share their questions or concerns with a trusted and qualified adult. A very basic and realistic improvement that schools could make is to provide contraceptives to students. This would immediately reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe sex in general. Many schools have already done this across America, but most fail to follow in their footsteps since the 1990s (“Sex Education Timeline”). This shows that, because of shame or ignorance, there are real and lasting effects to the inaction of our administrators, but the solution begins in one’s own heart.

Abortion is one controversial example of a possible escape that teenagers have in the event of an unplanned pregnancy caused by practicing unsafe sex. This former right has recently been removed from the arms of women and placed back in the hands of the state and was therefore banned in most areas. This directly led to an increased rate of impoverished mothers who do not have the funds nor ability to properly care for their children. It also helped seal their place in the lower class and trapped the young women with children, making them unable to find employment (Now More Than Ever, Teens Need Real Sex Ed). However, the right to abortion is not a perfect fix to this problem, in 1957, the teen birth rate had increased 78% from 1940 with 96.3 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 (Sex Education Timeline). But this does not devalue the overall fact that the right to abortion would make the impact of the lack of sexual education less harmful to both our children and therefore our society as a whole.

By denying teenagers access to sex education, schools indirectly contribute to the growing stigma and lack of knowledge on the subject, forcing them to try and figure things out on their own and possibly cause harm to themselves and others. Teachers, as sometimes the only responsible adults in children's lives, have a responsibility to be mandated reporters and treat anything a child says with respect and understanding. While it is true that there are cases where children confide in their teachers a report of sexual assault and the child is ignored or these certain cases are disregarded as just their imagination, the teachers even just being there does more help than previously deemed; leading to a sense of feeling heard and, while not a concrete fix to the problem, does more good than harm.

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