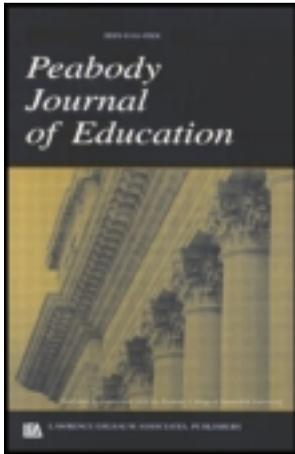


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Educating for Character in the Sexual Domain

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Changes in American sexual behavior brought about by the sexual revolution have been linked to the breakdown of the family and other social ills. Because sex has profound consequences for self, others, and society, sex education is an important part of character education. Sexual abstinence before marriage is associated with better physical and psychological health among adolescents and adults, fosters stable marriages, and ensures that childbearing takes place within marriage. Because abstinence education encourages students to avoid all risk taking and make sexual choices that are objectively in their best interest and the best interest of society, it is the approach most aligned with the goals of character education. Recent reviews of research have identified abstinence education programs that have been effective in reducing teen sexual activity. Consideration is given to how to provide continued support for sexual restraint during the college years.

Sex is delicate territory. No area of education has higher potential for conflict and controversy than sexuality education. Some character educators may worry, “If we tackle a topic as divisive as this, will we jeopardize broad support for character education?”

For character educators to try to avoid sex education, however, is to ignore the elephant in the room. In our hypersexualized culture, sex is everywhere. For all teenagers, understanding their sexuality and making decisions about this area of their lives is a key developmental task. Moreover, how we lead our sexual lives is intrinsically a moral matter, as sex has profound consequences for self, others, and society. Sexual decision making is therefore a matter for character education.

The negative consequences of adolescent sexual activity are well documented, especially for girls. One of 13 U.S. teenage girls becomes pregnant each year, and more than 400,000 give birth (Guttmacher Institute, 2010). In addition, one in four teenage girls has a sexually transmitted disease (STD; Centers for Disease Control, 2008). Regardless of whether a pregnancy or STD occurs, sexual activity on the part of adolescents is associated with poorer emotional health, such as lower self-esteem (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001), and higher rates of depression (Hallfors et al., 2004). Sexually active high school girls are almost five times more likely to be victimized by dating violence than girls who are not sexually active (Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2004).

It is no accident that for much of history, sexual self-control has been considered a mark of good character. For adults as well as youth, sex is an area of life that calls for guidance by virtues. Ethical sexuality (Williams, 2000)—that is, exercising control of one’s sexual desires and

acting responsibly, with respect for self and others—is therefore an important goal of character education.

IMPACT OF THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The challenges presented by youth sexual activity to families and schools do not come out of a vacuum; they come out of a sexual culture that has changed dramatically over the past half century. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s advanced the idea that people should be free to have sex without marriage, commitment, or even love. Aided by the birth control pill, the new sexual ideology led to a pervasive liberalization of sexual attitudes and behavior (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

In 1960, most adolescents entered adulthood (age 18) as virgins, most adults did not cohabit before marriage, and the public supported the norm that sex should be reserved for people who were married (Laumann et al., 1994). Today, most teens enter adulthood sexually experienced (the mean age for both first oral sex and first intercourse is now 16, with many youth engaging in these behaviors at younger ages), most adults now cohabit before marriage, and the majority of the public no longer agree that sex should be saved for marriage (Laumann et al., 1994; Smith, 2011; Terry-Humen, Manlove, & Cottingham, 2006; Thornton & Young-Demarco, 2001).

One of the consequences of increased unmarried sexual activity has been a sharp increase in nonmarital pregnancies and births. As reported by the ChildTrends Data Bank (2012), over a 40-year period, the percentage of all U.S. births outside of marriage increased almost eightfold, from 5.5% in 1960 to 40.8% in 2010. By 2010, 73% of Black babies were born outside marriage, as were 53% of Hispanic children, 29% of White children, and 17% of Asian and Pacific Islander children. In his book *Coming Apart: The State of White America*, Murray (2012) reported that a rapidly rising percentage of working-class Whites are having children outside marriage, often in cohabiting relationships. In 1970, only 6% of births to White women with a high school education were nonmarital; by 2008, that figure had jumped to 44% of births to White women (Murray, 2012). Increasingly, the men who father children out of wedlock no longer feel bound by the norm that they should take responsibility for their offspring by marrying.

Nonmarital births have negative consequences for both mothers and their children. According to the ChildTrends Data Bank (2012) and *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (Wilcox et al. 2011), women who gave birth outside marriage had lower incomes, greater dependence on welfare than married mothers, and less chance of ever marrying compared to single women who had not had children. Children born to unmarried mothers were more likely to grow up in a single-parent household, live in poverty, and have more social-emotional problems than children born to married parents. When children of unmarried parents became teenagers, they were more likely to have low educational attainment, engage in sex, and have a child outside marriage. When they became young adults, children of unmarried mothers were more likely to be unemployed, have lower occupational status and income, and have more troubled marriages and divorces. Other research reviews (e.g., Blankenhorn, 1995) have focused on the impact of growing up without a father and have found father absence to be a leading predictor of childhood and adolescent pathologies.

Not all nonmarital pregnancies result in births. After the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion throughout pregnancy for reasons of maternal health—"health" being broadly defined

to include psychological and economic factors—abortion became a readily available way of ending an unintended life resulting from sexual intercourse. The national annual abortion rate soon exceeded 1 million a year, with the U.S. teenage abortion rate eventually leading the developed world (Nathanson, 1979). The degree to which abortions are followed by “postabortion syndrome” (guilt, depression, sleeplessness, loss of self-esteem, etc.) among women and even some men continues to be debated. The 1970s also saw the beginning of the rapid rise in sexually transmitted diseases, with teens and young adults now accounting for nearly half of the 19 million new infections each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). STD rates continue to climb despite increasing promotion and use of condoms. Medical studies (e.g., Hatcher et al., 2005) have found that condoms reduce but do not eliminate the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Some researchers (e.g., Genuis & Genuis, 2004) have predicted that a majority of single, sexually active female adolescents and adults will get at least one sexually transmitted infection during their lifetime.

Other fallout from the sexual revolution has included

- a cluster of psychological and behavioral problems associated with youth sexual activity, such as a significantly higher risk of depression and suicide (e.g., 12- to 16-year-old girls who have had intercourse are six times more likely to attempt suicide than those who are virgins; Orr, Beiter, & Ingersoll, 1991);
- an increasingly sexualized media that promotes unmarried sex as normative and often uses teens and younger children in sexually provocative marketing;
- the growth of a depersonalized “hook-up” culture on college campuses and beyond in which neither party needs to feel any emotional involvement with the sexual partner (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006);
- the injury done to women, who, accepting sex on male terms (“no strings”), have experienced mental health problems such as depression and STD-related health consequences such as infertility and cervical cancer (Eberstadt, 2012);
- a growing pornography industry;
- the abuse of children—children living with their mother and her boyfriend are 11 times more likely to be sexually, physically, or emotionally abused than children living with their married biological parents (Sedlack et al., 2010);
- heightened levels, among cohabiting couples, of conflict, violence, and depression and lower levels of commitment (Wilcox et al., 2011) and higher rates of divorce among married persons if they have cohabited before marriage (Kamp Dush et al., 2003).
- the cumulative damage done to marriage and family by these problems.

A *New York Times* article, “The Face of Teenage Sex Grows Younger” (Jarrell, 2000), offered a concrete example of the impact of the current sexual culture on children. The article quoted Dr. Marsha Levy-Warren, a New York City psychologist, who said she sees more and more preteens who are dating as early as fifth grade, becoming sexually active by seventh grade, and “feeling awful” about having had sex too soon. A psychiatrist interviewed for the article commented, “I see girls, seventh- and eighth-graders and even sixth-graders, who have had oral sex fifty or sixty times” (Jarrell, 2000, p. 8).

Cultural outcomes such as these have led a number of scholars to conclude that “the large-scale behavioral and normative transformation in American sexual behavior is implicated in

the breakdown of family life in the United States, among other social ills” (McLanahan, 2004; Wilcox, 2008).

THE BENEFITS OF ABSTINENCE

One could make a case for abstinence education based on the negative personal and societal consequences of a permissive sexual culture. But most character educators are likely to find it easier to advocate for abstinence education and incorporate it into character education initiatives if they can articulate the case for abstinence in terms of positive, character-related outcomes that are linked to flourishing individuals and a healthy society. What does the research tell us about the benefits of saving sex for a committed love relationship, historically known as marriage?

Wilcox (2008) cited numerous studies of abstinence pointing to benefits such as the following:

1. “Waiting until marriage” ensures that children will have two married parents. A large body of research (Wilcox, 2005) demonstrates that across socioeconomic levels, children are most likely to thrive when they have two parents who are married to each other and mature enough to raise children. The best way to ensure that pregnancies and births happen within marriage and to increase the odds that children will have two married parents who are committed to raising them is to reserve sexual intercourse for one’s marriage partner.
2. Abstinence is associated with happier marriages. Couples who do not cohabit before marriage experience less marital conflict (Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003), are more likely to be faithful (Laumann et al., 1994), and are less likely to divorce (Cherlin, 1992; Kamp Dush et al., 2003). Adults who wait to have sex until they are married, and who are faithful to their spouses after marriage, report the highest levels of sexual satisfaction (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004).
3. Abstinence is good for parent–child relationships. Teens who are virgins are more likely to maintain close ties to their parents and abide by their values. By contrast, sexually active adolescents are more likely to distance themselves from their parents, spend less time with them, and reject their norms and values (Bingham & Crockett, 1996).
4. Adolescents who abstain from sexual activity are less likely to become enmeshed in a “problem behavior syndrome.” Abstinence is associated with more virtuous behavior among teens, particularly boys. Teenage virgins are more likely to avoid alcohol, drugs, delinquency, and crime (Armour & Haynie, 2007), whereas teenage sex increases the likelihood of other risk-taking such as substance abuse and antisocial behavior.
5. Abstinent youth do better in school. Students who are not sexually active get better grades, have higher educational goals, and are less likely to drop out (Schvaneveldt, Miller, Berry, & Lee, 2001; Upchurch & McCarthy, 1990).

One could acknowledge that abstinence is associated with these positive outcomes but still wonder whether abstinence plays a causal role. One study (Grello et al., 2006), for example, suggested that depression led teenage girls to engage in premarital sex rather than the other way around. Wilcox (2008) noted that some studies had sought to address the challenges of clarifying causation. For example, Hallfors and colleagues (2004) found that among teen girls, depression

was not consistently followed by sexual activity, whereas sexual activity was associated with subsequent depression.

DOES ABSTINENCE EDUCATION WORK?

One can reasonably conclude from the existing research that abstinence has benefits for youth, families, and society. If that is so, then the next question is, Can schools educate for abstinence effectively? And which is more effective in reducing teen sex and its negative consequences: abstinence education (which teaches the dangers of premarital sex for one's self, one's partner, and children, and the advantages of reserving sex for the committed relationship of marriage) or comprehensive sex education (which purports to teach both abstinence and condom use)?

Fundamentally different philosophies underlie these two approaches. Comprehensive sex education teaches that abstaining from sexual intercourse is the only 100% effective method of avoiding pregnancy and STDs but is morally neutral about premarital sex itself and teaches students how to "responsibly" use contraception to reduce the risk of pregnancy and disease if they do have sex. ("Risk reduction" has replaced previous, medically inaccurate language about "safe sex.") By contrast, abstinence educators promote risk avoidance rather than risk reduction, encouraging youth to avoid all sexual activity outside of marriage (including oral and anal sex as well as vaginal intercourse). They argue that being responsible means not risking the harms to self or others involved in premarital sexual activity, and that students should be taught that condoms don't make sex physically safe (pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections can still occur) or emotionally safe (there is no condom for the heart). In its espousal of risk avoidance, abstinence education takes an approach similar to that of other areas of health and wellness education such as drug education. Recognizing that illegal drugs are harmful to self and society, health educators teach students all the reasons why they should avoid their use and don't teach them how to "reduce the risks" if they decide to do drugs. Because abstinence education encourages students to make sexual choices that are objectively in their best interest and the best interest of society, it is the approach most aligned with character education.

What does the research show about the effectiveness of abstinence education and comprehensive sex education in reducing the problems associated with youth sexual activity? Different reviews of the research have reached different conclusions. In his monograph, "A Scientific Review of Abstinence and Abstinence Programs," Wilcox (2008) reported that four major reviews of research (DiCenso, Guyatt, Willan, & Griffith, 2002; Kirby, 2001; Manlove, Ryan, & Franzetta, 2003; Scher, Maynard, & Stagner, 2006) on abstinence education and comprehensive sex education found no consistent evidence that abstinence education influenced the sexual behavior of adolescents. For example, one review found that, on average, abstinence programs do not delay the initiation of sexual intercourse among adolescents (DiCenso et al., 2002). However, three out of four of these same reviews also concluded that most comprehensive sex education programs also fail to delay the onset of sexual intercourse among teens (DiCenso et al., 2002; Kirby, 2001; Scher et al., 2006).

In Wilcox's 2008 survey of abstinence education programs, he found a growing number of exceptions to the general pattern of no significant impact. He identified "nine credible peer-reviewed articles and one unpublished study which suggested that particular abstinence education programs or initiatives connected to public schools have succeeded in influencing adolescent

sexual behavior” (Wilcox, 2008, p. 19). For example, one study of a community-wide abstinence program in Monroe County, New York, found that pregnancy rates among teenagers aged 15 to 17 declined faster in Monroe County than in similar counties in New York not exposed to an abstinence campaign (Doniger, Riley, Utter, & Adams, 2001). Another study of the high school curriculum “Sex Can Wait” found that students experiencing this program were more likely to remain virgins and to have abstained from sex in the past 30 days (Denny, Young, Rausch, & Spear, 2002). A study of 550 seventh-graders in Virginia found that students who had an abstinence curriculum called “Reasons of the Heart” were about 50% less likely to lose their virginity 1 year after the program than students receiving the state’s generic family life education program (Weed, Ericksen, Lewis, Grant, & Wibberly, 2008). In Philadelphia, sixth- and seventh-grade African American students participating in the “Making a Difference” abstinence program were more likely to delay sexual activity than same-age students exposed to a comprehensive sex education curriculum, and this program effect was still evident 2 years later (Jemmott, Jemmott, & Fong, 2010).

Wilcox (2008) noted that effective abstinence programs had one or more of the following features: They sustained contact with students over a longer period; connected them with young adults and peers who were positive role models for abstinence; helped them see how avoiding sexual involvement would aid them in achieving their future goals; fostered a sense of responsibility for children that one might bring into the world; engaged students in community service; and recruited local media, youth organizations, and religious institutions as partners in reinforcing the abstinence message. By contrast, abstinence programs found to be ineffective typically lacked the programmatic features characterizing effective interventions.

Weed (2009), in “Another Look at the Evidence,” examined the relative impact of abstinence education and comprehensive sex education, using criteria such as “sustained results” and “broad-based impacts” (those impacts affecting all program participants, not just subgroups). He first applied these criteria to the 115 evaluation studies of comprehensive sex education summarized in *Emerging Answers 2007* (Kirby, 2007), published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. He contrasted the report’s claim that two thirds of the comprehensive programs had “positive behavior effects” with the following findings:

- No school-based comprehensive sex education program had resulted in a decrease in teen pregnancy or STD rates for any period of time.
- Only one program had delayed the onset of teen sexual intercourse for 12 months for all subgroups.
- In only three of the 115 studies did the comprehensive sex education program increase frequency of condom use over the 12-month period.

In the same paper, Weed (2009) analyzed a second oft-cited report on comprehensive sex education programs, *What Works 2008: Curriculum-Based Programs That Prevent Teen Pregnancy* (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008), that listed 28 programs having “the strongest evidence of success.” He found that

- Twenty of the 28 programs did not even measure rates of teen pregnancy as an outcome.

- Of the eight programs that did measure pregnancy outcomes, only three reduced pregnancy rates for up to 12 months, and all three of those were community-based rather than school-based programs. (Two involved students in community service, and the other program was based at a community medical clinic.)
- No school-based comprehensive sex education programs reported reduced teen pregnancies for any period.

Weed (2009) agreed with Wilcox (2008) that the number of rigorous abstinence education studies is limited but that “a pattern of evidence is emerging that indicates well-designed abstinence education programs can be effective” (Weed, 2009, p. 2). He cited three programs that achieved “sustained impact.” Heritage Keepers and Reasons of the Heart reduced the number of teens who became sexually active by about one half, 12 months after the program. The Making a Difference program achieved significant reductions in teen sexual activity 24 months after the program. Several studies reviewed by Weed also found that abstinence education, contrary to what is sometimes claimed, did not decrease condom use among teens who later became sexually active (Weed, 2009).

Because the Heritage Keepers abstinence education program was selected for inclusion in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) publication “Evidence-Based Programs,” its methodology merits description. Weed, Eriksen, and Olson (2011), in their work “Testing Program Impact and a Predictive Model: An Evaluation of the Heritage Keepers Abstinence Intervention,” described this program as a 450-min interactive curriculum for middle and/or high schools. It is presented in 45-min class periods over 10 sequential school days or in 90-min sessions for five consecutive school days. The curriculum articulates benefits of sexual abstinence in terms of immediate risks, such as unwanted pregnancy and STDs, and in terms of helping youth prepare for family formation in the future.

Weed and colleagues emphasized that scientifically derived “cognitive mediators,” believed to be causal mechanisms affecting teen abstinence, guided the development of the objectives and content of the Heritage Keepers lessons. For example, the curriculum addresses common “justifications for sex” (one cognitive mediator) by listing typical reasons teens give for initiating sex and by providing alternative arguments. Students practice these arguments in directed role-play. They also take turns in role-plays in which they alternate playing someone engaging in sex outside marriage, someone effectively resisting those arguments, and a third person encouraging the resistance. These exercises are designed to increase “abstinence efficacy” (a second cognitive mediator). The program emphasizes the “future impact of sex” (a third mediator) through interactive activities that help students make a personal connection between the possible consequences of sexual activity and the plans they have for their future. They are also given data about the benefits to the couple and any children they may have and about the benefits of forming and raising a family within a long-term legal and ethical commitment. This fosters the development of students’ “abstinence values” (a fourth cognitive mediator) by promoting class discussions differentiating between short-term infatuation and lasting love. Heritage Keepers teachers are selected on the basis of their ability to relate well with students, and their belief in and commitment to live by the message they present (Weed et al., 2011).

Abstinence education advocates drew encouragement from data reported by Santelli and colleagues (2004) showing that the percentage of sexually active teenage girls ages 15 to 19 fell significantly, from 50.6% in 1991 to 42.7% in 2001. According to the biannual Youth Risk

Behavior Survey of the Centers for Disease Control (2012), the percentage of all high school students who said they had never had sexual intercourse became a majority (54.4%) in 2001 for the first time in 25 years. As of 2011, Centers for Disease Control data showed that high school virgins were still a slight majority.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG COLLEGE-AGE STUDENTS

If refraining from sexual activity outside marriage has benefits for partners, children, and society, and well-designed abstinence education works with middle and high schoolers, it makes sense to ask what can be done to encourage sexual restraint beyond high school. What are the challenges presented by the college-age years and the possibilities for promoting ethical sexuality at that level?

The negative influence of contemporary culture on young adults' values and character, including their sexual attitudes and conduct, was the subject of the book, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, by University of Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith (2011) and his research team. Smith acknowledged some positive trends in youth character: Teen pregnancies and abortions have declined since the early 1990s, the percentage of young persons starting and finishing college has increased, and youth as a whole are less prejudiced against people of other races and ethnicities than earlier generations. (These positive developments are documented by scholar Jeffrey Arnett his 2004 book, *Emerging Adulthood*.) However, Smith's research—based on in-depth interviews conducted in summer 2008 with a nationally representative sample of 230 young adults, ages 18 to 23—found evidence of a darker side of emerging young adult character.

Lost in Transition identified six “macrosocial changes,” building over the past several decades, that Smith believes have combined to dramatically alter the experience of life between 18 and 30: (a) the extension of formal schooling into the 20s and the consequent postponement of entry into careers; (b) the delay of marriage; (c) a changing national and global economy that has replaced the prospect of stable careers with frequent job changes, a need for ongoing training, and a heightened sense of insecurity, all contributing to a general disposition in young adults to maximize options and postpone commitments; (d) the willingness and ability of many parents to support their children well into their 20s and even 30s, thus enabling them to take a long time to settle down into full adulthood; (e) readily available birth control technologies that have severed the link between sex and procreation and thereby fostered uncommitted sexual relationships; and (f) postmodernism, a philosophy that has promoted subjectivism (there is no objective truth) and moral relativism (what's moral depends on your point of view), both of which now thoroughly permeate the educational ethos, mass media, and youth and adult culture. As a result of these six converging cultural changes, the transition to adulthood today, in Smith's judgment, is significantly more protracted, complex, self-absorbed, anxiety burdened, and dangerous.

Smith reported the following findings, based on 3-hr interviews with each of his 230 subjects:

- Sixty percent are “moral individualists” who believe that a value such as honesty is a personal choice rather than a moral obligation. Half of these moral individualists are “strong moral relativists” who believe that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. When asked, “Can you tell me about a specific situation you've been in recently where you've been unsure of what was right and wrong?” only one third could do so.

- When asked, “What would living the good life look like to you?” 54% of respondents said they would be happier if they could buy more things. Only one fourth spoke of wanting to help others or being a positive influence in others’ lives.
- Nearly half (47%) of respondents admitted to binge drinking sometime during the 2 weeks prior to the interview.
- Sixty-nine percent of respondents were apolitical, having either no knowledge of or interest in politics. Only 4% appeared seriously interested in or engaged in politics. Most contributed neither time nor money to charitable causes or community service.
- The typical never-married, 18- to 23-year-old has had three oral sex partners and three sexual intercourse partners. Sixty-five percent say they have had intercourse many times. Nearly six in 10 express at least some regrets about their sexual experiences.

In the chapter “The Shadow Side of Sexual Liberation,” Smith (2011) commented,

All is not well among the emerging adults who inherited the sexual revolution launched by their parents and grandparents in the 60s and 70s. A lot, though not all, of emerging adults today are confused, hurting, and sometimes ashamed because of their sexual experiences played out in a culture that told them simply to go for it and feel good. (p. 193)

Smith (2011) argued that these aspects of young adult character are, to a great extent, rooted in the social institutions that form our young:

Poor moral reasoning comes significantly from poor teaching of thinking skills in schools, families, religious communities, sports teams, and other youth-socializing settings. Damaging sexual experiences have connections to things like the way colleges and universities are run and the lifestyle scripts disseminated by advertising and the mass media. Mass consumer materialism is deeply rooted in the structure of the American capitalist economy and the advertising industry. Intoxicating habits have much to do with the financial motives of the alcohol industry. And disconnection from civic, communal, and political life has something to do with the many real dysfunctions of American politics and the lure of private, mass consumerist, media-stimulated lifestyles. (p. 233)

Forty-Year Trends in the Life Goals of College Freshmen

Smith’s study of young adults does not attempt to make comparisons with previous generations, but another ongoing research project enables us to do so. For more than 40 years, the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles has surveyed entering freshman at hundreds of 4-year public and private colleges and universities. This research institution has published each year’s results in a report called *The American Freshman* (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, & Tran, 2010).

- In 1970 only about one third (36%) of all freshmen said that it was “essential or very important” for them to “become very well off financially.” By 2010, however, that percentage had risen to more than three fourths of all freshmen (77%).
- In 1970, more than three fourths (79%) of college freshmen said that “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” was essential or very important. By 2010, however, that figure had fallen to less than half of entering freshmen (47%).

- In 1970, nearly six in 10 (57%) of college freshmen said it was essential or very important to “keep up to date with political affairs.” By 2010, only one third (33%) said that being politically informed was important to them.
- In 1974 (the 1st year the University of California at Los Angeles survey included this item) 44.3% of entering freshmen “agreed strongly or somewhat” with the statement, “If two people really like each other, it’s all right for them to have sex even if they have known each other for only a very short time.” Student agreement with this statement rose to a high of 50.6% in 1987, then declined to a low of 38.8% in 1999, then rose again to 44.9% in 2005 (the last year the question was asked).

These 40-year trends among American college freshmen (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007)—rising materialism, declining interest in deeper life questions, growing indifference to public affairs, and widespread (though fluctuating) approval of casual sex—align strongly with *Lost in Transition’s* 2011 portrait of emerging adults.

WHAT CAN COLLEGES DO TO ENCOURAGE SEXUAL RESTRAINT?

In the face of these formidable challenges, what steps might colleges and universities take to foster mature character in general and better sexual decision making in particular? For starters, they might make character development an institutional priority. A position paper by the Character Education Partnership (2011), “Character Development During the College Years: Why It’s Crucial and How It Can Be Fostered,” described a range of ways that both private and public universities and colleges have sought to promote character development, including programs that foster academic integrity, service learning, and commitment to core ethical values. The John Templeton Foundation’s (1999) *Colleges That Encourage Character Development* described 10 categories of college initiatives aimed at fostering ethics and character throughout campus life.

Consider one such initiative aimed specifically at encouraging students to adopt a healthy lifestyle. In the 1990s, Boston College initiated a program called “48 Hours.” A weekend away from campus, 48 Hours was designed to help students make a wholesome transition from home to college culture. Father Tom Pella, college chaplain, explained:

At Boston College, most of our students were the academic stars, presidents of student government, and the like. When they come here, they’re just one of many stars, and that’s often hard on their self-esteem. Because they’re feeling bad about themselves, they get into destructive patterns—alcohol abuse and sex, for example—to try to fit in with their college peers. With the 48 Hours weekend, we’re trying to head that off. (Lickona, 1998, p. 53)

The program includes a “vision talk” about leading a life that is guided by the spiritual principles of St. Ignatius, but the program’s emphasis is not religious. Later, there are opportunities for retreats where the focus is on prayer, worship, and deepening one’s relationship with God. The 48 Hours program is aimed at helping students initiate friendships with student leaders, professional mentors, and other classmates that will be a support system through their college years. The focus is on leading a constructive and balanced life and, in particular, on examining both the positive and negative influences of students’ peer culture. During the weekend, each student is asked to examine his or her own life, set a personal goal related to an important life issue, and plan three action steps for achieving it. This is called a “covenant with oneself.” Later

in the freshman year, there are reunions and other events to help students follow through on their goals. Since the program began, the number of participating freshmen has grown from 50 to more than 900, nearly half the freshman class.

A second approach to encouraging sexual restraint during the college years would be to call attention to the benefits of saving sex for a truly committed love relationship such as marriage. Consider how much is done now to promote condom use to try to reduce the risks of uncommitted sex. Given most institutions' official espousal of "diversity," colleges would do well to diversify their messages about sex by including something about the benefits of a chaste lifestyle. Here are nine rewards of waiting that could be placed in student health centers and dorms:

1. Waiting will make your dating relationships better. You'll spend more time getting to know each other.
2. Waiting will help you find the right mate—someone who values you for the person you are.
3. Waiting will increase your self-respect.
4. Waiting will gain the respect of others.
5. Waiting teaches you to respect others (you'll never pressure anyone).
6. Waiting takes the pressure off you.
7. Waiting means a clear conscience and peace of mind (no conflicts, no regrets).
8. Waiting means a better sexual relationship in marriage (free of comparisons with other premarital partners, and based on trust).
9. By practicing the virtues involved in waiting—such as faithfulness, self-control, modesty, good judgment, courage, and genuine respect for self and others—you're developing the kind of character that will make you a good marriage partner and attract the kind of person you'd like to marry. (Napier, 1996, pp. 177–184)

Some campuses now use Valentine's Day to engage students in reflecting on the 3 Rs—"Respect, Responsibility, and Romance." Typically, a panel encourages college students to consider, "What kinds of relationships have the potential to lead to real love? What kinds of relationships help you find the person you'd like to marry?" Such discussions can also be given a religious dimension, even on a secular campus. *Link: The College Magazine* carried an article titled "God on Campus" (Lickona, 1998), which described a Valentine's Day event at liberal Wellesley College. More than 50 students turned out for an evening symposium, "God's Perspective on Love, Sex, and Marriage," sponsored by Real Life. The goal of the symposium was to introduce students to God's Word on dating, mating, and cohabiting. The evening included talks by married couples who had waited to have sex and student couples who were dating but not engaging in sexual intimacy (Lickona, 1998, pp. 39–55).

Finally, colleges would do well to give attention to the options they provide in terms of on-campus living arrangements. The best-selling novelist Tom Wolfe observed in an interview that the widespread, almost overnight change to coed dorms after the sexual revolution hit—putting young men and women in close, 24-hr proximity at a time when their hormones are at full flood—would have been considered cultural insanity only a few years before. Coed dorms, combined with the total abandonment of the concept of *in loco parentis*, fostered easy and promiscuous sex by signaling institutional permissiveness toward such behavior. This led not only to much sexual activity in dorms but often to blatant disregard for other people's rights and moral sensibilities. Dorm students, even at ostensibly religious institutions, began to report being repeatedly locked

out of their room because their roommate had an overnight guest—or even waking up to find their roommate in bed with his or her sexual partner.

Colleges could at least offer students the choice of living in a single-sex dorm. In *Campus Rules and Moral Community*, Hoekema (1994) reported a survey in which about half of responding campuses said they provide the choice of single-sex dorms. In some places, more than half of students select single-sex residences.

CONCLUSION

Before the sexual revolution, the societal norm was to treat sex as a serious matter, requiring prudent moral boundaries that channel this powerful drive in ways that benefit, rather than hurt, the individual, family, and society. More recently, popular culture has made sex seem like a casual thing. But in truth, as growing evidence makes clear, sex is an act that is full of consequences. That is a good reason to save it for marriage, and a good reason for character educators to support that goal.

AUTHOR BIO

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