

Sex and the collegiate experience

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American society prior to the 20th century had considered the topic of sex (sexuality) as being 'taboo' and not necessary to talk about, let alone taught in schools. In recent years however, sex-education has proved to be useful in providing information to the masses about disease prevention, child prevention, and other benefits. Elementary school programs that are designed to teach young adults about the perils of having sex or committing sexual acts with one another focus primarily on the consequences, and rarely on the benefits, in order to instill this 'sex-negative' ideology favored by parents. Yet, every fall, parents drop their 'young adults' off at colleges across the country where most are given a crash course early on in what sex is all about. Rather than the 'taboo' topic it is commonly thought of as, the topic of sex in college is embraced rather than shied away from. Students, in recent years, have been given free reign to choose courses and topics that range from "Death and Sexuality" to "Sex in Politics". Almost everyone is having sex in college, most for the first time, so why can't they learn about the history or nature of sexuality? This paper will focus on why colleges across the nation are going about promoting 'sex-positive' education. This paper is divided into three parts; the first will examine a few founding parents of 'sex-education'. Followed by where the "sex-positive" idea came from. The last part will explain how/why it is good that colleges have moved to offer 'sex-positive' courses in their curriculum. The conclusion of the paper will rebut opposition arguments to promoting 'sex-positive' education and reiterate the point that knowledge truly is power. Scholars often argue when exactly 'sex-education' in America emerged, but agree it came about in the early 20th century. Pioneers such as Alfred Kinsey, Margaret Sanger,

and Mary Calderone have been hailed over the years for promoting 'sex-education' early on in American culture. Kinsey has been praised for revealing the truth about sexual behavior and human nature in his findings from what has been commonly known as the Kinsey Report [Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948) and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953)]. Sanger became renowned and respected for founding the American birth control movement and, would later co-create the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Sanger later established the following principles as a means to promote 'sex-education': woman's right to control her body is the foundation of her human rights. Women are entitled to sexual pleasure and fulfillment. Every person should be able to decide when or whether to have a child. Every child should be wanted and loved. A follower of Sanger in the field of human sexuality was Dr. Mary Calderone. She was former co-founder/president of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and Medical Director for Planned Parenthood Federation of America. "What SEICUS seeks" Calderone once said "... is to 'establish sexuality as a necessary for good health and make it worthy by focusing on it more openly... with the best of intentions, which implicitly would teach that people must make well-formed and intelligent choices concerning a series of alternatives'." These pioneers led the thought on 'sex-education' and what would later lead to numerous other ideologies. The emergence of the AIDS epidemic and high teen pregnancy rates in the 1980s would later lead to an 'abstinence-only' sex-negative ideal that sex-positivism aims to correct in the future by getting more people, young and old, in the know. Teenagers enter college these days with equal parts knowledge and ignorance when it comes

to sex. Their elementary schools have caused them to think 'sex negatively' while the media berates them with the message that sex is dangerous and can be immoral. A teacher once told me that sex before marriage was like gambling. Either side of the die can lead to a tragic outcome (i. e. pregnancy, disease, or just heartache) that makes the act of 'sex' itself, just a risk. 'Sex' however, is not merely an action, but a comprehensive topic that goes beyond mere intercourse. The 'Sex-positive' movement, according to the article that sparked this essay, "seeks to undo the "damage" caused by years of abstinence-based sex education that focuses only on the consequences of sex, like pregnancy and disease, and to reverse negative stigma attached to do-as-you-like sexuality." Sex positivism is considered to be a feminist ideal but I feel it can be considered more than that. 'Sex-positivism' is not focused on comparing, nor berating, heterosexual or homosexual sex by any means. This movement that is appearing on college campuses across the country promotes sexuality as being a normal part of life. College is a time for a guy/girl to experience and explore their body while they mature into adulthood. By rejecting the dominant view of sex as being something shameful, and embracing all consensual sex practices between all people, 'sex-positivism' promotes humanity. The movement aims at using fact based accuracy when promoting its sex-education curriculum. Sex-positive believers consider it to be something that can be enjoyed, for many different reasons and in many different ways. Sexual practices whether homosexual, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual and so on are not thought of as immoral or wrong. Advocates for the movement travel around campuses, usually holding workshops on sex education, in

order to teach about do's and don't of their particular field. On college campuses across the United States, sex educators are attempting to promote sex by considering it normal and healthy. Through the organization of college sex festivals, on-campus sex workshops and women's studies departments offering many more interesting courses regarding the topic, educators are pushing 'sex-positivism' into the forefront of public interest. Universities such as UC Berkeley, Vassar, Yale and others offer courses that show sex as something natural and common in everyday life. The main focus, or point, to be drawn from this is that everyone should have the choice to have sex with whomever and however they want to without feeling like an outcast. The overall student majority in colleges today know how babies are conceived, how to protect themselves from the dangers of sex and, how to take advantage of their surroundings. The implementation of 'sex positive' courses promotes the rights and liberties to knowing about sex that all are entitled to. It takes time and practice to get good at sexual activities and 'sex-positive' educators across colleges are helping play their individual part to promote this 'new revolutions' forward mobility. Most educators have come to agreement that "sex is good when you feel good about it". College is the time for promoting level headed thinking and analyzing of the topics taught. So why not learn about something that brings people together in a way no other subject can. The Society for Adolescent Medicine recently declared that "abstinence-only programs threaten fundamental human rights to health, information, and life." By promoting sex education and 'sex-positive' thinking, colleges are promoting the advancement of knowledge that allows everyone to be comfortable with

their sexuality. For those that feel the concept of 'sex-negatively' merely came about as a means to give 'sex-positivism' a patsy to fall on should think about what has been done to suppress or hinder the youth of America from questioning their sexuality. College is the time where free thinking is allowed to rein supreme if one can back up their ideals with a good argument. I feel in order for society to be open to sexuality, it needs to take away the fear and emphasis that it is immoral away. Sure, my teacher years ago was right in saying that sex can be a gamble, but it's a bigger gamble to judge what one does not understand. Jeffrey P. Moran. Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000)⁹¹ Mark Thompson. Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement. (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994)⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰ Margaret Sanger, Planned Parenthood Founder. October 2004 <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/margaret-sanger-planned-parenthood-founder.htm> Melvin Anchell. Sex Education- A Tragicomedy, National Stopp News (June-July 1992) 33 Pearce, Jean. "The Sex-Positive' Movement on College Campuses." Human Events. Jan 5, 2004. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3827/is_200401/ai_n9369255 Pearce, Jean. "The Sex-Positive' Movement on College Campuses." Human Events. Jan 5, 2004. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3827/is_200401/ai_n9369255 Santelli J. Abstinence and abstinence-only education: a review of U. S. policies and programs. Journal of Adolescent Health 2006, 3