

Opinion

Sex education promotes awareness, not promiscuity

Since its conception as a solution to the problem of teen-age pregnancies, church and parent groups have been relentlessly resisting sexual education programs in schools. These advocates of naivety say teaching children about sex encourages promiscuity and leads to increased teen pregnancy, abortions and venereal disease.



Michelle Powe

Children today — by no fault of their own — are exposed to sex more than their parents were. Television, movies and fashion magazines flaunt sex. Advertisers sell products with sex. Sex is everywhere.

Parents who think they can isolate their children from these sexual influences are living in a fantasy world. Pretending the problem doesn't exist won't make it go away. The problem does exist.

So let's stop bemoaning the issue, saying such programs destroy family values and moral responsibility, and do something to solve the problem.

Some Baltimore schools have taken action. Two junior and senior high schools, with 3,400 students in grades seven through 12, participated in a sex education program from 1981 to 1984.

There was a 30 percent decrease in pregnancies among the girls who participated in the program, according to a study of the schools. The two schools that didn't participate in the program experienced a 58 percent increase in pregnancies during the same period.

The three-year study by John Hopkins University also shows that the sexually-educated girls appeared to have postponed their first sexual encounter and were more likely to seek birth control, says Dr. Laurie Schwab Zabin, the principle investigator in the study.

"This shows that such programs do not encourage students to become more sexually active but that they may actually postpone sex longer," Zabin says. "This shows that something can be done about the teen-age pregnancy problem."

A nurse and a social worker educated the students by providing in-school counseling, information about sexuality, and responsibility and group discussions. A nearby health clinic gave free and confidential medical examina-

tions, provided contraceptives, information, counseling and referrals when needed as part of the program, Zabin says.

The students used these opportunities of sexual awareness and understanding to their advantages, not for sexual pleasure. When confronted with the facts and the idea that they were accountable for their own sexual conduct, the students embraced responsibility — not one another.

Maintaining sexual illiteracy in the name of traditional values won't solve the teen-age pregnancy problem. And force-feeding the youth of America a "Leave-It-To-Beaver" philosophy on sexual mores won't help those who are already in trouble. Sexual awareness through education, not condemnation, is the only solution to this social crisis.

If we keep children in the dark about sex, it will only perpetuate the existing problem. Kids today don't want to be parents anymore than the kids of yesterday did. And given the opportunity to understand the responsibilities of adulthood, most will choose childhood, not children.

Michelle Powe is a senior journalism major and editor for The Battalion.

Funeral bells are ringing

EDITOR:

I sat on my typing fingers when columnist Mark Ude suggested that AIDS victims were expendable — not really worth the tax money that real Americans would have to spend to find a cure for their plight. I even tried to ignore his claim that democracy is what comes out of the barrel of Cobra Stallone's gun. But I feel compelled to instruct him that the lines on the base of the Statue of Liberty are not — as he alleges — those of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male Emerson but Sephardic Jewish female Emma Lazarus.

I mention this to Ude for reasons other than simple historical accuracy, though that, too, is important. For Lazarus lived in a time not unlike our own. Born and raised in a more liberal era, she too witnessed the surge of a Protestant elite. The "moral majority" of her times was one to whom Jews were excludable, if not expendable. She was one of the few Jews with the courage, skills and social contacts to fight back.

The conviction that motivated her poem, the one Ude quotes in part, was that a society in which the majority exercises tyranny over its minorities cannot be a just society. It was her work with homeless refugees on Wards Island, as well as in the causes of the minorities of which she was a member, that led her to write the words we still recite.

But until we are able to think of AIDS victims, the homeless, the accused but not convicted, and even the foreigner in our midst, as more than just expendable or as factors in an economic scenario (as Ude does of AIDS victims and illegal immigrants) then we will have to be content to recite her words — for we will not have celebrated them.

Finally, as for the "conservatism" whose bandwagon Ude joins but which he seldom supports with concrete argument, I give him words of Emerson's contemporary Henry Ward Beecher: "A conservative young man has wound up his life before it was unreeled. We expect old men to be conservative but when a nation's young men are so, its funeral bell is already rung."

Larry Hickman
Associate Professor of Philosophy and Humanities

Erosion of rights in defense of freedom

EDITOR:

Once again the political foundation of this country is being eroded by those who claim to defend it. The attack on pornography by the religious right is more than an attack on the sanctity of the individual power of reason, it is also an attack on Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke and the others founded our moral philosophy.

What is their justification? That every human being is a vile, irrational savage that has neither the courage nor the intellect to make his own choices. Their solution? An omnipotent government (run by irrational savages) that can decide "what goes" in his bedroom and his library.

Furthermore, they have continually claimed that the MAJORITY (whatever that is) has the right to inflict its will on the individual. That is NOT democracy, it is gang rule. Wasn't that Hitler's justification? I don't think that is what Jefferson and Locke had in mind.

These people base their attacks on fear and hatred. Hatred of anyone who wants to be left alone to live his life as he chooses. Don't turn your backs and pretend this will go away, it won't. The only way to defend your rights is to stand up to these people.

Stephen M. Jaeger

What about after-hours illness?

EDITOR:

I have grown accustomed to the fact that the administration of Texas A&M has a different set of priorities than I would choose, but typically, I let it go by until something happens that affects me directly. I believe that the recent decision to stop offering 24-hour services at the A.P. Beutel Health Center is nothing less than idiotic. Unfortunately, I am not familiar with the legal precedents, if any, that oblige a university to provide health care in any form to students.

There seems to be little hesitation in raising tuition as a response to falling oil prices, or other adverse economic conditions. If there is not enough money collected from the health services fee to offer 24-hour services, then it should be raised to cover the additional cost. I don't want to seem harsh, since the health service fee has to be the biggest bargain on campus. Not only do we get medical care for only the additional cost of tests, but the prescriptions are cheaper than anywhere else in Bryan-College Station.

The administration has failed to face one very important fact: most students cannot afford health insurance. The plan offered through the University is not very good, given the premium charged relative to what the plan covers. Consequently, we go without. Are we expected to get sick only during clinic hours? This both unlikely and foolish to expect.

A&M's aspirations to being a world-class university are commendable, but the sincerity of such aspirations should be measured by how the students are treated in the process.

Joanne Fendell

A quick fix

EDITOR:

I have some comments about an issue mentioned in Bill Sparks' letter of July 8. He wrote, "I worry that people like — — — — —, will dictate to women under what conditions, if any, a woman may decide to abort her pregnancy, . . ."

Let me point out what in reality IS being aborted (it is much more than a pregnancy):

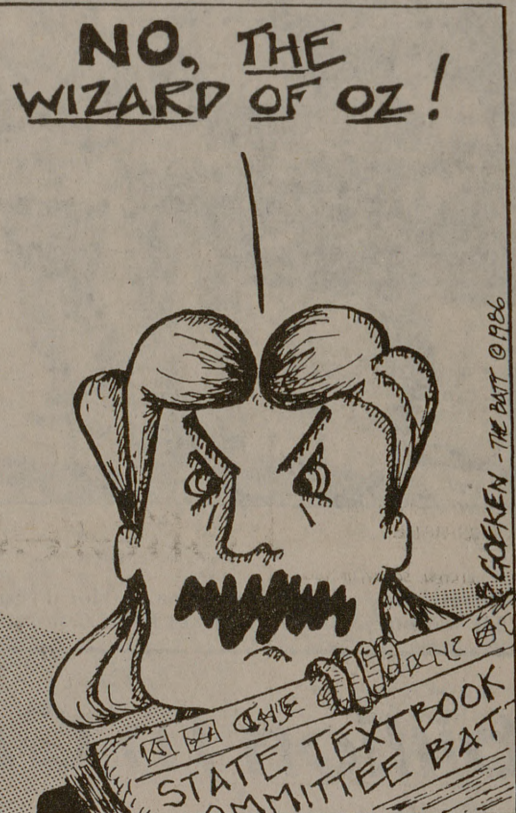
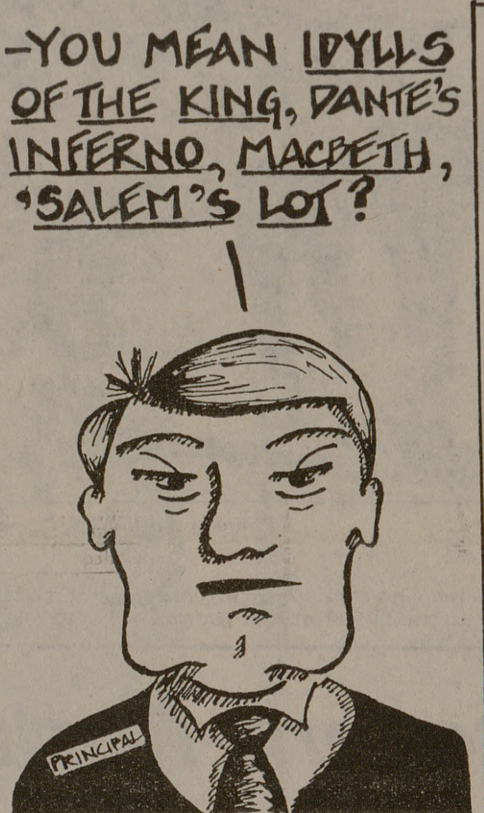
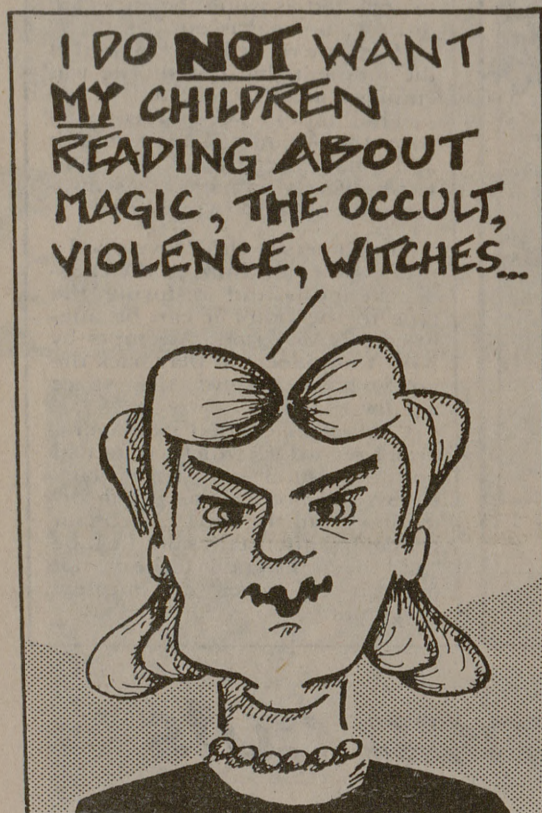
- It begins to produce blood cells after 17 days (after fertilization).
- It has a heart pumping its own blood after one month.
- It has a vascular system independent of its mother (the mother and unborn child do not exchange blood).
- Its brain waves can be detected after 43 days.
- After eight weeks every organ, muscle, bone, nerve, etc. of a human body is present and developing.
- By the end of the third month it can kick legs, curl and fan its toes, make fist, bend its wrist and turn its head. Amniotic fluid moves in and out of its lungs with inhaling and exhaling respiratory motions.

Does a 12-year-old person, since he is at a higher stage of human development, have a greater right to life than a 12-month-old? No, of course not. In the same way, the 12-month-old child has no greater right to life than the 12-week-old unborn child, even though the 12-month-old is at a higher stage of development. Unfortunately for the unborn child, the Supreme Court has decided that it has no rights whatsoever, even that most basic right to life.

Abortion is a "quick fix," 99 percent of the time, for irresponsible sexual activity. Unfortunately, there happens to be a living being that pays the price and it is a very high price — the termination of life.

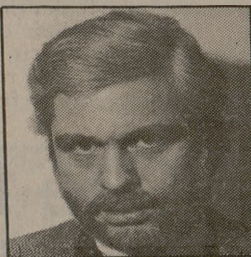
Jerry Cole
Chemical Engineering Graduate Student

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Speak softly and carry no stick

Question: Knock, knock, who's there? Answer: It depends. If you are knocking about Nicaragua or Angola, President Reagan is there with the strongest of language — everything from charges of official anti-Semitism to accusations of slave labor. But if you're knocking about a right-wing regime, say Chile or South Africa, then it is fair to say that no one is home. Come back in another administration.



Richard Cohen

according to witnesses, he was denied treatment and died. What made the tragedy extraordinary was the sheer accident that Rojas had once lived in Washington. The Capitol noticed and the State Department roused itself in condemnation. Otherwise, it was just another day in Chile.

For both Chile and South Africa, the Reagan administration initially trashed Jimmy Carter's human-rights policy and pursued a most peculiar course. These countries would no longer be hectored and bullied. Quietly, reasonably, we would work with them and encourage them to change their ways. The upshot was a perversion of the Teddy Roosevelt maxim: We spoke softly and carried no stick.

The consequences are now plain. Although that policy has changed towards both Chile and South Africa — it is now far more condemnatory — the years of inaction have taken their toll. The governments of those two nations were entitled to think that the United States, cherishing anti-communism above all things, was more or less in their corner. The peoples of those countries reached the same conclusions. In both Chile and South Africa, the prestige of the United States has plummeted. "They think that Reagan is the friend of their enemy," is the way one Chilean intellectual put it.

One could argue that the Carter administration had no success with Chile or South Africa, either. But it was clear that the government of the United States and, especially, its president held those regimes in scorn. Jimmy Carter was not hesitant to articulate an American ethic: We believe in democracy, in human rights. And we were not afraid to say so — even if it meant shouting it from rooftops. But not the Reagan administration or the president himself.

In a speech last March enunciating what is now called the Reagan Doctrine, the president paid homage to the very ethic that informed Carter's human-rights policy: "In this global revolution,

there can be no doubt where America stands. The American people believe in human rights and oppose tyranny in whatever form, whether of the left or the right." The trouble is, we denounce tyranny from the left much more energetically than we do from the right. The president's words notwithstanding, tyrannies on the right remain our pals.

Neither South Africa nor Chile is a Soviet ally. There is good reason to distinguish between countries that are our friends and those that are not. But even if the administration's chief objective is to keep these countries out of the Soviet orbit and only secondarily to encourage the growth of democracy, it ought to see where its policies are heading. In both countries, Reagan's silence is taken as consent — at best, indifference. Future regimes, whether democratic or not, may well turn out to be anti-American. We will lose on all accounts.

Everyone knows where Reagan stands when it comes to Nicaragua or Angola. That is certainly not the case with South Africa or Chile — despite the best efforts of our ambassador to Santiago. The moral outrage the president summons for tyrannies of the left is muted when he deals with those of the right. Instead of words from the president, we get monotone expressions of regret from the State Department — absurd condemnations of violence on both sides, as if a general strike and state-sponsored terrorism are equivalent. The upshot is that the very American ethic the president mentioned in his March speech loses its most influential voice. It does not carry to the slums of Santiago or the black townships of South Africa.

It hardly matters that Rodrigo Rojas was a temporary American. What matters is that he was a human being and that he was burned to death by Chilean soldiers. That murder, and others like it in South Africa, are abominations and ought to be condemned.

Knock, knock, Mr. President. Show us there's someone home.

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