

Flawed approach

U.S. insistence on abstinence-only sexual education leaves teenagers at risk

Compared to most industrialized nations, the United States is losing when it comes to teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. A study conducted by members of Advocates for Youth Linda Berne and Barbara Huberman compared the United States to Germany, the Netherlands and France in a number of areas. It was discovered that U.S. teens are the youngest to engage in sexual behavior. In addition, U.S. teens report significantly less frequent use of contraceptives other than condoms. Their rates of birth, abortion and STDs are also much higher than that of European countries.

European approaches to sexuality are much different than American ones. They are more open about the topic, encourage safe sex practices earlier and more frequently, use numerous mass media campaigns and value the decisions of their youth. America does not have to undergo a radical cultural change to improve the way its youth are treated. However, it should start by eradicating useless and outdated policies regarding sexual education in public schools.

In 1996, \$250 million was appropriated by the federal government supporting abstinence-until-marriage programs. Over the past few years, the Bush administration has contributed nearly \$100 million to sponsor the same programs, according to a report by Rep. Henry A. Waxman, a ranking member of the Committee of Government Reform. The primary goal of these programs is to portray sex as an activity intended only for married adults. These programs deny their intended targets information

regarding contraception and other preventative measures necessary for safe sex.

The United States is an extremely sexually-oriented society. Children and teenagers are exposed to enormous amounts of sexual content and images every day by doing anything from watching television to turning on the radio. The pressures to have sex are more than evident.

If teens decide to go down this — what abstinence-only programs would call, horrific and destructive path — they are often ill-equipped and unmotivated to make healthy and rational decisions about sex. But that is exactly the ideological intention. The latent message being delivered by these programs is this: "Do not have sex until you are married and if you choose to, then you'll be sorry." Abstinence-only education preaches the notion of "just say no" and leaves no other option. In contrast to other comprehensive education programs, this outdated, head-in-the-sand approach is essentially inflicting punishment on teens that can sometimes be a lifelong sentence.

On behalf of the Bush administration, former White House spokesman Ari Fleischer maintained in a June 2001 press conference that "abstinence is more than a sound science, it's a sound practice ... Abstinence has a proven track record of working." That statement illustrates precisely what is inherently wrong with the conservative view.

Abstinence works, of course, but it is not being practiced. Abstinence should be stressed but only in the presence of thorough and descriptive information educating students about all aspects of sexuality.

Further, it is ideology rather than scientific evidence that dictates what is being taught. There is no scientific evidence indicating that abstinence-only programs are effective. The Bush administration has measured the effects of these programs by evaluating everything but pregnancy and STD rates. The administration thinks that because children understand the emotional, social and other possible health gains from abstaining from

premarital sexual activity that the programs are effective, according to Waxman's report.

This is clearly a flawed and unreasonable measure. In contrast, situations like those in Europe illustrate the more desirable conditions that can be obtained by using more comprehensive and sex-positive approaches guided by research.

Teens need to be able to receive information, discover their own values and learn healthy relationship skills that will enable them to decide for themselves when they are ready for sex. Essentially, they should be given the right to live an American life without a neglectful and judgmental reaction from their, what should be, supportive leaders. Abstinence-only approaches deny teens this right.

The conservative motive for these programs is to attempt to control sexual behavior. With fully comprehensive, unbiased and truthful educational programs, teens feel more obligated to protect themselves and each other and, in many cases, commence sexual activity later.

Abstinence-only education policies are hindering U.S. advancement toward a healthier environment for adolescents. It is time for politicians to be realistic and practical. The actual situation is that many kids are having sex and those who have had no comprehensive sex-ed are incapable of making mature decisions. If current conservative policies regarding sexual education remain intact, the United States will always be at the top of the list of Western nations with sexual health problems.



CHRIS LIVELY



IVAN FLORES • THE BATTALION

Chris Lively is a senior sociology major.

North Korea trying to force action on nuclear weapons

North Korea, the international pariah, is back at it again trying to call the United States' bluff on nuclear weapons. By claiming that they have begun to assemble nuclear weapons and refusing to continue negotiations with the Japanese, the North Koreans are trying to spook the South into kowtowing before their demands and break apart the U.S. coalition trying to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

North Korea claims it has begun to assemble nuclear weapons using the plutonium it recovered from 8,000 used fuel rods, according to the International Herald Tribune. Although Secretary of State Colin Powell downplayed the threat as empty in the same article, another article from the British Broadcasting Company indicates that the United States may not really know if the threats are empty.

According to the BBC, the United States knows little that it can be certain about of what's happening in the North Korean nuclear program. Most of what is known, such as the number of fuel rods the North possesses, was known before the first nuclear crisis on the peninsula in 1994.

The United States knows the fuel rods have been moved to a processing facility, but does not know how much of the plutonium they contain has been reprocessed. According to the article, Krypton 85 gas emitted during the process is hard to conceal. The United States may have detected the gas, but has made no confirmation of the fact. The United States also has only a rough idea of how much weapons-grade plutonium the North



DAVID SHOEMAKER

had already processed or has been processing. But this intelligence shortage is not the only problem facing American and South Korean policy makers.

The North has also told the Japanese they are no longer welcome at the multilateral talks meant to resolve the crisis. According to the BBC, the North told the Japanese that they were "no longer a trusty-dialogue partner."

The sudden dismissal of the Japanese from the talks stems from Japan's desire to discuss the abduction of its citizens by Northern forces during the Cold War, and the desire of the North to negotiate directly with the United States and the United States alone.

This comes in the face of a recent agreement by the Japanese, South Koreans and Chinese to work to resolve the crisis peacefully. The Japanese are resisting the North's action, claiming the North cannot throw them out of the talks. Taken separately, the North's actions may seem to be the threats of a tottering Stalinist regime looking for the spotlight.

But on a larger scale, these actions are a concerted effort by the North to fracture the legitimate alliance built by the United States to curb the North's nuclear ambitions. Its efforts to remove the Japanese from the talks are clearly meant to remove so much of his letters in the New Testament encouraging the churches to purify themselves. I present this statement as a possibility: it is not the opinion of the minority that is divisive, it is the sin itself.

Japanese commitment to remain involved is a heartening sign of solidarity with the United States.

The other part of the North's plan is to rattle its nuclear saber at the South in an effort to scare the country away from a solid line with the United States. The North also plans to increase the policy gulf between the countries over the hardness of the line to be presented to the North.

But the strategy may be backfiring. According to the BBC, the public Korean Broadcasting Commission 1 channel accused the North of "duplicitous" in its apparent desire for nuclear weapons when asking the United States for accommodations. In the past, Southern public opinion was in favor of appeasing the North. But now it seems that the North's brinkmanship has worn thin.

The United States needs to realize that the North's claims must either be dismissed or substantiated by intelligence. Either way, the United States has an opportunity to further unite the coalition of countries that wish to stop the North Korean nuclear program. Although Iraq is important, this is an opportunity that should not be missed.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

Students and faculty must stop intolerance

In response to an Oct. 16 mail call:

As Dr. Hogg wrote, it isn't a "choice" people make to be gay. I doubt anyone in his right mind would "choose" to endure the discrimination, hatred and belittling typically associated with being gay if he wasn't gay to begin with.

What difference does it make if someone is gay? Being gay may not be consistent with some religious beliefs, but where do these religions say it is OK to hate or judge?

Like Dr. Hogg, supportive students and faculty members need to let the entire staff and student body know that they do not support hostility towards those who lead lifestyles not parallel with their own. Too often I hear discriminatory slurs used right in front of a professor or staff member who simply laughs then does nothing to educate the user. Take a stand! Being a member of "Aggie ALLIES" is a great way to show support but is not visible enough in the classrooms and lecture halls.

Let your voices be heard loudly above the intolerant.

A J Chier
Class of 2007

Church debate column contained errors

In response to Lauren Esposito's Oct. 16 column:

Ms. Esposito's article contained errors. First, to point out that a group is a minority does not necessitate that group is incorrect. Second, "minority" is a questionable designation. Within the world Anglican community, the U.S. Episcopal Church makes up a mere 2.3 million members. Archbishop Akinola's Nigerian Anglican Church has more than 17 million. It would seem that the Americans are the minority then.

Third, this dread minority that Ms. Esposito seems to find problematic does have in its favor a long tradition of church teaching, and not only within the Anglican tradition, but also the Catholic and most Protestant traditions. A minority with

church tradition on its side is nothing to be sneezed at. Fourth, bishop-elect Robinson left a wife and two small children when entering into his homosexual relations — the homosexual issue is bad enough, but also now add adultery. Would Esposito have been as willing to support Robinson had he ditched his family for a woman? After all, if we are all created by God, why can't an adulterer administer the teachings of the Lord?

Phillip W. Gray
Graduate Student

Homosexuality is a sin in the Bible

The 18th chapter of the book of Leviticus is dedicated to the exhortation of unlawful sexual relations. It is interesting that we in our modern society still consider all of these sexual relations (within the family, with animals, adultery) to be immoral except for one; Verse 22 explicitly states that a man should not lie with a man as one lies with a woman. God calls this detestable.

Since he is speaking to Moses, a man, we logically conclude that God is speaking about homosexuality. It is, therefore, a sin and has no place in the church.

I realize that I am not perfect and have no authority to judge a fellow man, but I also follow scriptures where Jesus calls us to repent. As such, I cannot condone homosexuality. Sin is divisive in the church as a whole, which is why Paul spends so much of his letters in the New Testament encouraging the churches to purify themselves. I present this statement as a possibility: it is not the opinion of the minority that is divisive, it is the sin itself.

Carlee Borden
Class of 2004

Members of church doing right thing

The "conservative faction" of the Episcopal Church is not exhibiting bigotry toward homosexuals. They are simply recognizing that there are certain Biblical requirements bishops must meet. This is

not hatred.

There is also much debate over whether homosexuality is right or wrong. But it was never about right versus wrong. The original sin was when mankind chose knowing right from wrong against knowing life from death. Sin is spiritual death — separation from God and the way He created things to be. Genesis 2:24 says that "a man should be joined to his wife." There is no mention of "alternative lifestyles" because that was never in the design. It's not right or wrong; it's life or death. Homosexuality separates from the designed plan of God and brings death.

And why is everyone so concerned about not "splitting the unity of the church?" Since when was that Jesus' policy? He put highly respected religious leaders in their places throughout the Gospels and constantly split the unity of the church. We need more men and women of conviction willing to stand up for truth instead of bending over backwards to avoid "rocking the boat."

Amber King
Class of 2005

MAIL CALL

October 17, 2003

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Lindsey Rodgers
Class of 2006

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