

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

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## Sex!

### Abstinence-only education is the key to ensure teens make the right decision

Sex sells. It always has, and it always will. Everything on TV tells society that sex is the right decision. According to the Parents Television Council, youths watch more than 25 hours a week of television programming, and 66 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 16 claim their peers are influenced by television.



MATT YOUNGER

Simply put, in a society drenched in sexually-laced images and so influenced by television, a sizeable opposition is necessary to counter the message that is leaving this generation hopeless, uninformed and in need of truth. This comes through nothing simpler than an abstinence education program supported by President George W. Bush.

This administration appropriated \$55 million in project grants to "public and private entities for the development and implementation of abstinence-only education programs for adolescents, ages 12 through 18, in communities across the country," according to the White House Web site. Moreover, Bush requested \$73 million for 2004.

While some consider this an outrageous amount of money for a social program of this nature, others are more genuinely outraged at a more alarming statistic. According to The Dallas Morning News, 2,739 teenage girls become pregnant every day in the United States, and 8,219 youths contract an STD on a daily basis. Some of these teens have neglected to listen to the wisdom of those who care, but many of them are simply uninformed of the perils of such a lifestyle because everything about society screams that it's OK.

Beyond the risk of pregnancy, STDs and abortion, another risk looms — the adverse emotional effects. Some teens do get lucky. They are sexually active to a highly dangerous degree, yet they do not ever contract an STD or have a child in the making. All seems dandy until they realize the gravity of their sexual experience in terms of its emotional consequence. Sex is, without question, the most passionate and profound display of affection between two individuals. It often creates an identity of security and comfort and implies that a relationship is at a very serious level.

Fifteen-year-olds who should be worrying about cars now have to deal with complex emotional situations that they are not ready to deal with. Abstinence-only education programs will teach children the risks that many of them don't even know they're taking.

Abstinence-based education is more than just a moral argument. Its roots are grounded in something stronger — logic and reason.

Abstaining from sex is not just morally right; it's smart. Teens do not need another moment of somebody going to their schools and explaining sex as if they don't understand it. Sex is the status quo for adolescents. Instead of simply stating the obvious, programs need to present a David to the Goliath that stands today.

Many teenagers who have sex don't know about the emotional, psychological and health factors involved. Abstinence education groups teach that a condom is not a surefire way to protect and that other more serious issues are

involved. Passing out condoms to 14-year-olds is like giving a 7-year-old a match. "We don't care what you do with it, we just want you to know it's there," educators say. On the contrary, abstinence groups tell developing minds that condoms aren't the solution; they're simply a way to possibly avoid some of the problem. Abstinence groups are not anti-condom; they are pro-education.



These programs give students the respect that other educational programming doesn't. They view the teen as impressionable rather than hopeless.

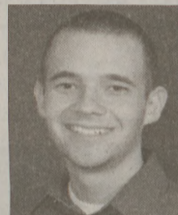
These programs offer a permanent solution to counter the half-truth that sex before marriage is okay, and give the students a little more credit before throwing contraception in their faces and writing them off as another societal problem.

Children need to be taught there is a reward for waiting until marriage to have sex. One reward obviously comes in the form of never having to worry about an STD, abortion or pregnancy. But another reward and a more profound one comes in the form of honor. There is something overwhelmingly admirable about men and women who save themselves for marriage. And nobody can refute this. All across the country, every day, husbands look into their wives' eyes and say, "This is the most meaningful relationship I will ever be in, and for our protection and our honor, I am presenting myself to you as a virgin." Children must be taught that people such as this do exist.

Matt Younger is a junior political science major. Graphic by Tony Piedra.

### Programs that provide no alternative leave children unprepared, ignorant

For years, conservatives have been lauding abstinence-only education programs as a way to lower teens' sexual activity, lower the abortion rate, lower the number of cases of STDs and raise the moral standard of the nation's teens. They say that abstinence is the only way to improve teens' lives. The truth is, abstinence-only education is not the most effective way to keep teens safe.



MATT RIGNEY

European programs, especially in The Netherlands, stress the importance of making the right personal decisions, not the importance of abiding by others' decisions. Dutch sexual education programs establish an open line of communication. Almost all Dutch secondary schools and about 50 percent of primary schools address sexuality and contraception, rather than abstinence only, according to the National Library of Medicine. Dutch children are exposed to sexuality without the taboo that the United States places on it, making them easier pupils to teach.

This open-communication policy encourages parents to talk with their teenage children about sex, an important facet of the European-style sexual education programs. According to teenpregnancy.org, 70 percent of teens said they were willing to listen to things their parents thought they were not ready to hear, and more than 70 percent of teens said that a lack of communication between a girl and her parents was a reason she may become pregnant.

As a result of the greater communication between parents and teens, European teenagers begin having sex at around 17 years old, two years after the average American teen starts.

This is an important statistic, because children who have sex at a younger age are more likely to be

The Netherlands has the lowest abortion rate in the world with between five and seven women out of 1,000 having abortions each year. It also boasts one of the lowest teen pregnancy rates in the world: Less than 1 percent of 15- to 17-year-old females gets pregnant every year, according to the National Center for Policy Analysis and the National Library of Medicine. In the United States, 34 percent of women become pregnant before the age of 20, and eight in 10 of these pregnancies are unintended, according to teenpregnancy.org.

The Dutch government achieves this unparalleled success through open communication with teens about sex and a program that educates, rather than threatens.

Teens are going to find a way to have sex if they want to. In some cases, explicitly telling teens to abstain from sex may make them want to rebel. Although President George W. Bush and his political cronies claim that his abstinence-only education program is responsible for a decrease in the teen birth rate, this number has been declining since 1991 — 10 years before Bush took office.

This type of education program threatens teens with stories of pregnancy and STDs, scaring them into thinking that abstinence is the only way to avoid these problems. Obviously, abstinence is the best way to avoid pregnancy and STDs, but teens must be taught the alternatives. Not every American shares the same moral and religious beliefs as the president.

victims of rape: 40 percent of girls who had sex at age 13 or 14 said it was involuntary, according to teenpregnancy.org. And logic dictates that the sooner a person starts having sex, the more likely they are to become pregnant or contract an STD.

The Dutch and European sexual education programs also stress the importance of contraceptive use. These programs discuss the use of, the pros and cons and the risks involved with each type of contraception. They also give students access to contraceptives, making a responsible decision more likely.

Conservatives are pulling the wool over their own eyes, thinking they will be able to stop teens from having sex. No one can stop teens from having sex, so why take away their access to affordable or free contraception?

If sexual education programs teach abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and STDs, teens who choose to have sex will be ignorant of the risk they are taking. These teens will also be ill-equipped to practice safe sex when they choose to do so.

Conservative efforts to push abstinence education are misinformed. If government officials would look at the results that other countries are getting out of a total sexual education package and encourage American schools to adopt such programs, teenage sexuality problems would severely decline.

Matt Rigney is a junior journalism major.

## Vietnam veteran should not be memorialized

### Opening the door to those who committed suicide would be an unmanageable task

Constructed in 1982, the Vietnam War Memorial stands as a resonant dedication honoring the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country characterized by the nearly 2.7 million Americans who participated in the grim struggle. The wall contains roughly 58,000 names of those considered casualties of war. Already a tragic and staggering number, that number could grow by the thousands if one family's request is granted.



CHRIS LIVELY

Almost four months after returning from battle, prisoner of war and U.S. Air Force Capt. Edward Brundo took his own life due to the psychological devastation symptomatic of many Vietnam soldiers both during and after the war. Now, his family has requested that his name be added to the wall on the grounds that Brundo's trauma was a war-inflicted casualty, according to a news report from World Net Daily. The Brundo family makes a

sensible and honorable request, and it is one that deserves the utmost compassion and attention. Granting approval of such a request, however, would set a precedent that would be almost impossible to keep.

Although the memorial is a dedication to all who served in combat, current U.S. Department of Defense policy states that the names inscribed on the wall be of those who were killed or declared missing in the combat zone designated by President Johnson's executive order. Names of those who died after the war directly from wounds received in the combat zone also meet the criteria. As a result of the Brundo family's request, a psychiatric consultant to the surgeon general conducted research and reported that Brundo's record indicated that he sustained "severe psychological and physical wounds" in Vietnam, which resulted in his death by suicide, according to The Washington Post.

Maj. John Thomas, chief of public affairs for Air Force personnel, advocates granting the Brundo family's request. He mentions that the criteria for name addition refers to wounds

received, but do not differentiate between physical and psychological wounds. The wall currently contains names of suicide victims, but are of those who died in and during combat. All things being equal, post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological abnormalities inflicted by a war of such devastation and chaos could be serious enough to drive many to suicide. Although this is arguable, granting approval for the Brundo family would result in the a case-by-case record review of any veteran's family wishing to do the same. While Brundo's case may justify an inscription under these grounds, inventing a process with today's available technology to distinguish between war-induced suicides and those that stem from other reasons would be a logistical nightmare.

Also excluded from the list of names are victims who have died of cancer as a result of exposure to Agent Orange. Here too, qualifying Agent Orange-induced cancer would become a tedious, impractical task.

Jan C. Scruggs, president of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund,

opposes the inscription of Brundo's name. "If the Department of Defense decides to go down this route," Scruggs argues, "I guarantee you and the Department of Defense that 20,000 families of service members who committed suicide will demand, and will now have legal standing, to place those names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," according to The Post. Scruggs makes a reasonable point as he also claims that there is simply not enough room on the wall to include all of those names, not to mention other post-conflict death victims such as those from Agent Orange.

Estimates of post-conflict suicides of Vietnam veterans reach staggering numbers, and some say would need possibly two more entire walls to accommodate them.

Since the fighting ended in Vietnam, various names have been added to the wall, as was expected by the VVFM. However, these names are of those who died in training missions in the combat zones or of directly related and distinguishable war injuries not characteristic of all sui-

cide victims.

Perhaps the memorial should have been built with the anticipation of adding thousands of more names, but that is another issue in itself. Nevertheless, Captain Brundo and all post-war suicide victims deserve to be remembered and revered for their dedication and services at least in the hearts and minds of those who cared about them despite the fact that inscribing their names in the wall would have certain unfeasible implications.

A spokesman for the VVFM said a decision would be made regarding the Brundo family's request in the next few weeks. In the meantime, the VVFM will appropriately dedicate a plaque honoring the victims of post-conflict suicides and cancer next month, an appropriate way to honor people who lost their lives because of Vietnam, despite the fact that it is not feasible for the wall to be amended.

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