

Sex, Society and Mississippi Public Education

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As society has progressed, the topic of sex has grown to be vehement, confounding, and especially controversial. It has become apparent that our approach to the subject may have dangerous consequences, now more than ever. One truth has begun to stand out: the better we educate the public on sex and choose to normalize it, the more society will benefit from it.

In classrooms across the United States, particularly, some form of sex education is usually taught. In Mississippi, it was not until 2011 that House Bill 999 decided all public school districts in the state had to adopt a sex education program.

And despite 58% of high school students in Mississippi being sexually active, schools could only choose from “abstinence-only” or “abstinence-plus” curriculums.

In these courses, demonstrations on how to apply contraceptives are barred, girls and boys must be separated, and celibacy is pushed as the only morally correct choice for students.

Topics like positive sexual expression, sexual orientation, consent, abortion, and non-traditional contraceptives are often omitted from lesson plans. Furthermore, instead of encouraging students to make decisions that are best fit for them, abstinence-centered education uses tactics to scare students of the “consequences” of sex.

For instance, these programs exaggerate the failure rates of condoms and other birth control methods.

The curriculum does not teach teens what options they have if they do become pregnant, despite many babies who are born to teen mothers are exceptionally likely to be neglected/abused.

This strategy also teaches that premarital sex *will* have harmful social, psychological, and physical effects on your person.

The results of these teachings are frightening. Mississippi is consistently one of the highest-ranked states in the nation for teen pregnancy, which is predictable when considering students do not receive a comprehensive education on birth control options.

The state will not allow teachers to demonstrate how to put on a condom, which may explain why the 15-24-year-old age group is responsible for 76% of chlamydia cases and 70% of gonorrhea cases.

In addition to all of this, children are being taught that sex is a toxic thing. This system is grooming children to believe that a natural part of life can only lead to negative consequences. In doing this, another generation is taught to judge those who choose to be sexually active and are comfortable with that decision.

Despite these truths, it seems that efforts to make a change have been stagnant. In 2016, House Bill 999 was scheduled to be repealed, but after a legislative vote, was extended to stay in place.

In an ideal situation, a new comprehensive sex education law would replace Bill 999. Every student would be required to take this course in junior high or high school. In this bill, the benefits of abstinence would be discussed, but abstinence would not be the set “rule”. The class would not be separated by gender. Administrations would demonstrate how to apply contraceptives and teach unbiased statistics on the reliability of different methods. They would learn how proper and consistent use of modern birth control options can greatly reduce the risk of pregnancy and to stop the spread of an STD/STI by using condoms.

After all, the point of a sex ed class is not to wave a finger in students' faces if they are ready to have sex, but to teach them to be responsible, safe, and smart. Students will be taught consent thoroughly. In many studies, sexual assault/harassment have gone down when a community teaches comprehensive sex education.

In case a student may become pregnant, the curriculum will teach about what options that student may have. Most importantly, students will learn that whatever decision he/she makes concerning sex is completely normal. The concept that healthy, safe sex is a natural thing will constantly be reinforced.

Sexual expression can be great and empowering; it is nothing to be scared or ashamed of as a student.

If society took hold of this "taboo" subject and normalized the conversation, the topic would not be considered offensive. Sex is a part of nature, and to treat it as anything else is ignorant. By implementing these changes, real problems in society that stem from how we teach sex could be solved shortly.