

Monday, January 26, 2004

## EDITORIAL

# Teaching only abstinence is insufficient, irresponsible

*"Everybody an' their mamma preaching abstinence, these Kids ain't checking for absti-shit  
 So put a condom in their hand and hope it don't bust"  
 — Coolio, "Too Hot"*

Several comments and suggestions that Bush made in his State of the Union speech last week are likely to stir controversy among pundits and laymen alike in the months leading up to the 2004 presidential election.

One such initiative was the notoriously ineffective and downright moronic idea of abstinence-only sex education — which, in an age when more and more teenagers are having sex at earlier ages, would produce frightening and unintended results.

Abstinence-only sex education, as opposed to traditional forms of sex education, portrays abstinence as the only moral thing to do before marriage and ignores any information about contraception that could protect against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Abstinence-only instruction is wholly based on the assumption that every single teenager receiving the education will be morally correct enough to respond to the intense barrage of hormones and confusion that accompanies puberty in a way that morality prescribes. Biologically, that is off a dim hope.

Conversely, Planned Parenthood defines "comprehensive sex education" as "age- and developmentally appropriate education that includes a variety of topics related to human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. It teaches that abstinence is the best method for avoiding STDs and unintended pregnancy, but also provides information about condoms and contraception."

Comprehensive sex education, while seemingly tedious as a young person, is scientifically proven to be more effective than abstinence-only forms of education. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the teen pregnancy rate in America is actually decreasing while the rate of contraceptive use among those who are having sex at young ages is increasing — further evidence that correct use of contraceptives is working to lower the troubling rates of teen pregnancy.

Clearly, traditional forms of sex education just make sense. It is completely unreasonable to assume that all teenagers will adopt abstinence-only morals in an age when authority seems like a joke. While abstinence-only may seem like a good idea, without a working knowledge of how to practice safe sex, the teenagers who don't practice abstinence will be at a high risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. And endangering teenagers with an entire life ahead of them shouldn't be the aim of the federal government, especially one headed by a president who preaches "no child left behind" on a regular basis.

One way to alleviate the sex education debate in this country would be for parents to stop complaining about how schools teach about sex and just do it themselves. Have honest conversations about sex with your teenagers, whether you focus on abstinence or the importance of birth control. Answer their questions. Give them advice. Be parents.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Eric Layton Illustration

# More real than reality

I don't watch reality television. It saddens me a bit, but I'll never be able to answer a Trivial Pursuit question about "Survivor," "Fear Factor," "The Bachelor," "Joe Millionaire," or "My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé." The problem is, something about these shows makes me uncomfortable.

Perhaps they're too real — maybe people really do need to traumatize their relatives for money, or maybe having a bunch of television producers line up a selection of mates is just a modern improvement on the age-old business of matchmaking.

It's possible. It's also possible that they're not real enough. The hoops these people are asked to jump through are often silly, frequently humiliating and — from what I've seen during bouts of channel surfing — incredibly pointless.

Mind you, I myself engage in pointless activities.

From time to time, I find that sleep and I are to be only distantly acquainted. Midnight, 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. pass without much concern, but when 3 a.m. comes (and goes) without a significant increase in the weight of my eyelids, I usually decide that action is required. Like any normal person still in the throes of New Year's Resolution #14 (get more exercise), I decide that the solution to my wakefulness lies at the gym.

I usually spend an hour or two hoping that the threat of going out into the pre-dawn cold will persuade my circadian rhythms to beat out a sleepy tune. Sometimes it works. When it doesn't, I drag out my tennis shoes, gather up my car keys and venture out into the company of 5 a.m. freaks.

Yes, you heard me — freaks. How else would you characterize people who — in the middle of winter — decide to leave the cozy comfort of their sleep-warmed beds



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson  
 Huh? What? Really.

in order to exercise?

Once among the freaks, I scope out a treadmill, hit the start button, and start to go — nowhere. Can't you just smell the irony? The woman who protests pointless television pointlessly expends energy going nowhere, and not even particularly fast.

But it's not an entirely pointless endeavor. From where I patiently tick off the laps, I can watch the goings-on of my companions-in-toil. Reality television has nothing on these folks.

On my most recent trip, I first watched Biker Man — a fifty-something fellow, with a flame tattoo up his calf and graying hair bound in Willie Nelson braids — determinedly climb up his StairMaster. I'd have found him only mildly interesting but for the Grandma Woman who took up the machine beside him. She was a 70-something little old lady with a butt flatter than a legal writing pad. Nevertheless, there she was, climbing her stairway to heaven. The contrast between them was marked, but I was far more interested in what they had in common. Each wore an identical expression of disgust, discomfort and determination. The external packaging may have been different, but underneath, I was seeing kindred spirits.

While this unlikely pair was good for a few laps, my attention was soon caught by

another gym personage — Perfect Man. Somehow, this fellow managed to look natty in a tracksuit — perhaps it was the way his collar turned up, the pristine whiteness of his socks or maybe just the identical length of all his shoelaces.

He masterfully mounted one of those new machines that simulate uphill cross-country skiing. He put it on the steepest setting and then proceeded to slide away at the same brisk pace for most of an hour. If he sweated, I didn't see it. If his breath became labored, I didn't notice. Mostly, I pattered along completing my laps knowing that I was in the presence of a god. I was suitably humbled.

I might have stayed that way had it not been for the arrival of Beauty Queen Woman. At just after 5 a.m. this only-recently-old-enough-to-drink female entered the gym. I noticed her immediately — as did most of the male population. She was tall, tan and blonde — which is probably why the men were looking. I, however, was caught up in the utter fascination of a scientist who has just discovered a new species.

She wasn't wearing workout clothes, she was wearing an ensemble. Her hair wasn't ponytailed, it was coifed. More amazingly — and I swear it's true — her face was decked out in full maquillage. This girl didn't just get out of bed at an incredibly early hour to exercise, she got up even earlier to primp first. She wasn't just your average freak — she was a Rick James Super Freak.

Compare that to eating rats, drinking blood or dating strangers on national television. Perhaps I don't watch reality television because reality is far more interesting.

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## ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous week's poll and the coming week's poll question.

**Last question:** Which of the eight Democratic candidates' views most closely match your own?

**Results:** Fifty-three votes.

- Wesley Clark: 22.7 percent or 12 votes.
- Howard Dean: 17.0 percent or 9 votes.
- John Kerry: 17.0 percent or 9 votes.
- Dennis Kucinich: 13.2 percent or 7 votes.

• Al Sharpton: 11.3 percent or 6 votes.

• John Edwards: 9.4 percent or 5 votes.

• Joe Lieberman: 9.4 percent or 5 votes

• Dick Gephardt: 0.0 percent or 0 votes.

**This week:** What's your vote

on Measure 30?

**Choices:** Yes, I don't want my tuition to go up; Yes, I value the state services that are at risk; No, I don't want to pay more in taxes; No, The state should be able to manage the budget as it stands; I didn't vote.