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■ In my opinion

Sex: education emotion ethics

Before I say anything else, I just want to get this out there: Putting a condom on a banana is nothing at all like putting a condom on one's self. For one thing, there are different angles. Also, one is done in a crowded, awkward moment while the other is done in an intimate, passionate moment. Perhaps most importantly, if you accidentally pinch a banana, it won't leave you singing soprano for a week.

Having gotten that out of the way, I'd like to talk about some other, more general problems with contemporary sex education. The current debate is between abstinence-only programs and programs that teach the use of contraceptives. If you ask me, this entire debate is ridiculous because neither program prepares students to deal with the emotional and ethical dimensions of their sexual behavior.

I'm not saying that educators should impose their values on a captive audience. I am saying that parents and educators in this country should find a middle ground between "Thou shalt not" and "Insert tab A into slot B." It's certainly possible to raise and discuss questions of ethics without imposing a particular agenda. In the case of human sexuality, I would say it's not only possible, but necessary.

Hear me out on this because I'm not talking about ethics in the Bible-thumping sense of the word. There's an ethical dimension to almost every human action, and certainly to every interaction. Most of the time, we aren't conscious of the ethical dimensions of the choices we make. Hell, most of the time we're not even conscious of the



GABE BRADLEY
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

fact that we're making choices. But we make ethical choices in what we say in class, how we act at the bank and where we buy our groceries. And you better believe we make ethical choices in who we screw and how.

However, contemporary sex education describes sexuality as if it were a biological transaction. Learning about sex is not like learning about geometry. Sex cannot be reduced to facts, figures and statistics because it is a practical subject that affects every single person alive. Sex education misses the boat when it focuses on communicating dry information, such as how to recognize a herpes sore or prepare a piece of fruit for protected intercourse, instead of practical dialogue, such as learning about a partner's emotional needs or respecting each other in the morning.

You can't have casual sex any more than you can snort a casual line of coke. Any attempt at sex education that does not deal frankly with the emotional and ethical realities of sex is practically worthless.

Again, I'm not saying that anyone should push a particular agenda. But young people need someone to raise these issues, present various points of view and facilitate discussion.

Some say sex education should take place in the home. I agree with this in theory. But in practice, it's just not happening. When I was younger, I got "the talk." One parent told me the mechanics and left it pretty much at that. Like countless other young people, I went into adolescence woefully under-informed. In all the talk about what goes where, no one ever told me what I was going to feel. No one ever mentioned what it was going to be like to be horny or confused. And nary a word was breathed about how my partner would feel.

Though there's something to be said for learning "the hard way," there's no inherent virtue in making mistakes that could easily be avoided if one were to possess more information. Because of a lack of information and candid dialogue, generation after generation ends up repeating the mistakes of its predecessors. There's got to be a better way. There shouldn't be "the talk," there should be many talks. Sex should be a topic of conversation like any other topic. For one thing, there's way too much information to dump into one talk. Also, a lot of the information won't even make sense to kids until they're older.

My point, put simply, is this: Sex is more than just mechanics. Incorporating this reality into sex education would mean an increase in dialogue but a decrease in banana sales to public schools. I suppose tradeoffs have to be made somewhere.

gabeb Bradley@dailyemerald.com

■ Editorial

Government places ideals on top of smart sex-ed

As newspaper editors, we tend to be biased against ignorance. While the religious right might believe that Eden is lost when you eat from the Tree of Knowledge — especially the Tree of Sexual Knowledge — we do not share their fear of education. Nor do we share their belief that young adults are made safer by being kept in the dark about sex and contraception while in high school, when 60 percent and 70 percent of teenage women and men, respectively, have sex before age 18.

We believe knowledge is empowering for young people, especially young women who have historically lacked control over their own sexual lives. That is why the Emerald, along with the majority of Americans, cannot support the Bush administration's push for abstinence-only education in public schools. Since 1996, the federal government has spent \$1 billion trying to sell the virtues of abstinence, with even more to come in the next fiscal year, despite the fact that more than 75 percent of parents prefer comprehensive sex education over abstinence-only, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

It is not surprising that parents are apprehensive about abstinence-only education. Studies have shown that these programs fail to significantly delay sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners or reduce teen pregnancy; in fact, evidence suggests these programs stunt sexual maturity, leading to increased incidents of unprotected sex and the potential for sexual disease and pregnancy, according to research from the Alan Guttmacher Institute.

Abstinence-only programs also fail to deliver scientifically accurate information, and more often than not pass along bogus religious propaganda about the dangers of everything from masturbation to homosexuality to abortion. A 2004 report, released by Rep. Henry Waxman, found that more than 65 percent of these government-funded programs contain misleading or inaccurate information, from overstating the pregnancy risk associated with condoms to suggesting that HIV can be transmitted through sweat and tears.

Abstinence mis-education is only one aspect of a larger religious movement to regulate our private lives. They want to ban gay marriage, outlaw gay and lesbian sexual acts, make marriage harder to dissolve, criminalize adultery, censor pornography and all acts of "indecentcy" on television and radio, make abortions illegal and restrict access to contraception, especially for those under 18.

The overall intent is to teach young adults to fear sex and feel ashamed of their natural desires and fantasies. We should be teaching just the opposite in the schools: how to embrace one's sexuality, how to enjoy sex responsibly, both physically and psychologically, and how to adequately care for a partner's sexual and emotional needs; maybe even, god forbid, how to have more pleasurable, more inspired sex.

The truth is nothing to fear. And hopefully one day we will have the courage to tell our children the truth: Sex is a healthy thing when done responsibly.

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■ In my opinion

Remembering a counter-culture icon

The life and death of the American counter-culture has been told ad nauseam in countless sappy documentaries and mindlessly simpering books harking back to a nonexistent time of artistic experimentation and political revolution. It has been breathlessly spoken of by aging baby boomers patting themselves on the back and claiming no music will ever be better, no art will ever be greater and that no cultural movement will ever be as honest and authentic. They create a fantasy land of revolutionary politics and god-like musicians, bearing as much resemblance to reality as Charles Manson's vision of the upcoming Armageddon.

But nobody documented this movement and its long, strangled aftermath better than Hunter S. Thompson, who blew his brains out this weekend at the age of 67. With prose as bombastic and breathless as his lifestyle, he fashioned himself into the screaming mad genius of journalism, rewriting the boundaries between fact and fiction as he ranted like a street corner prophet quoting from Revelations through nearly four decades of political corruption, hellish warfare and two-faced hypocrisy on nearly every level of authority.

There is no one else like him and there probably never will be. Journalism does not allow for it and never



RYAN NYBURG
BUDGET RACK

really did. He covered everything, from horse races to Hell's Angels, from political campaigns to motorcycle competitions. Every story was touched with his unmistakable style, full of brimstone and amphetamines. He exaggerated, he falsified, yet he always told the truth of an event, often more so than straight journalists. There was nothing objective about him, nothing disconnected or separate.

Thompson was a part of every story he wrote, his personality as intractable from his writing as his apocalyptic hyperbole. He was the antithesis of everything American journalism is supposed to stand for, yet he told the sick, sad truths about our culture at which others were not even willing to look.

His death was the final touch on a life marked by rampant drug use, astronomical expense accounts and wild political activity. His life cannot be told as a straight narrative, only as a series of

notable events. He covered a drug enforcement conference while tripping on mescaline. He threatened to set Gary Trudeau on fire. He fired off a gun randomly from the porch of his Colorado home to let off steam. He ran for sheriff of Aspen on the Freak Power ticket. It was a close race even though he supported drug legalization and the banning of urban development. He and some friends once blew up a jeep.

Such a scattered and manic past hardly hints at Thompson's considerable literary merit. He published countless articles that now stand as some of the greatest reporting of the past 40 years (any aspiring magazine writer should read "The Kentucky Derby is Sick and Depraved") and published at least one literary classic, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," as well as numerous books of incredible social and political worth. For all of its hyperbolic styling, "Fear and Loathing on Campaign Trail '72" is one of the best books about American politics ever written. Even his collected letters are worth perusing for their insights.

Now that he is gone, we mourn his loss and know that nothing was ever the same once he came onto the scene. Go in peace, with fear and loathing.

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