



"Miss? I Have a Question... "

Why won't safe-sex advocates advocate safe-sex?

A few months ago, the BBC reported on a rise in a new strain of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's), which are proving to be resistant to treatment. Here is an extract from their report:

Doctors have expressed "huge concern" that super-gonorrhoea has spread widely across England and to gay men. Public Health England acknowledges measures to contain the outbreak have been of "limited success" and an official said:

"The huge growth in sexually transmitted infections has come about as a result of promiscuous lifestyles. Previous advice has been about encouraging people to practice safe sex but I'm afraid this hasn't worked in the past and it's not working now. The only truly safe-sex approach that will stop the spread of STIs is rediscovering the idea of pre-marital chastity and a lifelong commitment to marriage."

Okay, so she didn't really say that. You can relax again and take a deep breath, fully reassured that our culture hasn't actually discovered a dose of sanity. That would be really disorientating, wouldn't it?

What the head of the Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) unit at Public Health England, Dr. Gwenda Hughes, actually said, according to the real BBC report I, is that we should be *"encouraging people to practice safe-sex to minimize the risk of STIs."*

Okay, so Dr. Hughes wants to *minimize* the risk of STIs. That's good. We can probably all assent to that. But what's the best way of actually *minimizing* the risk of STIs? According to Dr. Hughes, it is for people to "practice safe-sex", by which she means that people should protect themselves when they go about their promiscuous lifestyles.

But is this the safest way? If not, why didn't she mention what that is?

A call for troublemakers

I imagine a teenager in a sex education lesson asking the following question: "Miss. Assuming I take precautions, would it be safer for me to have three partners or 300?"

No brainer of course, and even the most progressive of teachers would have to admit that three is "safer" than 300. Simple mathematical probabilities this one: the lower the number, the "safer the sex."

In which case a really mischievous teenager — a true rebel you might say might ask the following question:

"Miss, is it safer to only have one partner for life, or multiple? And if it's one — which it is — and if this is a safe-sex lesson — which it is — why do you not advocate it?"

But of course Miss can't advocate it, even if Miss privately knows it to be true, for fear of something that apparently involves clocks and their being turned back. However, in reality Miss can breathe a sigh of relief; she is unlikely to have to undergo the embarrassing ordeal of being asked such hard questions since the number of truly rebellious teenagers prepared to challenge modern orthodoxy is not really very high.

The counter argument

Now I know the counter argument. It runs something like this: about 60 per cent of teenagers who pledge to remain celibate until they are married end up engaging in pre-marital sex and are one-third less likely to use contraceptives than their peers who have received sex education. Well that's what Wikipedia says at any rate. So this proves that abstinence programs don't work and therefore it is better to deal with the reality and try to prevent STIs through safe-sex education.

If ever you heard a spurious argument, that was it. Of course abstinence programs don't work. Why would they? We have created a culture where pre-marital sex and multiple partners is absolutely expected and teenagers that try to go against the grain are called weird/stupid/backward (amongst the politer names that is). They are up against a cultural juggernaut. If they fail, pointing to their failure as evidence that this approach is wrong is plain bad logic. Was the problem really that abstinence doesn't work? Or was the *real* problem that our sex-obsessed culture makes pre-marital and extra-marital sex so utterly normal, that those who do try to be different come up against such enormous pressures and unpleasant taunts that only the most determined will stand? (I can't recall hearing much about tackling Chasteophobic bullying recently, can you?)

In other words, it's no good arguing that abstinence programs don't work in a culture that has been designed to make them fail. And telling children that they need to make sure they are wearing safety gear when the cultural juggernaut comes hurtling towards them is not really what you would call "a solution."

The problem is the cultural juggernaut itself, and the real issue is whether we want to continue thinking that premarital and extra-marital sex are the norms, or whether we are prepared to make a wholesale shift in the way we think about sex. The latter is of course the unthinkable concept, since it would apparently result in clocks going back.

On the other hand, though the former approach won't mess with the clocks, it will guarantee your culture a plethora of STIs.

That's the trade-off. Now make your choice.

Conclusion

Here's the thing. Two cultures. One treats sex as entirely separated from procreation and marriage, and most people accept that view and live accordingly. The second links sex with marriage and procreation, and most people accept that view and live within its parameters.

Question: Even if the first one has all sorts of "encouragements to safe-sex" going on, which one is more likely to have the most STI's? Clocks notwithstanding, that's not a hard question, is it?

Rob Slane

© 2019
www.christianstudylibrary.org

¹James Gallagher's "Super-gonorrhoea's spread 'causing huge concern'" posted to BBC.co.uk on April 17, 2016