

## Stop Pretending Sex Never Hurts

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Every day we hear about something that is harmful to us, something the government needs to regulate or outlaw, something for which an avalanche of public service announcements must be unleashed on the American people as they drive home from work, watch television, or scan their favorite websites.

Don't eat sugar. You'll get diabetes and die. Don't smoke. You'll get lung cancer and die. Don't stop at McDonalds. You'll get fat and die.

Meanwhile there's not a peep about one of the most dangerous activities people engage in all the time—premarital sex. Or extramarital sex. Or, dare I say the word—fornication? Or does that make me sound too judgmental? Probably, but the word fits because sex is loaded with moral implications: The possibility of dysfunctional relationships, of sexually transmitted diseases, of an unwanted pregnancy or abortion. The possibility of guilt, shame, depression, and suicide.

Does this sound dramatic? Over the top? Maybe, but it's true. Sex can be dangerous. Yet, we either promote it for political purposes, exploit it in the name of entertainment—even for our children—or brush it off in the name of personal liberty.

### Yes, Sex Is a Big Deal

This last point is significant because I want to make it clear I'm not saying government should regulate people's sexual behavior, and I'm not even suggesting that conservatives start their own barrage of PSAs speaking out against the dangers of sex. What I am asking for is some perspective, some tolerance of those who speak about the costs of this highly sexualized age without being driven from the halls of public debate as if they're witch hunters brandishing torches of judgment and blame.

When I hear people talk about sex as if it's no big deal, as if it's no different than eating a steak or going for a drive on the freeway, when I see ads comparing voting to losing your virginity, or when I hear social conservatives slapped down when they voice their objections to a licentious culture, my heart grieves.

That's because I'm picturing the girl walking home alone after having sex on the beer-drenched floor of a fraternity house with a guy too drunk to remember her name. The tears on her cheeks. The tightness in her chest, the sick feeling deep inside, and the already-hardening effect of knowing she will do it again.

I'm remembering a young girl who came to me with scars on her wrists and tremors in her soft voice as she told me about the day she aborted her baby. She wept uncontrollably in my arms for an innocence, a life, she would never have again, her dark eyes filled with a sorrow that only the greatest amount of love and grace could ever wash away.

I'm thinking of the boy who sits in a bathroom, alone, staring at a lab report that says he is HIV-positive. A sense of hopeless desperation wells up within him like a flood of dark water as he tries to breathe, to fight back the overwhelming fear that threatens to drown him. His life is forever changed. A precious gem exchanged for a handful of dust. I hear his sobs as he leans on the side of the tub begging for comfort no human can fully give.

## The Stats Are No Joke

An estimated 8,300 young people between 13 and 24 **reported** to the Centers for Disease Control in 2009 that they had been diagnosed with the HIV infection. **From 2008 through 2011**, among adult and adolescent males, the annual number of diagnosed HIV infections attributed to male-to-male sexual contact *increased*. At the end of 2010, nearly 873,000 people reported having HIV.

Nearly half of the 19 million new sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) each year are among young people 15 to 24 years. Chlamydia and gonorrhea cases are highest in Americans between 15 and 24.

More than 400,000 teen girls aged 15 to 19 years old gave birth in 2009, and while teen birth rates are at an historic low, the teen birth rate in the United States remains **one of the highest** among other industrialized countries.

While both men and women are severely affected by STDs, women face the most serious long-term health consequences. If they're left untreated, STDs can silently steal a woman's chance to have children later in life. It's **estimated** that undiagnosed STDs cause approximately 24,000 women to become infertile each year. Syphilis **rates** are on the rise; they have been the highest every year among women 20 to 24 years old.

Abortion **statistics** are even more bleak. There have been approximately 50 million abortions performed in the U.S. from 1973 to 2011. A total of 35 percent of pregnant teens have an abortion. While abortion decreased by 3 percent from 2009 to 2010, more than 765,000 women **reported** to the CDC that they had an abortion.

Women who **abort** are four times more likely to die within a year than women who don't get an abortion. Women who aborted in the year before their death were 60 percent more likely to die of natural causes, seven times more likely to die of suicide, and 14 times more likely to die from homicide. Abortion is linked to smoking, drug abuse, suicide, violent behavior, and eating disorders.

## People Have a Right to Know

Yes, a woman has a right to do what she wants with her body. Yes, men and women can engage in all kinds of sexual behavior if they want to. But does that mean we should ignore the consequences? Remain silent to the costs? Refuse to issue warnings because we're afraid we'll be called judgmental or worse?

If we're going to warn people of the perils of Big Gulps and French fries, shouldn't we warn them of the dangers of sex? If we're going to go so far as ban sugary drinks and salt, shouldn't we at least advocate abstinence?

What kind of society celebrates, perpetuates, and capitalizes on a behavior that can hurt so deeply, that robs people of their innocence, their happiness, and even their lives? Is that compassion?

Who are the truly compassionate ones? Those who celebrate actions that lead to depression, dysfunction, and brokenness? Or those who lovingly warn that there is a better way—a way that celebrates the best of who we can be, not the worst of what we're free to do.

*This **post** originally ran at Ricochet.*

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