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The Battles over Sex Education: History, Politics, and Practice

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Introduction

Sex education has always been a controversial aspect of education and has endured numerous changes due to the dispute surrounding it. Since the beginning of the 20th century, debates over sex education have been prominent in schools throughout the country. Already by 1919 there was a call for education about “the moral, the normal, the healthful, the helpful, and the esthetic aspects” (Carter 2001, p.233) and a move away from teaching solely about disease prevention. In 1964, as sex was becoming more visible to youth via a more overt media targeted at teens in particular, the private organization SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) was created to challenge inadequate sex education. With the creation of SIECUS, opponents no longer remained quiet because there was now a clear target to attack. Right Wing groups lashed out at comprehensive sex education programs. Thus, the sex education battle was born and has remained vigorous to this day.

There have been several policy changes in recent history that have affected sex education throughout the country and there is far from a cohesive stance about whether these policies were the correct ones to implement and whether or not they have been successful. While the policies that have had the greatest effect on sex education were put into place beginning in the 1980s, the ferocious sex education battle really began in the ‘60s. There were many social and cultural changes from the 1960s-1980s that caused such policies to be executed. These policies and practices reflect a very conservative government that views sex education as a way to promote traditional ideas about sex. Thus, this paper will partly focus on these policy changes and what promoted their conception. What social and cultural shifts from the 1960s to now caused policy changes in sex education in the United States? There is another part to this question that needs to be addressed. While an overwhelming majority of schools require abstinence-only education, is

this necessarily the type of education parents want their children to receive? To what extent do current sex education programs and policies indicate parents' desires for their children's education and to what extent do they reflect political controversy? To explore this question further, I will shift the concentration to one state, Connecticut, and examine how national social and cultural shifts are reflected in Connecticut's policies. What federal funding is Connecticut receiving and what does this reveal about Connecticut's sex ed programs in relation to the rest of the country?

While there still remains a great deal of controversy surrounding sex education and how it should be taught, abstinence-only has achieved the greatest victory in this battle. Abstinence-only programs teach adolescents to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage and have as their exclusive purpose teaching the health, social, and psychological gains that come with abstaining from sex. Information about contraception is not provided except in discussing their failure rates. The government has supported such programs as opposed to comprehensive sex education programs, which stress abstinence for youth while also discussing issues such as contraception, masturbation, homosexuality, and abortion. Federal funding has been developed that is offered only to states providing abstinence-only sex education. Schools utilize this type of education so that they can receive such funding. The victory of abstinence-only over comprehensive sex education reflects immense social and cultural shifts throughout the United States and these changes are reflected in the sex ed policies utilized by Connecticut. While abstinence-only remains the most frequent type of sex education all over the country, this does not reflect the majority opinion of parents with children receiving such education.

Sex education is an important aspect of public health. Teenage pregnancy and the spread of STDs is a growing problem throughout the country, as there are more than 40,000 new

infections of HIV nationally every year, and over 50% of these are estimated to be in people under the age of 25 (“Coordinated School”, 2006). The Department of Education realizes the need for STD/HIV prevention classes, as in 2005 91% of high school students in Connecticut reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school (State Profile 2005, p. 3). There is clearly an understanding that while teaching about such topics is contentious and the debate surrounding it remains, education is necessary. Given the fact that sex ed policy is shaped by controversy, it is important to understand how that controversy has evolved over time and how policy has responded. It is also important to recognize the need for some type of sex education. Even those advocating abstinence-only realize that AIDS and STDs are obvious issues in today’s adolescents’ lives and need to be addressed. I hope that this project will provide insight into the evolution of the sex education battle and present Connecticut as a participant in the ever-changing world of sex education.

Methodology

For my research project I used mostly secondary sources to trace the cultural shifts and policy changes throughout the United States, how the sex education battle developed, and how policies have affected sex ed programs in Connecticut. These secondary sources provided a great deal of background knowledge about how the sex ed battle was born, who the key figures were in the debate, and a history of policies relating to sex education. I conducted historical and archival research and coupled various secondary sources together, allowing me to form a thorough understanding of the history of the sex ed battle and what has caused it to be so controversial. For the portion devoted to Connecticut I relied mainly on curriculum frameworks provided by

the State Department of Education. I also utilized SIECUS's state profile to examine what policies Connecticut is implementing and what funding it is receiving.

When conducting this research I originally looked mainly for un-biased material that would allow me to view these issues from various perspectives. Yet, the majority of data that I found in fact did have a clear opinion about the sex ed controversy, mainly that abstinence-only sex education is insufficient and the popular opinion supports implementing comprehensive sex education. Thus while examining this information I made a concerted effort to read the material with an open mind and not base my findings on previously stated arguments, but rather to form my own. While analyzing policy documents I was searching for themes that may have reflected national trends in the sex ed debate. To do so I focused on what type of language was used. Was there mention of religion? Was there an emphasis made about specific ideas or on certain words? I was looking to see if and how these policies reflected the sex education controversy.

The Battle Begins

The sex education battle began earlier than many people assume. At the end of the 19th century there was increasing concern about the spread of venereal disease, one of the reasons that people were drawn into a widespread public conversation about the transmission of sexual knowledge. "By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, sex education had become a focal point for debates about the condition of the American family, which was commonly assumed to serve as an index to the state of the nation" (Carter, p. 216). Access to sexual information meant for people a solution to the significant problem of proliferating venereal disease. Many people feared that information and beliefs derived from vulgar or commercial sources might be inaccurate or encourage promiscuity. Education had the power to either confuse

and corrupt students, or enlighten them. For this reason, even the most enthusiastic sex educators expressed reluctance about teaching sex. “Sex educators feared that their teachings might arouse precocious sexuality, and this apprehension shaped their entire program. In particular, the educators’ fear of prematurely debauching their adolescent students led them to emphasize their scientific status” (Moran 2000, p. 48). Thus, the sex education movement began in the beginning of the 20th century with definite reservations, focusing on disease prevention and hygiene. While there was a public discourse occurring about sex education, there was no specific organization promoting it and so while there was some opposition and concerns, for the most part opponents stayed quiet because there was no one that they could directly attack.

By the 1920s a general consensus began to emerge that too much emphasis on disease was improper preparation for healthy adult sexuality. Yet while society seemed to want to teach more in sex education, the majority of sex ed classes were still aimed towards “preventing disease and immortality rather than on preparing for sexual maturity” (Moran, p. 99). In 1939 the Supreme Court rejected the Comstock laws (passed in 1871; classified contraceptives as obscene and prohibited any sharing of contraceptive information) and with this decision the movement began to pick up. Throughout the 1940s the Public Health Service pushed for sexual education and there was increasing support for broader sex education and social hygiene. By the 1950s, during the middle of the baby boom, the focus of sex education programs began to shift towards family living. Sex education was transformed into family life education, which was intended to “raise the standards of home life and enable people of all ages to live more constructively” (Moran, p. 138). Teachers deemphasized sex ed and focused on daily living, discussing marriage in depth, parental responsibilities, and dating, barely mentioning anything about sexual activity except that one should not engage in it before marriage. The movement for family life education

attempted to train adolescents to conform to middle-class family standards. While some tension existed about sex education and how it should be taught, the opposition was still largely quiet because there was no one organization to denounce. This set the scene for the major sex education battles to begin in the 1960s.

In the 1960s sex was becoming much more visible to youth through the media and public discussion about sex was markedly different than it had been in previous decades. “In venues from pornography to the theatre to women’s magazines, the media in the early to mid-sixties screamed sex” (Irvine 2002, p. 19). Adolescents were not formally learning about sex but rather gaining knowledge from these sources. Schools were only a significant source of sexual information for about 8% of teens (Irvine, p. 19). Thus, in response to the growing sexuality in the culture, a group of crusaders for comprehensive sex education stepped out in May 1964 to form SIECUS. A comprehensive sex education curricula focuses on abstinence but provides students with information about contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other controversial topics. “SIECUS espoused the ideal of sexual liberalism, which celebrated sexuality and pleasure as long as they were controlled within marriage or stable heterosexual relationships” (Irvine, p. 19). SIECUS held to the belief that youth need to be completely informed about sex to make wise decisions. The conception of SIECUS began the sex education movement toward comprehensive sexuality and gained a great deal of support. By the decade end, a number of organizations had circulated guidelines for comprehensive sex ed programs.

Now there existed an organization with stated objectives regarding how sex should be taught and opponents no longer remained quiet. Right Wing groups such as the John Birch Society and the Christian Crusade attacked the organization. There was a strong religious critique to the anti-sex education movement. While the debates over what material should be

taught gained fervor, by 1968 nearly 50% of all schools were offering some version of sex education (Moran, p. 170). From the late 1960s to early 1970s, opposition took the form of attacks aimed at barring any form of sex education and were fueled by Right Wing groups. As schools expanded and revitalized sex ed programs throughout the '70s, the Christian Right was gaining power. Cultural conservatives who made up these groups were roused by the formation of SIECUS and the high visibility and political gains won by feminism and the lesbian/gay movement. "Following *Roe v. Wade*(1973), liberals and feminists won a steady series of court cases guaranteeing poor and teenage women's rights to birth control information and services, and Washington and the states responded by establishing major programs to provide them" (Levine 2002, p.96). Women were gaining control of their sexual freedom, which led to a report published by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in 1976 announcing a national epidemic of teenage pregnancy. While statistics did not support this, the idea of a teenage-pregnancy epidemic caused public anxiety about teenage girls' now more liberated sex lives. Politically, this benefited both conservatives and liberals. Liberals argued for education for sexually active youth to keep them safe and inform them of the dangers facing them, while conservatives tried to reign in the education, arguing that it only encouraged sexual activity. To them, sex education in the public schools symbolized an increasingly immoral sexual culture. The conservative view began to gain popularity in the 1970s with the rise of pro-family politics.

The '70s "marked the clear articulation of pro-family politics, a development that would prove vital to the success of New Right and Christian Right" (Levine, p. 96). Activists in the 1970s pro-family movement compacted their opposition to a series of social issues including abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, and sex education under a pro-family rubric. They addressed fear and confusion among some Americans arising from the tumultuous

social changes occurring at the time, such as the structures of families, reproductive issues, and social acceptance of lesbians and gay men. The movement pointed to teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual openness in the media, and other changes of the increasingly sexualized society of the 70s as evidence of moral decline. To these activists, sex education in the public schools represented a progressively increasing immoral society and destroying it became a high priority for pro-family organizations. Public opinion had generally favored sex education since the 1960s and so the movement had to have strong arguments to change people's opinions. This movement provided coherence and infrastructural power to the oppositional voices that had previously spoken out in the 60s. "Their ways of thinking and talking about sex education appealed not only to many religious conservatives. Parents could be frightened by allegations about their own school programs, and those anxious about changes in the sexual culture might easily response to the secularized arguments crafted by Christian Right national organizations" (Irvine, p. 80). The movement made parents fearful of the effects sex education would have on their children during a time when the concern over teen pregnancy was so strong and women were gaining newfound sexual freedom. In the late 70s, Christian evangelicals began to capitalize on this anxiety about sex education and expand their anti-sex education movement. They fought to remove sex education from all schools and accused SIECUS of encouraging sexual activity amongst adolescents.

The AIDS epidemic of the 1980s irrevocably changed sex education in the United States. In 1986 U.S. General C. Everett Koop issued a report calling for comprehensive AIDS and sex education in public schools. Koop's report helped promote sex ed, partially due to the fact that at the time people felt such an urge to do whatever possible to stop the epidemic. Sex education suddenly became much more visible as an extremely important defense against the spreading of

AIDS, as many people felt that knowledge was a vital prevention tool. “The AIDS crisis deepened the politicization of sex education even further, for by inducing far more school districts to add some sort of education to their offerings, it multiplied the possible sites for controversy, and by making certain sexual behaviors a matter of life or death, it imparted to these controversies a grim intensity” (Moran, p. 205). In 1987 CDC (Centers for Disease Control) began to disburse \$310 million over the next several years to states that would mandate AIDS education. In 1991, CDC devoted approximately \$82.1 million to the problem of adolescent AIDS, most of it going to educational programs. The combination of money and fear had an impact. By 1990, at least 41 states encouraged or required sex education, and all either recommended or mandated AIDS education in public schools (Moran, p. 208).

AIDS marked an important dividing line in the Right Wing’s approach to sex education. The health crisis made it less viable for conservatives to call for the dismantling of school sex education programs, as they could not justify a total ban on the subject. “Instead, the Right responded with a new tactic: fear-based, abstinence-only education” (Pardini 2002, p. 2). The Right shifted its argument from asserting that sex education should not be a subject taught in schools to accepting it but only under specific terms. Conservatives launched a national project to establish chastity among youth and emphasized that sex is only blessed within marriage. During this time, abstinence-only seemed an attractive option to many due to the fear of contracting AIDS. If youth were taught to not engage in any sexual activity until they were married, they would halt the progression of the AIDS epidemic.

In conjunction with the Right Wing’s new proposal for abstinence-only sex education, the AFLA (Adolescent Family and Life Act) was passed under the Reagan administration in 1982 and reauthorized in 1984. AFLA was designed to prohibit any discussion of abortion

services in its programs with young women and promote chastity and self-discipline among youth. It was an attempt to shift the discourse on the prevention of teenage pregnancy away from contraception and instead to chastity or morality, accompanying the new ideas about how sex education should be taught being promoted by conservatives. The act sought to further the Right's cultural and political goals and was in direct opposition to the comprehensive sex programs that organizations such as SIECUS were promoting. "AFLA was evidence of a cultural clash between those like SIECUS and Planned Parenthood, who supported a pluralist sexual value system, and those like Christian evangelicals, who demanded adherence to biblical sexual morality. Depending on your standpoint, AFLA was a blessing or a debacle" (Irvine, p. 91). Conservatives felt that they were finally being acknowledged. To them, AFLA interrupted what they saw as an unfair federal privileging of comprehensive sex education. However to critics, AFLA was an example of the state providing structural support and therefore justifying a specific set of religious values. The law mandated that for a program to qualify for funding, it must involve a religious group (a portion of the law that was removed in 1993, when it changed to stating that funding would not be provided if an organization had any religious affiliation). Thus, only religious groups that were anti-abortion would qualify for funding.

There was a transformation in conservative discourse on sex education between the 1960s and the 1980s. A shift occurred from outright opposition to sex education to support for alternative programs which adhered to evangelical sex and gender values. AFLA helped secure the switch in sex education debates from conflict over whether sex education should be taught in public schools to conflict over what type of curriculum should be offered. "Suddenly there was an important choice: Would young people in the public schools be taught a curriculum that

included information about birth control and safer sex, or would they only be taught to abstain from all sexual activity until marriage?” (Irvine, p.107).

From the late 1980s into the ‘90s, AFLA-funded curricula flourished. At the turn of the 21st century, most public schools offered one form of sex education. Conservatives strived to channel federal funds to abstinence-only programs and in 1996 succeeded with the passing of TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) Act. The act included Title V of the Social Security Act and under Title V, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services allocated \$50 million in federal funds every year to states for sex ed programs with rigid abstinence-only guidelines. With the passage of Title V came an eight point federal definition of abstinence-only education which all programs that receive funds must adhere to. With this act, even as the debate between comprehensive sex ed and abstinence-only sex ed continues, comprehensive sex ed organizations are now on the defense. While organizations such as SIECUS are still fighting to put more comprehensive sex education programs in schools, they are struggling against federal support for abstinence-only programs. The amount of money provided for these programs and the number of states taking advantage of those funds has continued to rise. Since the inception of abstinence-only until marriage programs in 1982 with the passing of the AFLA act, federal spending on these programs has increased dramatically. In the end, every state has applied for the federal abstinence-only money at some point except for California.

A Parental Perspective

While abstinence-only education and policies supporting this type of education have prevailed, the widespread view amongst parents reveals a different opinion of what they want their children to be learning. The majority of parents contend that they would prefer their

children to receive more comprehensive sex education. 67% of adults agree with the statement that “money should be used to fund more comprehensive sex education programs that include information on how to obtain and use condoms and other contraceptives” (“Public Support for”, 2004). Multiple studies have obtained results showing that while parents support an emphasis on abstinence, they want more comprehensive sex education programs. Yet, the U.S. government's support for abstinence-only education doesn't coincide with the widespread support for comprehensive sex education. What does this reveal about the political controversy surrounding the sex ed debate?

In the 20th century, there has been a general tendency to think of sexuality and adolescence in terms of danger. “Teenage pregnancy and the AIDS epidemic have buttressed a peculiarly American disposition to view adolescent sexuality as a hazard, and intensified the impulse for educators to regulate adolescent desire”(Moran, p.216). The main discourse around sex and teenagers is that they are not mature enough to handle it and need to be protected from the dangers associated with sex, such as pregnancy and disease. The abstinence-only movement has latched onto this fear and used it to promote their cause. Who would argue with preventing children from potential perils? “Americans are still convinced that teen pregnancy is pandemic, and in a time of sex-borne death, containing the exchange of adolescent bodily fluids is an attractive notion” (Levine, p.101). Parents want to protect their children and thus it would be easy to assume that because abstinence-only has won the sex ed battle and is being promoted as preventing children from harm, parents support this type of sex education.

However, research has shown much evidence to the contrary. A large part of this is due to the ineffectiveness of such programs to achieve what they preach. In 1997, six studies had been published showing that abstinence-only classes did not delay intercourse in adolescents. A

comparison has been made to sex ed programs in many European countries, where sex education begins earlier. European programs are “informed by a no-nonsense, even enthusiastic, attitude toward the sexual; it is explicit; and it doesn’t teach abstinence” (Levine, p.102). Studies have shown that in western European countries while teenagers have as much as sex as their peers in America, rates of teen pregnancy, abortion, and AIDS in every western European country are a fraction of our own (Levine, p.102). Parents have realized that while in theory abstinence-only sex ed programs are protecting their children and promoting a safer way of life, in reality this is not the case. There are more unwanted teenage pregnancies, abortions, and teenagers contracting HIV in this country than opposed to elsewhere where more comprehensive programs are employed. Consequently, parents have been found to support the implementation of comprehensive sex ed programs.

The majority of American adults champion teaching about sex in school. In fact, the first Gallup poll, conducted in 1943, found 68% of parents favoring it and even the heaviest right-wing fire in the 1980s and 1990s didn’t manage to erase this support, which consistently bested at 80% (Levine, p.109). In a recent study 1,110 U.S. adults were surveyed and 82% supported programs that discuss abstinence as well as other methods for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Half of the adults were in complete opposition to abstinence-only education (“Few Americans”, 2006). Even among self-described conservatives, 70% supported comprehensive sex ed and 40% opposed the abstinence-only strategy (“Few Americans”). Other studies have obtained similar results. The SIECUS Fall 2004 Report includes a fact sheet compiling the results of numerous national and statewide surveys regarding sex education. The results are in accordance to previous studies finding that parents support comprehensive sex ed. 93% of parents of high school students believe that birth control and other methods of preventing

pregnancy are appropriate topics for sex education programs, 79% of parents believe information on how to put a condom on is appropriate, 85% of parents believe information on how and where to get contraceptives is appropriate, and 76% believe masturbation is an appropriate topic (“Public Support for”). In order for abstinence-only programs to receive federal funding, they must not include any mention of birth control and condoms unless it is to emphasize their failure rates. Thus, from these statistics it is clear that the majority of parents are in support of comprehensive sex education, even though this is not what is occurring in schools throughout the country.

Sex education has continued to become even more political in the past few decades with the federal government supporting strict-abstinence only until marriage programs and the findings depicted above “highlight a gap between policy, science and public opinion” (“Few Americans”). The contrasting views between governmental authorities and parents showcase the political controversies that have continuously been a part of sex education since its inception. It is clear that conservatives and the Christian Right have been more powerful in this fight than liberals and those advocating comprehensive sex ed programs. The taboos surrounding sex and discussions about sex have aided the Right’s victory. “Sexuality issues, in particular sex education, facilitated the Christian Right’s rise to political power” (Irvine 194). Historically, there is a stigma attached to sex and it is extremely difficult for a society to see something that has always been controversial in a new light. Conservative organizations have used language that reproduces sex in these ways and have instilled fear in parents and governmental authorities. It is disturbing to hear the Christian Right’s allegations that children are being taught deviant sex behaviors and accusations that teaching about contraceptives will increase sexual activity amongst teenagers. Even though it has been proven that such statements are false, due to the

uncomfortableness around sex in our society it is not that difficult to be convinced of these claims.

The AIDS outbreak and ideas about a teenage pregnancy epidemic gave room for conservative groups to show what awful consequences come from sex before marriage and gave reason for people to listen to their suggestions on how to prevent these outcomes from continuing. Due to previous views on sex, it was not difficult to gain support for abstinence-only programs. “Conservatives have drawn on the tenacious power of sexual shame and fear to galvanize residents to oppose comprehensive programs” (Irvine, 1993). What is evident from the dissonance between governmental support for abstinence-only programs and the steady decline of comprehensive sex education programs despite enormous support is that the government has a particular stance on sex, one that is in agreement with conservatives and the Christian Right, and is not willing to take into consideration evidence that does not adhere to this position.

Connecticut as a Participant

Federal involvement in promoting abstinence-only sex education began in 1982 with AFSA. Since then, congress has added two new federal funding programs: Title V and funding for community organizations (including faith-based) within the maternal and child health (MCH) block grant, adopted in 2000. While there is a great deal of federal funding now available, education in the United States is largely decentralized, meaning sex education policy is determined at the state level. Thirty-nine states require that some education related to sex be provided throughout the state, 21 require that both sexuality and STD education be provided, and 11 states leave the decision of what to teach entirely up to local school districts (Gold & Nash

2001, p. 4). Connecticut receives funding for abstinence-only programs and its policies exhibit issues that are seen in the sex ed debate throughout the country.

Connecticut does not require schools to teach sex education, but does require that schools teach human growth and development and disease prevention. However, it does require abstinence-only education in school districts that provide sex education. In 2005, Connecticut received \$330,484 in federal Title V funding. The state has focused on 4 sections of the government's 8-point definition of abstinence education. This means that any funded program must

- a. Have as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity
- b. Teach that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems
- c. Teach young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances
- d. Teach the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity ("State Profile", 2005)

Connecticut, like almost every other state in the country, is receiving federal funds to provide abstinence-only sex education programs with the aforementioned guidelines. While these restrictions on the type of sex education provided give insight into how the controversy about sex education has influenced Connecticut's policy, the curriculum frameworks provided by the State Department of Education demonstrate how its practices have been affected.

The Health and Safety Education Curriculum and the Healthy and Balanced Living frameworks provide great insight into how sex education is regarded in Connecticut. The frameworks are crucial documents in grasping what Connecticut's official views on sex education are as well as how they reflect the general themes in sex education. The overarching goal of the Health and Safety curriculum is that by the end of the 12th grade, students will have

developed and maintained behaviors that promote lifelong health. At the beginning of the framework, the k-12 content standards are provided. There are 4 standards: healthy and active life, injury and disease prevention, human growth and development, and substance abuse prevention. Only in the third standard is there an exception stated, which reads “It is the responsibility of the local school district to allow parents and guardians to exercise their right to exempt their children from instruction in human sexuality. Local school districts are responsible to develop a curriculum that is presented in an age-appropriate manner” (p. 43). In no other curriculum framework is such an exception made. This speaks to the trend in virtually all sex ed programs throughout the country, which is that learning about sex is a choice. Parents can choose whether or not they want their child to learn about sex. “A tactic initially used to defuse community opposition, these forms also stack up as de facto acquiescence to a parental “right” over their children’s sexuality” (Levine, p.110) Parents are in charge of what their children learn about this sensitive topic and not up to the state to decide. All other standards the State Department of Education put forth are mandatory and important, but not sex education. This is “optional” education.

The language of the Health and Safety Curriculum Framework provides more examples of how Connecticut views sex education. The human growth and development content standard states, “Students will avoid behaviors that result in pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases” (p. 43). It does not state that children will learn how to avoid such behaviors but that they simply will steer clear of them. The framework also states that instruction will demonstrate ways to obtain information about human growth, development, and sexuality. It does not say that they will provide information but rather that they will teach ways to receive such information if so inclined. In addition, it is stated that such information can be obtained from family, health

professionals, responsible adults, and clergy. While the definition of clergy does mean any religious leader, to many it has a Christian connotation. I cannot argue whether this is intentional or not, but that a word with such an association was used suggests that the Christian Right has had an impact on Connecticut's practices and policies as well as those in most other states. The Christian Right has largely been responsible for the abstinence-only victory and its presence is clear in this document by using the term clergy. Another example of how language is important in this document is that students will identify the methods of contraception and the effectiveness of each. Yet, it does not say that students will learn how to use these methods of contraception to protect themselves.

The language throughout the document is that students will be provided with information but not shown how to use that knowledge. This is evident in the majority of sex ed programs throughout the country. Abstinence-only curriculums "typically omit any topic of discussions including masturbation, homosexuality, abortion, and contraception" (Irvine 2002, p. 101). While contraception is raised in the framework, the rest of these topics are not. And while contraception is brought up, it is only mentioned once and only in that methods will be identified, not discussed thoroughly. This has been the main subject of political controversy: what should be taught in sex education? Conservatives have won the battle and this is witnessed not only through governmental policies and funding but through the language exhibited in the Connecticut's Health and Safety Curriculum Framework.

The Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework also provides insight into Connecticut's official views on sex education. There are 14 standards put forth in this framework and 5 of those standards mention sex education:

1. Comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention

2. Demonstrate the ability to access valid health information and health-promoting products and services,
4. Analyze the influence of culture, media, technology, and other factors on health
6. Demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health
8. Demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health (p. 7)

The organization of this framework is the most revealing. Whenever sex is mentioned, it is put at the end of the content standard, suggesting that is less important than the other concepts. For example, “identify and discuss causes, modes of transmission, symptoms and prevention methods of communicable and non-communicable diseases” (p. 13) comes after 8 other goals. Similar set ups are depicted in every content standard where anything involved with sex is mentioned. This is a clear depiction of how important Connecticut views sex education. Learning about sex comes last, after other more important lessons. This reiterates the view that it is optional and parents can opt-out of having their children learn about it because it isn’t crucial to their success. This also relates to the stigmatization of sex and discussing it with children. Historically sex is a taboo topic meant only for adults and the language surrounding it reflects this longstanding opinion. “Much of the symbolic power of aversive rhetorics derives from the stigma historically attached to sex” (Irvine, p.195). By inserting these standards at the end, it is not placing them directly on your face or giving them great importance. It is merely stating them within the context of other goals; to support other objectives.

Parents in Connecticut are also in accord with national research that has found parents to be in support of comprehensive sex education programs despite abstinence-only programs being implemented in almost every state. 75% of adults believe schools should teach both abstinence *and* contraception, 59% oppose current policy that funds teaching only abstinence and prohibits information about condoms and birth control to prevent pregnancy and/or disease, and 77% of African Americans, 62% of whites, and 58% of Hispanics said that they would take action to

support a change in school policy if they found out their school does not provide information about condoms and birth control (“Speak Out” 2006). Thus, it is clear from viewing curriculum frameworks, looking at what funding it is receiving, and hearing parent’s perspectives on the topic, that Connecticut is in sync with national trends and controversies surrounding the sex education debate. The state is receiving federal funds in spite of the majority of parents wanting a more comprehensive program, sex education is not mandatory in schools and if it is available, children are not required to receive it, and language is used that has religious connotations. All of this together shows how the controversy around sex education has affected Connecticut.

Conclusion

There has been political controversy surrounding sex education since its inception. As sex became more visible through media and with the creation of SIECUS, opponents no longer remained quiet because there was an obvious target to attack. Right Wing groups lashed out at comprehensive sex education programs. In the end, they won the battle over those advocating comprehensive sex ed with federal funding for states that provide abstinence-only sex education. Even though today the debate over sex education continues, comprehensive sex ed organizations are now on the defense. While organizations such as SIECUS are still fighting to put more comprehensive sex education programs in schools, they are struggling against the now more powerful abstinence-only education. Yet even though the government has supported abstinence-only sex education in a major way, parents do not agree with this type of education. Numerous studies have shown that parents support more comprehensive sex education programs in school. Thus it is clear that those in power have a clear view on what type of education they believe is appropriate and at the moment are unwilling to change their standpoint, regardless of popular

opinion. It is clear that Connecticut's policies and practices reflect the national trends in the sex education battle, one that is likely to continue for decades to come.

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