



Reading

This reading was developed using teen message boards on the internet.

Queen: What are your feelings on sex?

(I.E. waiting until you're married, its effect on a relationship, people who play each other just to "get some", laws against sex in certain situations, what it means to you, etc...) Kind of a weird topic, I guess... I'm just curious as to what other people think about it

*Apocalypse Now: I believe sex to be a gift from one another in a relationship. You don't need to have sex to know that you love someone. It's just that there's a point when you see it as a way to express something to your mate without words.

*Blue Eyed Hottie: I personally feel that sex is a very vulgar word, I prefer love making. I think sex is a personal experience to be discussed and participated in only with your lifetime mate. True it feels good, but unless you really love the person you're experiencing it with then you're missing out on the better half of sex.

Queen: I don't understand why so many people want to wait until their wedding night. Don't you love the person just as much when you get engaged to them? Or is it just a "biblical" thing?

*Frog: For me it is, but I also have thought about what sex could do to my life if I started now. I could also get diseases and so many other bad things. So, for me, it is my faith, and my knowledge on the subject. I don't want to get a kid before I get my drivers licence!

SuzanneSoGood: Sex before marriage is far from acceptable...think about it, do u really want to marry someone who has slept with 20 different people-ewww and what is a better wedding present than yourself-your body-your virginity. respect yourself and your body

Fox: Yeah, but marrying someone you end up not having real sexual chemistry with can kind of be a downer as well.

Drumdude: Just because someone chooses to have sex before two people are married doesn't automatically mean that they have no respect for each other or themselves. If someone wants to have sex with twenty people, then that's their choice. Society can't do anything about that. And it's not up to us to condemn that decision. That is the responsibility of the person making it. Virginity is overrated. So is sex.

Fisher: I* thought it was a really big deal to be a virgin for a while. I lost my virginity last out of all of my friends [at 17], but as long as you're comfortable with the idea, what's the point in abstaining? It's normal, it feels good, and it's fun. So do what you want.

*Bdgal: Sex can wait for me. i want to enjoy my youth while I can. but there are some cuties out there who make me wanna rush. if u no what i mean. i have this boyfriend and he really wants to do it now, how do i explain to him that I am not ready.

Queen: If he really cared about you as much as someone should before they're ready to have sex, he would be willing to wait until you're ready and comfortable with it.

Elk: I'd rather have sex before getting married, if only because it would be really lame to be fumbling and awkward on my theoretical wedding night.

*Friendofall: You know, you guys may not have thought of this yet because you're all too starry-eyed, but your sex life isn't everything. You can be perfectly happy with your true love for the rest of your life without having to... well, you know. ANYWAY, if you REALLY love them then sex really won't matter all that much in the end.

Snowgirl: I'm going to wait until the right time. I'm not going to say that it'll never happen until I'm married, nor am I going to say that I will have sex on my wedding night. I think that you should hold off until the right moment.



Message

At 2:00 on a Friday afternoon something very different was going to happen at Romney Central. Mr. Henley took all the grade 5 boys to one room and Mrs. Smith took us girls to another. Each group saw a film explaining in scientific terms the reproductive organs of both sexes and used slow moving animation and dramatic classical music to demonstrate how a sperm met an egg and created a baby. When the film ended, Mrs. Smith stood in front of us, smiling brightly, and handed out this pink book explaining menstruation.

I listened as hard as I could because I didn't want to miss a thing. Some things I'd been wondering about got a lot clearer, but other things still didn't make sense. Somehow, and don't ask me how, I left that class thinking that impregnation happened while the man and woman were sleeping. As they slept, the man's penis grew until it had stretched across the bed and entered the woman's vagina, depositing the sperm, and then shrinking back into the man. So, the way I figured it, if a woman and man didn't want a baby, all they had to do was wear pajamas. If they wanted a baby, they either went to bed naked or cut holes in their pajamas and the deed was as good as done!

How could something with such good intentions so badly miss the mark? Clearly, my sex education worked in some ways and was completely inadequate in others. Sad thing is, for most people, this is the kind of sex education they get. Last week I sent out a survey, asking people about the kind of sex education they received. Of those who responded, almost everyone between the ages of 25 and 50 had some version of the sex education I experienced, and while it provided some answers, it left most of us hungry. It gave us facts. It did not provide meaning. And we need both. Even the youngest child needs more than facts. It needs that spark that transforms facts into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.

The sex education most of us received barely touched the surface. Most of us had questions, big questions, that weren't touched. What about love? Would you feel like a different person once you lost your virginity? Would it hurt? When do you know it's right? How do you know if it's the right person? How do you know if you've performed well or did you make a fool out of yourself? Is everyone else doing it and you're not? Are you a prude if you don't do it and a slut if you do? Are you a wimp if you're a virgin and a stud if you get to home base? Is sex just for someone you love or can it just be for fun? These were the big questions and while biology lessons answered the questions about plumbing, they didn't touch on that bigger stuff.

So, we filled in the gaps on our own. We used our imaginations to give the facts we received the meaning we needed. We turned to television and the movies. We turned to our friends. We devoured our mother's harlequin romance novels and women's magazines or we turned to a father or older brother's porn stash. Sometimes we learned about sex just by doing it. Often too soon, often without the proper precautions, often with the wrong person. Some spend years trying to undo negative messages before you could truly enjoy sexual intimacy. Many of us still live with the repercussions of bad sexual choices. Others feel gratitude that our mistakes were rather harmless. Most of us wished we had more to guide us, more to direct us, more to help us make decisions about this most important part of our life.

One of the central concepts of Unitarian Universalism is the interdependence of life. Everything is connected into a larger whole. Disharmony in one part of that whole is disharmony everywhere. Healing in one part of the web of life is healing everywhere. Nothing is isolated, everything is dependent on everything else. When we are wounded or healed in one part of our lives, it affects everything else. Similarly, when one person in a community is wounded or healed, the entire community is affected. We are mind, body and spirit all intertwined. Sex and sexuality touches on all of that. Sex is of the body. It is of the mind and it is certainly of the spirit. This makes sex and sexuality profoundly religious and spiritual issues.

Another central concept of Unitarian Universalism is education. We are life long learners, constantly expanding to accommodate new knowledge about ourselves and our world, drawing it in, making it our own where it transforms into wisdom. The pursuit of truth is a holy journey for Unitarian Universalists.

We live in a culture that has a two thousand year history of both oppressing and fetishizing all that is sexual. What do I mean by that? We get primarily two messages about sex. On the oppressing side, sex is dangerous and sinful and has to be controlled. And on the other side, sex is made into a fetish. It takes over and is the most important thing in life. It completely defines you. Many churches have an oppressive approach to sexuality. Most advertising has a fetishizing approach to

sexuality. While they may seem like opposites, they're actually two sides of the same coin and feed on each other. The more sex is controlled, the more people are likely to react by fetishizing it. Alternatively, the more sex is turned into a fetish, the greater will be the reaction to control it.

This is what has happened in North America in the last 60 years. After the social chaos and upheaval of World War II, everyone just wanted life to get back to normal. American society became pretty conservative and controlled, especially in the area of sex and gender. By the late 1960s, many had had it with this conservatism, especially people in their teens and twenties. There was a massive social revolution and many were determined to throw every control off of sexuality. There was some really good stuff about the sexual revolution. The women's movement and the gay liberation movement freed people in so many ways and we are still reaping the benefits of those movements. But after a while things got out of control. There was such an emphasis on freedom that often responsibility got left behind.

This even affected our own churches. In the 1970s the free love movement entered our congregations through a small number of people excited by the possibilities of sexual exploration and boundary breaking. Even some ministers broke that iron clad rule against having intimate relations with their parishioners. The free love movement was pretty intense and left many hard feelings and deep questions about what it really meant to be free. Clearly there was something of merit in questioning assumptions, but when did the questioning turn into an excuse for self-indulgence? This was a difficult time in our history and there began to be some pushback within our churches for a more balanced approach to human sexuality.

But the pushback was nothing like what started developing in mainstream society. Some tried to turn the clock back to what life had been like before the women's movement, before gay liberation, before contraception. By the early 1980s, there was a growing conservative backlash against what many saw as the excesses of the 70s. What we're seeing today, with the rise of the religious right, with its dual focus on anti-choice and traditional family, is the culmination of over 30 years of an organized backlash.

This backlash has turned your minds and bodies into a cultural battleground for whose understanding of sex is going to win. Those in the helm of the conservative backlash would like to return young people to a state of innocence. Abstinence-only education contains only warnings about the unreliability and immorality of contraceptives and provides abstinence as the only answer. Many teens are being told that emergency contraception and birth control pills cause abortion, and that condoms leave you vulnerable to HIV. Anyone who questions abstinence-only education is quickly placed in the camp of those who promote promiscuity and no holds barred sex. Perhaps this is why the Democratic-controlled congress is dragging its feet about cutting tax dollars for abstinence-only education. Even though it's been proven not to work, no one wants to look like they support teens having sex. That would be suicide at the polls.

In this battle for the hearts and minds of the nation, we remain held in the grip of a social disease where sex is both dangerous and addictively desirable. And what that means is that all of us are left hungry. We are so hungry for healing, meaning, wisdom and wholeness, that we keep looking for ways to walk out of this destructive cycle.

About 25 years ago, still reeling from the free love movement, Unitarian Universalists looked at this two-sided coin and said, "There has got to be a different way. We want more than this for our children. We want more than this for ourselves. We believe in the interdependent web of all existence. We believe in the sacredness of education. So let's take our beliefs and our values, and let's find a way to give them to our children so they can find their way into a healthy responsible loving sexuality. Let's find a responsible way for our young people to explore who they are as sexual beings. Let's give them a safe place to ask their questions and to discern who they are, and let's do it in a way that strengthens their sense of being Unitarian Universalist."

The Unitarian Universalists developed one of the most progressive and comprehensive sex education curriculums any religious group has ever developed. It was based on five core values: self worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity. Subjects included human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. With its holistic approach to sexuality, our curriculum provided not only facts about anatomy and human development, but helped participants to clarify their values, build interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality.



"Why Sex Education is so Important"

Rev. Krista Taves

January 13, 2008

Emerson UU Chapel, Ellisville MO

What was shared in this morning's reading is the kind of conversation our sex education curriculum makes room for. It takes you from a place of receiving knowledge, to a place of making meaning, of developing your own wisdom. You find your own answers in a safe place surrounded by supportive adults and supportive peers.

We have certainly been criticized for our approach. We have been accused of giving our youth permission to be sexually promiscuous. We have been accused of playing into a homosexual and feminist agenda that will destroy the fabric of the traditional family. I know, because I have personally received hate mail saying exactly that.

But the results say something very different. When you look at those who have graduated from our sex ed classes over the last generation, a higher rate of Unitarian Universalists postpone having sex than do people with abstinence-only education, or facts-only education. When our young people do decide to become sexually active, they are more likely to think carefully before doing so, choose carefully who they engage in sex with, and are more likely to practice safer sex. What that means, is that our youth and young adults are less likely to experience some of the damage many of our older members have experienced with sex, they are less likely to have to undo negative psychological programming, less likely to experience unwanted pregnancies or to contract sexually transmitted diseases. Our approach is one of the most effective ways of reducing abortions, much more effective than abstinence-only fear based education.

And this puts us in a unique place. Many of our youth have become ambassadors to their generation. Because of the growing influence of abstinence-only miseducation, and I'm not going to mince words, it's mis-education, most of you have knowledge and wisdom that has been denied to your friends. This doesn't make you any smarter than them or better people. But, it does mean that you have been given a certain responsibility.

Another core concept of Unitarian Universalism is that the gifts we have been given are not ours to keep. They are to be given away, our gift to the world. As this church gave you the gift of knowledge, and opportunity for the development of wisdom, now it is time for you to pass on what you have learned. More and more of your friends are being given false information about sex which leaves them vulnerable. You are now resources for them. You are in a position to help them because of what you have learned here. When you hear something that you know to be incorrect, it is your responsibility to say something. If this feels like a big responsibility, it is. No one said being a person of faith was easy. But think of the consequences of being silent. Think of the harm that could come to your friends. If the thought of talking to your friends about sex sounds scary, you bet it is. But that doesn't mean it's not worth doing or trying.

We are called to be a light to the world in a time when many, out of fear and unknowing, caught in the destructive cycle of sex as illness or addiction, try to pull down the curtains of knowledge. We are called to witness to what life can be like when knowledge is welcomed, not resisted. Let's not shrink from the task.

Amen and blessed be.