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## A Course On Sexuality:

### Good Reasons Why Sex Must Be Discussed

By JUDY WOUK

"Can boys get boys pregnant?"

This was one of a series of questions which a group of adults responded to as if it had come from a teenager, during a course called ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY.

The course, which has been described as "the most innovative and dynamic education for human sexuality in the country", was developed by the Unitarian-Universalist Church, mainly for use in teenage Sunday school classes. I recently attended a weekend session of the course along with about 20 other adults and students.

#### SEX A COMPLICATED ISSUE

The question about boys getting pregnant may seem simple at first, but the group decided near the end of the session that if such a question does come from a youngster it may have several implications: It could have been prompted by a lack of knowledge about physiology, anatomy and 'where babies come from'; by fear of the consequences of same-sex behavior; or by hearing of transsexual operations, homosexual marriages, female impersonators or transvestites.

The course, which makes use of filmstrips, music, discussion groups and questionnaires, is aimed at fostering an atmosphere of communication in which young people can really bring up and discuss questions about sex.

It is not intended to promote a specific set of behaviors, but hopes to develop responsible, mature individuals who are able to make their own decisions while taking into account all the possible alternatives.

The course was developed over more than four years by ministers, religious educators, sex educators, doctors and teachers. The trainers our group had were Gene Navias, a Unitarian minister who is an education consultant, and Pat Schreiner, a consultant on family life education. Both were very much in tune with themselves and society.

Contrary to a great deal of criticism, the course is very concerned with the question of values. The role of the teacher, however, is never the expert who asks all the questions and knows all the answers. Instead, the teachers led the discussion and acted as resource persons.

#### CONTROVERSIAL MULTI-MEDIA RESOURCES

The course is unique in several respects. The most controversial is the explicitness of the multi-media resources -- there is one filmstrip, for example, which shows naked couples of the same sex in various degrees of intimacy. The course insists on frank, honest answers, not only on such "safe" topics as anatomy and physiology of conception, pregnancy and childbirth, but emotionally laden areas such as homosexuality, masturbation, lovemaking role of sex in today's society and other areas which are often avoided, with consequent misinformation, confusion, guilt, and fear.

The course has no predetermined beginning and end; the students, not the teachers, decide what topics to explore and in what order. It starts with the kids' interests and concerns, with "where they're at" rather than with what experts consider logical (which generally turns out to be anatomy). There is also flexibility as to the depth to which each subject is taken.

Another section of the course--the unit on love-making, begins with popular records about love, with the questions, "What sort of relationship did the individuals in the song have?" "Would you like to be involved in such a relationship?" In a mixed group, one thing that often comes out is that many popular songs degrade women to the level of an object of man's desire. The following week the group might see a filmstrip of great erotic art works, including many from other cultures.

Another resource is a filmstrip which shows three couples engaged in inter-

course from foreplay to completion, and obviously enjoying it. There is also a set of records of people discussing their first heterosexual lovemaking experience including a girl who started gradually with her future husband, one who was pressured into it and regretted it, and one who decided she was ready and so chose a boy to help her overcome her fear.

To the question "Should I or shouldn't I have intercourse?" the teachers don't give a blanket no, but they don't give a blanket yes, either. They encourage the young adult to think about such questions as "How will this affect me?", "How will it affect my relationship with my partner?", "If it turns out to be painful or bad, can I accept that?", "How would it affect my parents and others close to me?", "Do I know how to use contraceptives?" "Do I really want to do it, or am I being pressured into it by my peers, or lover, or my own fear of being 'out-of-it'?", "Can I accept my reputation being ruined if people find out?" "Do I know alternative ways of dealing with my sexual impulses -- such as masturbation, getting to orgasm, other forms of sex, cold showers and sports", "Do I know about the forms of VD and how to avoid it?"

Someone who makes a decision with these questions in mind is much more likely not to hurt others and himself, and to be comfortable with society, than someone who acts solely on the basis of fear and ignorance. A girl who has thought things through this way is less likely to get pregnant than one who is ashamed of her own sexuality and avoids contraceptives because "we just did it in the passion of the moment, and didn't think about it beforehand."

#### ASKED ABOUT OUR OWN VIEWS

The course puts a great deal of emphasis on training sessions, both for teachers and for parents, in which they are asked to think about their own background, attitudes and sexuality.

Participants were asked to consider where they personally stood on such questions as whether homosexuals should be allowed to marry when they have a permanent loving relationship, whether homosexuality is a disease or an acceptable alternative; what role necking and petting should play in the development of a pre-teen and teenager; and under what conditions premarital intercourse is acceptable. In exploring our own fears and hangups, we could then be more prepared to deal with those of others.

Does the course work? Yes, on several levels.

There are indications that there is less experimentation by young people who have clear information and data and also that sex offenders are persons who have not had clear sex education and access to explicit pictures.

Adults and students who participated felt that it gave them a sense of personal worth and direction, helping them to feel sexuality as part of total experience rather than an isolated segment. It also opened new avenues of discussion between parents and children.

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