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Young women and Sexuality

In American society today there are diverse views in regards to sexual behavior and not one particular view is perceived to be more correct than the other. Fortunately, I have grown up in a time where being a sexual person and being a woman is accepted. Sex is everywhere, it's in the movies we watch, it's in the art we see, and it's in the music we listen to. Today sex sells and the sexier something is the better. However, it has not always been like this and there were times when women were just thought of as objects used for procreation as well as to satisfy their husband's sexual appetites.

In the Victorian Era women were not suppose to experience sexual pleasure. Sex was not a topic to be discussed in polite society and it was certainly not something done for fun (Rathus, Nevid & Rathus 2008). Sex was only deemed appropriate when it was between a married man and women and done not for pleasure but rather for procreation. The topic of sex seemed to stay private even until the late 1930's. Prof. Kinsey an anthropologist had discovered that the American people were truly uneducated regarding sexual behavior, including him. Kinsey was disturbed and shocked by the lack of scientific literature about sex. Therefore, Kinsey decided to go out and study sex and sexual behaviors. He had interviewed a number of different people which included married couples, single men, women, and also gay and lesbians (Rathus, Nevid & Rathus 2008). Through his research he had discovered he was not alone and many people shared the same questions as him regarding sex. It truly was not until the 1960's and 70's when

significant changes in sexual practices and attitudes had occurred. Sex was being discussed more, and liberation in female sexuality had taken place (Rathus, Nevid & Rathus 2008). Now girls can be viewed just as sexual as men and it is completely normal for women to talk about sex. However, one must consider there are always some women who are more sexual than others and not everyone views regarding sex is the same. We live in a society filled with many different beliefs regarding sex and not one belief is seemed to be more correct than the other. This was a topic I had wished to further investigate. Therefore, I had interviewed three 22 year old women all in college but all having different views regarding sex. To insure privacy and confidentiality the real names of the participants will not be disclosed.

My first interviewee was a 22 year old virgin named Maggie who waiting for the right person to have sex with, my next was a 22 year old named Catherine with strong views surrounding sex and only having sex once in a monogamous relationship. Finally, my last participant was a 22 year old named “Missy” who was more open to sex and has had a number of sexual partners. I had asked the participants a variety of questions about their attitudes regarding sex as well as their own personal experiences. I wanted to get a further understanding of why these women felt the way they did in regards to sex as well as what might has possibly influenced theirs beliefs. The questions used in all three interviews were the same and each interview lasted about a half an hour.

When asking my participants how comfortable they were discussing sex, they all stated they were quite comfortable talking about sex with close friends. However, they all were not as comfortable sharing their own personal experiences. They felt that this was just too personal of a topic to share even with friends. Surprisingly, Maggie the virgin

seemed to be the most comfortable discussing sex as well as her own sexual experiences. However, she stated that she did not like to talk about sex with people who she didn't know, afraid she would be judged by others for being a virgin. All three participants have said they had experienced times when they felt as if they had to hide their personal views regarding sex out of fear they would be judge by others. I found this to be very interesting and truly demonstrated that the topic of sex is not as comfortable to discuss with others as I had originally thought. The women were more concerned with keeping their own personal views and experiences to themselves rather than discussing them. Furthermore, all three women had admitted to being judgmental towards others based on their sexual experiences. The virgin as well as Catherine who had strong views on sex both said they would probably look down upon girls who have already had sex with a large number of people. This also seemed to be the case with Missy, who stated she tends to be judgmental towards those who have not had a lot of experience with sex. Missy even states "If someone our age has not had sex yet I would think hmm what's wrong with you, I might have some inner prejudice at virgins." This particular statement truly stood out and I realized how much of our views regarding sex has changed. Virginity used to be cherished and something kept sacred until marriage. Now it seems that virginity is something to be ashamed of and kept hidden due to fear of being made fun of by others.

Before getting into questions of their personal experiences regarding sex I wanted to know if there was any particular individuals or situations that have possibly influenced these three women's views. Surprisingly all three women said their parents really never talked to them about sex, therefore they believed they had no influence on them what so ever. It was by observing and talking with their friends that they all believed contributed

to their attitudes regarding sex. All three women had believed their views on sex have not changed due to college, but college has made them more open to discussing sex. By being in college there were exposed to a lot more things. Missy had especially felt this way, stating that by being in college she felt that promiscuous sexual behavior was accepted and “it was not big deal to go home with a guy you just met at the bar.” I tried to find a better understanding for possible factors that made Missy’s view on sex so different than the other girls. I came to the conclusion that Missy’s friends in high school could have had a significant influence on why she had felt the way she did about sex. Compared to the two other girls Missy had gone to a big high school and by age 15 she was the last out of her friends to have sex. She said there were times where she had felt left out when her friends would talk about sex and was waiting for her time to come. If Missy had associated herself with friends who were not so open to sex then maybe she wouldn’t of have been too. The other two girls Catherine and Maggie had both attended extremely small high schools both with a graduating class under 100. The girls had also both stated that their friends never really talked about sex and students weren’t really having sex with each other because the school was so small and people gossiped. Both girls said that they believe the size of their high school and the people they associated themselves with had significantly influenced their views on sex and also their possible “lack of experience.” Maggie the virgin stated that maybe she would not be still be virgin if she went to a bigger school or had more sexually experienced friends. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that environment you live in as well as the people who surround yourself with are highly influential when developing your attitudes concerning sex.

After discussing the women's personal attitudes regarding sex, I wanted to know more about their personal experiences. I was apparent that all three women were a little hesitant disclosing personal information, but after a few questions they became more open to the topic. I had asked the women about their past relationships and if there were possibly any personal or moral rules the women might have before engaging sexual acts. When discussing Oral sex it was surprising to see that Maggie, the virgin and Missy had shared many of the same experiences and attitudes. They both stated that they do not have any personal rules or requirements before engaging in oral sex and there is no length of time they need to know a person before participating in fellatio. Catherine however, had stronger views regarding oral sex. She felt as if a relationship had to be developed before performing fellatio.

When discussing the topic of sex all three women's experiences were significantly different. Maggie has had no sexual partners and is waiting for someone that she cares about and who cares about her. She stated that she wants to be in a relationship with the person she loses her virginity with. However, as time passes she is becoming more impatient and is now just wanted to get it over with. She doesn't know whether she should compromise her beliefs because she does not want to be a virgin forever. When discussing Catherine's sexual experience she states she has had 2 sexual partners, both being boyfriends from long term relationships. She believes sex is suppose to be special and shared with someone you care about. Catherine states that "sex is the most intimate thing you can do with another person and I just would want it to be with someone I care for and cares for me." Missy however, seems to view sex extremely different than the other two women. She states that she has no rules about her sexual partners and they do

not need to be in a monogamous relationship before having sex. Missy has had 13 sexual partners some being boyfriends, acquaintances, hook ups or one night stands. She considers herself a sexual person and has no regrets in regards to her sexual history.

In addition to knowing about the women's past sexual experiences I wanted to get a better understanding of sexual contraceptives they use as well as the measures they take for participating in safe sex. This was a particular part of the interview I had found to be most shocking. To my surprise all three women had stated that they would not mind if their partner has had a large number of sexual partners. The women had stated their concerns and fears that they would be considered just another number. However, not one woman stated anything about the fear of transmitting or becoming infected with a STI. I was quite shocked that this was not one of their main concerns when engaging in sex with a person who had a high number of sexual partners. I found it interesting that the women did not ask their partners if they had been testing for STI's, but instead hoped that their partners would let them know. Catherine was the only participant who had been on birth control and well as asked questions regarding her partners past sexual history. I was quite shocked at the lack of concern that the other two women had felt about the dangers of becoming infected STI. I was especially shocked by Missy's sexual behavior and decisions regarding safe sex. Missy is not on birth control and has admitting to having sex within the past six months without a condom. In the United States today 68% of White women are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. (Kaiser 2008). Women are also biologically much more susceptible attracting HIV during intercourse (Kaiser 2008). "It is believed that over one million Americans are infected with HIV and an estimated 50-60 million are infected with STI- causing viruses" (Rathus, Nevid & Rathus). It is crucial

that young women like Missy receive more information and become more aware of HIV/AIDS as well as other STI's to obtain better understand of importance of using a condom. If they don't then there is a good chance that these women could end up like the other 300,000 women living with HIV (National Women's Health Network 2008).

Besides the possibility of getting an STI I wondered if the women especially Missy was concerned with getting pregnant. In the article titled College Students Facing Rising Rates in Birth Control Dr. Shulman states that "College women are at the highest risk for unintended pregnancy because they're sexually active, they're very fertile, and they are away from home" (Chaker 2007). I asked Missy why she was not on birth control, she stated that she felt uncomfortable asking her mom if their insurance covered it and it has become too expensive to afford on her own. Sadly Missy is not the only one who faces this problem. Colleges as well as Universities have drastically increases their prices of birth control for popular prescribed brands (Chaker 2007). Many students like Missy are forced to switch brands or faced with the embarrassment of having to discuss their insurance coverage with their parents. Missy did not seem to be fazed with the possibility of becoming pregnant and it seemed to not affect her sexual behavior. I wondered if this was do to the fact that drugs like Plan B. or becoming more available without a prescription. Plan B is an emergency contraception back up method that can be taken to prevent unwanted pregnancy after unprotected sex (FDA/Center for Drug Evaluation and Research). I wondered if the availability of drugs like plan b. as well as birth control might minimize the fear associated with having unprotected sex.

Even though as a society we have grown tremendously in our knowledge and acceptance regarding sexuality we must still remember the dangers associated with

unprotected sex. It is an amazing thing that women no longer need to be ashamed of their sexual desires and they can be just as sexual as men. However, I believe there need to be more responsibility given to parents in regards to discussing sexual contraceptives as well as safe sex practices. It is parents as well as the public's job to inform sexually active people of the risks associated with unprotected sex and until this happens we have not fully grown in regards sex as a society.

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