

Undoing the 60's

The 60's asked, "Why do we have all these rules?" "Old ways are out of date. Let's just love." But there was an inadequate understanding of human nature. Now we have seen the generational fallout.

The entertainment industry has been practicing what it preached to us -- which we paid to consume. Abuse of power is not a novel concept so why are we surprised? Rationalization abounds. Pornography has been accepted as freedom of speech. Personal desire has become the criterion of rights. Responsibility is far in the background.

The hopeful sign in the sexual abuse/harassment scandal is that it shows the presence of a collective conscience. There is a consensus that there must be a line somewhere. But where to draw the line seems to be a mystery.

Consenting adults has been the working hypothesis for some time, but has the drawbacks of definition. Those with proclivities towards the young will always challenge "age of consent." Scientifically, brain research shows that the hardware necessary for fully rational decisions that consider long term consequences does not develop until age 25.

Even more complex is the idea of consent. What the asker thinks he (or she) asked and implied may be very different from what the "askee" hears or infers. A young teenaged girl hears the older boy say, "I love you," and thinks it means "forever." The hopeful actor thinks, "My career depends on this," and the employee sees advancement or termination. Imbedded lawyers and bodycams would have to be universal.

And the "How do you know if you don't try it" approach flies in the face of powerful biochemical bonding that takes place with sexual activity. It is physical and chemical, oxytocin and dopamine, in addition to emotional. We should have long ago suspected when seeing, time after time, the victim going back to the abuser and refusing to terminate the relationship. More ominous is the data on extinction of attachment. After several repetitions of sexual bonding and breakup, the ability to bond becomes blunted and even completely lost. That turns the victim AND the abuser into cold, calculating automatons who may search for other sources of pleasure – also involving those same neurochemicals – such as drugs.

Medical Institute for Sexual Health (www.medinstitute.org) and the book, "Hooked" by doctors McIlhaney and Bush detail the research and its implications. Maybe the purveyors of sex education can be sued for educational malpractice? The American Psychological Association retracted the conclusions of their article "A Meta-Analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples," but should never have endorsed its conclusion that adult-child sex may not be harmful. Judith Levine in "Harmful to Minors" claimed that it was overreaction by other adults that causes harm.

Where can the line be drawn for sexuality that leads to personal and societal health and well-being? The solution endorsed by societies that survived is "One partner for life." Bonding helps cement the relationship, especially if all the thinking and evaluating ("is this someone I want to spend the rest of my life with?") has been done BEFORE the relationship becomes sexual. Sexually transmitted diseases cannot be spread – they require more than one partner. And unwanted pregnancies ought to be greatly decreased. Committed parents make for the healthiest environment in which to raise a child and the economics are also the most favorable.

What's not to like? Well, the selfish and the irresponsible need not apply. What about you?

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