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Sex Ed, The U.S, and You

Have you had the dreaded ‘sex talk’ to your children yet, or are you waiting for the teachers at your local American public school to do it for you? Well, unless there’s a Ted Talk about safe consensual intercourse, your child is only gonna learn about the dangers of STDs and how abstinence is the only solution. However, if your teen happens to be going to a local public school in France, you would be able to actually rely on the education system to teach them proper sex ed. Instead of emphasizing the dangers of sex such as pregnancy, and STDs, France educates their students on both sides of sex, the danger but more importantly, the love. After watching *Where To Invade Next*, and having the ability to take a look at the approach France has on sex education, United States need to change their sex education approach to match France’s.

The United States has an extremely high rate in teen pregnancy for a developed country, being almost 6 times higher than the rate in France in 2009. “Teen birth, abortion, and sexually transmitted disease (STD) rates in the United States are higher than in most other industrialized countries. For the last two decades, U.S. public health experts have worked to address these problems” (Berne, Huberman, 15). There is an astonishing **409,840** births among 15- to 19-year-old women in America each year (“Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the US.”). One of the biggest reasons for these disgustingly high statistic is the role that politicians play in sex education in public schools. After WW1, the United States decided to have accurate sex education in the school curcium. However, that changed in 1981, when Reagan passed the Adolescent Family Life Act which only funded programs with an ‘abstinence based’ program (“

History of Sex Ed.”). It makes you wonder, what DIDN’T Reagan ruin? Instead of viewing sex education as a public need, they based it on their political views. To support sex education was too “ liberal” for conservative political figures. “Yet even countries that officially embraced “liberal” sexual philosophies often struggled to provide much real sexual instruction in their schools” (Zimmerman, 4). It wasn’t until 2010 that funded abstinence only based programs started to dismantle (“A History of Federal Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs”). This is also the same year that congress passed the Personal Responsibility Education Program which funds “ evidence-based, medically accurate, age-appropriate programs to educate adolescents about both abstinence and contraception in order to prevent unintended teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS” (“Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the US”). While the United States has been trying to retract themselves, France has only been moving forward. While 28 of our states don’t even legally require sex education in public schools, France is now using a 3D clitoris to teach sexual equality, as well as the female orgasm (“This Is a 3D Model of a Clitoris – and the Start of a Sexual Revolution”) . Truthfully, I don’t know anyone who learned about the clitoris in my American high school.

Now that there has been a bit of history on why the American public sex education has deteriorated in the last thirty years, why is France so ahead of us? The biggest contributor for France’s sexual development, is the way they normalize sex and the body in public schools. Rather than blaming adolescents for the changes in their body and their sexual needs and desires, they encourage them and allow clarity that whatever they’re feeling is normal. Which is better, education system that makes you ashamed of your body and the hormonal effects of puberty, or

an education that allows you to understand that not only is it completely normal, but that everyone feels the way you do at some point in their life? In the movie *Where to Invade Next*, Moore actually goes inside of a french classroom as they're talking about sex education. As the teacher is speaking, she mentions sex as 'making love' rather than just intercourse, as well as actually explains how emotions play into the act of love making. When Moore ask if they taught abstinence, the teacher laughed saying "That's not really a method of contraception, it's too risky" (Moore). With one of the lowest adolescent pregnancy rates, going from and a much lower rate of STDs than the United States they may have a point ("Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the US").

There are so many excuses as to why parents or politicians wouldn't want their adolescents to learn about sex at school. A familiar complaint is that by teaching sex education in middle school, we're only making teens want sex more. News flash, with little to no real knowledge being taught about sex education in American public schools, teens are having sex as young as 13 with no idea on how to protect themselves or what sex really is. For them, most of their sex education comes from the mouths of misinformed peers in the halls of their middle school, rather than from informed teachers. When we label sex as 'bad' and try to push abstinence, it will only make teens more curious and less informed. "One in two sexually active persons will contract an STI by age 25" ("Statistics"). Can we blame adolescence for being so reckless when no one taught them how to be safe? America likes to 'hush hush' matters that make us uncomfortable, but we're doing this at a risk. Estimates suggest that even though young people aged 15–24 years represent only 25% of the sexually experienced population, they acquire nearly half of all new STDs ("STDs in Adolescents and Young Adults"). Instead of

teaching adolescents of how protect themselves from being a part of this statistic, the United States instead spends over \$17 billion dollars annually because of the high STD rate.

The United States is just recently starting to include contraceptives such as birth control and condoms in their sex education. “ In 2015, a total of 229,715 babies were born to women aged 15–19 years, for a birth rate of 22.3 per 1,000 women in this age group. This is another record low for U.S. teens and a drop of 8% from 2014” (“STDs in Adolescents and Young Adults”). While this is progress, it’s nothing compared to the 4.4% of teen fertility rates in France in 2014. (“UK Has Highest Teenage Birth Rates in Western Europe”). As a county, we should examine the differences in our education system, and want to improve. For the betterment of our adolescents, we need to stop shaming such a normal act and allow them to feel comfortable asking questions and talking honestly about sex. Our political views don’t matter as much as our youth.

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