

Sex and Consequences: A Bioethical Guide for Youth and Parents and Teachers

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...avoid now the mistakes for which you would later curse yourself.

Modern sexuality is uniquely shaped by a dual dynamic: physical capacity arrives at younger ages than ever before spawning tension with a delayed social and economic capability. Teachers report a widespread belief that casual oral relations aren't sex while parents react to the perception that middle-aged predators are destroying the innocent by means of the internet. Edward Shakespeare's ideal is abstinence for the unwed. He pounds relentlessly at promiscuity but ultimately wishes to provide lifesaving information to young people who make real-world decisions. "I would be irresponsible if I didn't recognize that some youths are not going to *abstain* from sexual activity." Of course there is the obligatory horror show on STDs to scare teens into holding back in case the appeal to a mature sense of ethics falls on deaf ears.

Sex within a committed marriage is the only variety wholeheartedly recommended. Condoms are endorsed as the best all-around form of birth control and risk-reduction. *Sex and Consequences* exhibits progressive thinking in its handling of homosexuality. The orientation is acknowledged to be within the normal range and a matter of predisposition rather than choice. "Conditioning by parents and society seems to have no counter-determining effect..." Long-term relationships based on mutual respect are endorsed for both orientations.

Strategies to defeat petting pressure are helpfully provided. Proper medical terms are used rather than colloquialisms practical frankness is deemed more productive than polite vagueness. While the intent regarding pubescent changes is to reassure alarmed young folks menstruation is variously characterized as "annoying" "embarrassing" "unpleasant" "inconvenient" and "painful." One could argue that all books have low points and an author willing to point them out as Shakespeare does in a few instances is saving readers trouble. Still to open this way is like conceding a game at the kickoff: "Before you get to the information you'll be most directly interested in..." After the (correctly labeled) boring and nearly irrelevant cellular biology everything else which follows is germane.

Edward Shakespeare is a retired teacher of both Biology and English with notable work experience editing medical textbooks. His evenhanded compassionate instructional book is aimed at an adolescent audience. While some sex education texts are wider ranging and others take more strident positions Shakespeare avoids judgmental conclusions makes no politically-loaded misrepresentations and stresses the desirability of personal character. The uncontroversial approach makes *Sex and Consequences* a viable option for educators who wish to sway the impressionable toward wisely restrained relationships without staging Oxford-style debates at school board meetings. (August 21, 2009)

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