

Teenage Pregnancy - A Cry For Positive Touch?

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I heard a debate on the radio this morning about who should be giving children 'sex education'. Should it be the parents? Should it be the schools? A midwife rang the radio and gave her opinion, saying that she is now encountering many pregnant twelve and thirteen year olds and, she argued that whoever's responsibility it was, it must be implemented at a very young age.

I believe that the key issue has been missed. Surely, the main question should be 'Why do young teenagers and pre-teenagers feel so driven to experience sexual intercourse at such a young age'? I would argue that the fundamental problem is not a lack of education alone. I would suggest that as an essentially non-touch society we are encouraging children to consider sexual experiences at a very young age, not because they want sex, but because they need positive touch.

Montagu (1986) discusses 'the skin and sex' and cites the research of Blinder (1966), Hollander (1961,1969, 1970), Lowen ((1969), Malmquist (1966) and Moll (1967) who all found that the women they studied used sex as a method for receiving positive touch. Hollander, Luborsky and Scaramella (1969) found that over half of the women in their study enticed men to have sex with them simply in order to be held. Malmquist, Kiresuk and Spano (1966) also found that women in their study '*were consciously aware that sexual activity for them was a price to be paid for being cuddled*' (cited in Montagu, 1986. Page 165). Montagu (1986) argues that this was due to their need to be cuddled and held during their early childhood, which was in fact not satisfied during this period of their lives. Lowen (1969), supports this view, as he found that '*women who suffered a lack of tactile stimulation in infancy, in later life engaged in sexual activities in a desperate attempt to gain some contact with their own bodies.*' (Montagu, 1986. Page 167).

The research is fairly old, but this does not mean the findings are any less pertinent to modern society. In fact there are perhaps more significant. In the last 30 years there has been an increase in products on the market that prevent babies from having contact with their carers. As the baby develops and becomes more mobile, the actual need to physically handle the infant lessens; and by the time a child is walking independently, positive touch may have become a dim and distant memory, only to be rekindled by the first flush of lustful passion in adolescence. From this, the aching desire to be held (Montagu, 1986), may lead to a child agreeing to sex when all they really want is a cuddle. I found myself this morning, saying to the radio, addressing the broadcasters and the midwife speaking (even if they could not hear me), that infant massage and peer to peer massage is the way forward. By encouraging parents to massage their babies, and by encouraging peer massage in the classroom this would hopefully alleviate the need for children to engage in premature sexual experiences in an attempt to feed their need for touch.

Surely, if the government is considering extra funds to manage a early 'sex education' programme in Primary schools, in an attempt to reduce the number of young pregnancies, there is a strong argument for funding to be available for infant massage in the community and the facilitation of massage in schools. If implemented throughout the UK, I am sure we may see a reduction in the level of these statistics, so that the trend is more in line with other European countries (if not better).

Reference

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