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Abortion, Homosexuality, and Fiscal Conservatism: The Coalescence of the New Right around a
Partisan Sex Education

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ABSTRACT

A new movement surrounding the implementation of sex education, including programs aimed at youth with the goals of destigmatization of sex, preventing teen pregnancy, and venereal disease began in the 1960s. This launched a debate about what information should be available about sex and sexuality and to whom. Initial debates at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s focused on whether or not sex education should be included in schools at all, however, by the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the debate had moved on to what specifically these courses should cover. Born in 1964 and liberalized in the early 1970s, the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), was the leading voice in the sex education movement. Backlash to its ideas came in two waves, one non-partisan and one partisan. This thesis looks at the development of SIECUS, its positions, and its eventual association with the left, as well as the impact of fears surrounding ongoing changes in family structures, women's roles in society, race relations, open sexuality, and abortion on the creation of a new right wing. The paper begins with a general overview of the history of sex education and the conditions that allowed for the rise of a sex education movement before moving on to discuss the creation of SIECUS, the initial lack of partisanship in connection to and wide support for sex education, the impact of SIECUS' liberalization, and how important differences between the first and second waves of backlash to the sex education movement contributed to the development of a new Republican Party. This is used to explain an ongoing partisan divide surrounding the issue and to show how certain tactics and values have come to be connected with either of the two major political parties.

KEY WORDS:

Sex Education

History

Women and Gender Studies

The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States

Partisanship

Abstinence Only vs. Comprehensive Sex Education

American Politics

Mary Calderone

ABORTION, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND FISCAL CONSERVATISM: THE COALESCENCE OF THE NEW RIGHT AROUND A PARTISAN SEX EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In the year 1970, a United States President signed a bill into law, something which, at first glance is rather unextraordinary. However, the bill in question was the “Family Planning Services and Population Research Act”¹ which allotted money to training and research in family planning services and sex education (Title X) and, the President was Republican Richard Nixon. Even more surprising than sex education advocacy by a Republican President is the level of bipartisan support with which the bill was able to pass through Congress. Thirty Congressmen from both Houses and both parties signed on as cosponsors of the bill, notably including Senator George H. W. Bush.² Anyone with some familiarity with the current state of politics and partisanship in the United States will recognize that any similar bill passing not just one, but both Houses, today is highly unlikely. Even more unlikely is that same bill passing with bipartisan support and being signed into law by a Republican President. The success and aisle-crossing popularity of the 1970 Public Health Bill was possible because of the lack of partisanship surrounding and widespread public support for sex education which was present in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A coalescence of multiple different movements and demographics around a shared sex education proposal, one which was quickly incorporated into a new Republican Party, was the birth of the partisan divide on this issue, as well as the strengthening of core ideologies which have since influenced the creation of the agendas of either party.

¹ This act is also referred to as the Public Health Bill of 1970 (S. 2108) and includes Title X.

² Nixon, Richard. “Statement on Signing the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970.” December 26, 1970. The American Presidency Project, Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley.

The development of the movement for public sex education and the backlash to it were both reactions to a number of rapidly occurring changes in the society and culture of the United States during the 1960s and 1970s including the increasing visibility of teen and out of wedlock pregnancies; the spread of venereal disease (VD); new roles for women; and new and changing family dynamics and structures.³ Advocacy for the implementation of sex education programs was spearheaded by the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) which was the largest and most active organization at the time and is continuing its work today. While the group was initially more moderate and appealed to many traditional values, later extensions of its core ideas created a much more liberal organization. Backlash to sex education occurred in two different waves with the second ending in the establishment of new Republican Party goals and voting blocs. Both the changing advocacy of sex education supporters and its augmentation of the effectiveness of the second wave of backlash led to the establishment of comprehensive sex education as the domain of the left while abstinence only education became that of the right. While both Jeffery P. Moran and Janice M. Irvine discuss SIECUS and sex education, their impacts, and their roles in the development of the New Right in their books *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th and Century* and *Talk About Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States* respectively, each is missing a key part of the story. Moran does not directly draw connections between partisanship and sex education, focusing more on the development of sex education in and of itself and the new understandings of life stages and development that come with it. Irvine connects sex education with the partisan politics it contributes to, but she focuses much more on the impacts of Mary Calderone

³ In this thesis I will be referring to concepts such as sexually transmitted diseases by the terms that were used during the time. In the case of out of wedlock pregnancy this is done to create a distinction between widowed and divorced single mothers and those mothers who remained unmarried from conception to birth.

individually than the impacts of the SIECUS organization in its entirety. Additionally, while Moran does, Irvine does not sufficiently show how SIECUS' positions evolved from their moderate beginnings to the more liberal organization which it became in the 1970s. In this thesis I synthesize their work to create a broader understanding of the organization and how its actions and those of its allies on the adoption of a new policies and ideology by the Republican Party. This thesis focuses more on the effects of the sex education movement and its backlash on the right and the Republican Party because of the larger amount of available information.

In this thesis I argue that there were two separate waves of backlash to the movement to implement public sex education programs which began in the 1960s. The first wave of backlash is nonpartisan, focused solely on the prevention of any and all sex education programs, and is not well organized beyond a local or state level. This wave was unable to gain as much momentum as the second wave of backlash because many Americans and a variety of religious and social groups supported SIECUS' idea of providing factual information to the public as a preventative measure against venereal diseases. This wave is a continuation of previous arguments against sex education and occurs from the end of the 1960s through the early 1970s. The second wave of backlash rises at the end of the 1970s and continues through the 1980s, supporting the creation of the religious right and the new Republican Party. This wave is a more organized national movement, responding especially to SIECUS and others' increasing discussion of abortion and homosexuality, which brings together a number of different groups in support of abstinence only education. It is also more successful in achieving its goals than the previous phase. While Irvine does discuss the backlash to sex education programs, she does not divide it into two distinct phases. This distinction is important because it is the ideas and tactics, like dog whistle politics, of the second wave of backlash which become a part of a partisan ideology and major party agenda.¹

¹ The term dog whistle politics refers to veiled appeals to racism which are designed to only be obvious to those holding racist views, acting like a "dog whistle" because only they can hear it.

The differences between the two waves of backlash show that the partisan lines we today see as set in stone have not always been so and, the demographics we associate with either party have changed. Additionally, I put more emphasis on the importance of the merger between the religious right, which develops from the second wave of backlash, and the traditional fiscal conservatives which formed the foundation of the Republican Party. I argue that the adoption of specific sex education ideologies by each party occurred during this time frame. Furthermore, the policy approaches of either party to perceived moral issues – more authoritarian on the right and more libertarian on the left – as well as some of the core values of each – personal responsibility and traditional morality on the right versus personal choice and education on the left – were solidified by their actions in regards to sex education at this time. While this is truer of the right than the left, the impact of sex education on the Democratic Party is still clear.

Through research into the documents of SIECUS, Mary Calderone, and others involved in the sex education movement, as well as newspaper archives, I was able to understand why these changes in the opposition movement occurred. This thesis begins with an overview of sex education prior to SIECUS and the milieu that facilitated its creation before going on to detail the goals, activities, and supporters of the organization during its early years. The successes of the sex education movement are used to show the initial lack of partisanship associated with either the sex education movement or its opponents. I then discuss the liberalization undergone by SIECUS in the early 1970s and how this process contributed to the development of a second wave of backlash. I argue that opponents during the second wave of backlash were primarily reacting to SIECUS' promotion of the discussion of homosexuality and of abortion.

Additionally, I argue racism and the associated “dog whistle politics” became more influential factors in opposing sex education programs during the second wave of backlash, although racist

appeals were also present in the first wave, as fiscal and social conservatives began to unite within the New Right. Finally, I explain how the partisanship of the second wave of backlash in connection with Ronald Reagan's Moral Majority led to the development and adoption of abstinence only education by the Republican Party. I conclude this thesis by discussing the continuing partisanship surrounding sex education, as well as the continued involvement of SIECUS, more than fifty years after its inception.

SEX EDUCATION BEFORE 1960

At the turn of the century, discussion of sex was still strongly stigmatized, and sex education was almost entirely focused within the home in a reflection of the popular Victorian era ideals which discouraged discussion of obscenity. These same ideals, popular in white middle and upper classes, argued that sex was immoral except for procreation within marriage, and that sexual repression is the height of accomplishment.⁴ Women were regarded as being above sexual desire and so it was their obligation to elevate the morality of the husbands and children.⁵ Popular figures of the era, like Anthony Comstock, spoke out against obscenity, arguing that knowledge of sex and sexuality would taint the minds of children and lead them into immoral lives of crime.⁶ It was commonly accepted that youth were more easily corruptible than adults and that exposing them to potentially corruptive materials would be more dangerous than keeping them in ignorance.⁷ Teaching sex, like public discussion of the issue, was seen as only serving to increase curiosity and encourage experimentation, especially if discussion of unsavory topics like prostitution, adultery, and contraception occurred. Additionally, many feared inaccurate information may be provided by unqualified and amoral teachers and, that an enforced

⁴ Moran, Jeffery P. *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in 20th Century*, Cambridge, 2000. 1-7.

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ Ibid., 1-7.

⁷ Ibid., 63.

form of sex education in schools infringed upon the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit.⁸

Despite initial strong opposition, the sex education movement began to pick up steam in the first few decades of the 20th century, aided by the support of many of those who had been and were still involved with the popular Temperance Movement and Social Hygiene Movements.⁹ In reaction to the public prudery of the Victorian era as well as rapidly changing social mores and gender roles during the 1920s, educators began to argue that ignorance was a poor shield against the dangers of prostitution and venereal disease.¹⁰ Additionally, increasing rates of both were furthering fears of failing family units and declining morality.¹¹ These same issues (and other similar issues) would continue to motivate both proponents and opponents of sex education. Another key development in the introduction of public sex education was the introduction of the idea of adolescence as a separate stage of life which came about in 1904, defined as the stage in between puberty and marriage in which there exists sexual interest.¹² Acceptance of this new life stage led to recognition of youth sexuality as an issue which needed to be addressed.¹³ New views of non-reproductive sex as a natural form of companionship within marriage reduced some of the stigma surrounding discussion of the topic.¹⁴ Rather than continuing the tradition of enforced ignorance, sex began to be taught as the means of procreation and the foundation of the

⁸ Anthony Comstock Condemns Obscene Literature (1883). In *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*, New York, 2002. Pages 243-244.; Carter, Julian B, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 2 (2001), 216, 219, 225.; Huber, Valerie J., and Michael W. Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." *International Journal of Education Reform* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2014). 25-51.

⁹ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

¹⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in 20th Century*, 25-27.

¹¹ Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 215-224.

¹² Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 1, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40-45.

¹⁴ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

family unit, leading to strong connections between individual sexual conduct and the common good.¹⁵ Schools especially were pushed to fight vice in teens.¹⁶

Sex education at this time was designed to discourage people from engaging in sex outside of marriage and to instill enough fear about the dangers of extramarital sex to ensure abstinence.¹⁷ Students received graphic descriptions of venereal disease and were shown pictures of babies born to those afflicted with sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁸ Both girls and boys were taught that it was their duty to protect their families and future children from these horrors through their dedication to remaining chaste.¹⁹ Many of these programs were specifically targeted at urban areas where individuals were more likely to be exposed to things like prostitution and, with the ease of anonymity among large numbers, did not necessarily have a community to enforce proper sexual norms upon them.²⁰ It was also generally assumed that those living in rural farming districts were less in need of sex education because of their exposure to animals.²¹ However, even with these advances, sexual education of youth continued to carry an amount of controversy because of the view of a children as more impressionable. To avoid “obscenity,” these programs frequently tried to be “scientific” and often embedded information about sex and reproduction within other classes like biology or botany.²² Larger schools were more likely to offer these courses and to include sex education within their curricula because they often had more funding available to provide “modern” science

¹⁵ Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 216.

¹⁶ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 50.

¹⁷ Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 217, 229-230.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 224, 229-230.

¹⁹ Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 230-235.; Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 28.

²⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 32-33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106-108.

²² Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 239, 243-44.

electives.²³ Presentation of sex in a scientific manner, sex education programs appeared more legitimate and were able to avoid suggestiveness and therefore protect children.²⁴ It was also hoped that this method of teaching would make sex seem unexceptional and uninteresting, preventing curiosity and experimentation.²⁵

Sex education efforts were also increased during each of the world wars because of increased need to address VD – especially within the Army – as war presented a number of new opportunities for sexual immorality and promiscuity. Those who were seen as “feeble minded,” black men and new immigrants especially, were causes of special concern for the government and were especially targeted in the prevention of disease.²⁶ Some leaders within black communities encouraged this targeted education because of the belief that it could potentially improve race reputation and diminish stereotypes by encouraging the adoption of white-middle class moralities and lifestyles.²⁷ During this time, schools also began to implement “family life courses” starting in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These courses often included character building, relationships, hygiene, money, marriage, and children as its topics. This method of teaching which used both fear tactics and embedded discussion of sex within the context of other family topics helped to make sex education more palatable to many Americans.²⁸

After WWII both women and youth were gained significantly more autonomy, changing how sex and, by extension, sex education were treated. Greater financial freedom, a larger number of available jobs for women and teenagers, and increasing mobility as a result of the popularity of automobiles led to greater numbers of unmarried sexually active individuals than in

²³ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 106-108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56-59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70-72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ Huber and Firmin, “A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900.” 25-51.

the past.²⁹ This meant once again the rates of sexually transmitted disease were on the rise, as were rates of teen pregnancy, necessitating changes in education as a response. Additionally, obscenity laws were becoming increasingly relaxed, new forms of birth control, like the pill, were being developed, and gays and lesbians were beginning to go public. The publication of the Kinsey Reports detailing American sexual activity show that despite many continuing to profess ideas similar to those of the Victorian era, the behavioral realities did not match up.³⁰ Youth, embracing their newfound freedoms, began to rebel and to look for less judgmental systems of morality, questioning taboos on premarital sex and the importance of virginity.³¹ Managing these increasingly independent adolescents and their access to the wealth of previously censored information and products became one of the bigger struggles for families in this second half of the century.³²

As a result of these changing norms, public education programs began to support the idea that sex could be a pleasurable expression of love, in addition to a reproductive process.³³ The U.S. education system focused on training adolescents to conform to the white middle-class standards of family life which were centered around marriage and child rearing.³⁴ Sex education programs taught abstinence until marriage with the goals of protecting the family and the individual and promoting faithful marriages, in which, sex would be more fulfilling, especially if one remained chaste until the wedding.³⁵ Sex was portrayed as a positive family-based experience within a natural and moral monogamous relationship and as an expression of

²⁹ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

³⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 156.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

³² Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁵ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

maternity – which was portrayed as the most important role of women.³⁶ The prevalence of these types of courses continued into the 1980s, although some of the included information changed greatly.³⁷

THE NEED FOR A NEW SEX EDUCATION MOVEMENT

The sex education movement which this paper focuses on began in the early 1960s in response to a number of different developments that would inspire both proponents and opponents. These issues continued to motivate both sex educators and opponents through the following few decades. As women gained more freedoms and sexual activity became more widely accepted, teen and out of wedlock pregnancy, venereal disease, divorce, and dysfunctional families all became more visible to the general public, sparking fears for the social and moral health of the country. Additionally, developments in contraception, especially the birth control pill, contributed to a changing view of women, morality, and sex.³⁸ Prior to the advent of the pill, out of wedlock pregnancy had been one of the strongest deterrents against premarital sex and the fear was that more and more people would begin breaking with the norm because of it.³⁹ At the same time, the rate of premarital sex was on the rise, as was the average age of marriage, and the rate, albeit marginally, of birth.⁴⁰ These trends were especially evident among black Americans who had begun having premarital sex in higher rates in the previous decade, generating a teen birth rate which was twice that of white teenagers.⁴¹ This was the perceived “epidemic” of teenage pregnancy which continued into the 1980s.

³⁶ Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education." 234, 239-240, 242.

³⁷ Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, 101-104.

³⁸ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 199.

⁴¹ Ibid., 200-201.

In the 1960s and 1970s, teen pregnancy was not actually a new phenomenon. In fact, per capita rates of teenage pregnancy peaked in 1957. In reality, there was no “epidemic,” but increased the increased visibility of single mothers combined with a larger number of teenagers in the U.S. population made it appear as though there was.⁴² In addition, teenagers were one of the largest demographics to utilize family planning and reproductive health services, further cementing the idea of the “epidemic” and the connected moral decline. The number of teenagers who utilized family planning clinics between 1969 and 1976 jumped 600% and, by the 1980s, teens made up ¼ of abortion procedures performed each year.⁴³ Surveys showed that 69% of teenage American women in metropolitan areas had engaged in sexual activity by age 19 and at the same time, the teen birth rate increased by 75% between 1969 and 1975, although could be partially attributed to the larger number of teenagers.⁴⁴ Sex education advocates as well as opponents both cited the rises, perceived and real, in adolescent sexual activity when making their cases. Both supporters and opponents also blamed teen pregnancy, in the cases of many girls, for high school dropout rates, poverty, and welfare dependence.⁴⁵ However, the reverse was actually true. Generally higher rates of poverty led to higher rates of teen pregnancy. Many girls who dropped out after becoming pregnant were already at risk of doing so beforehand.⁴⁶

Teenage pregnancy was also becoming more visible because it was becoming more acceptable for a woman to exist in white middle-class society as an unmarried mother. As women became more financially independent and the stigma against single mothers within the

⁴² Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 541.

⁴³ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 541.

⁴⁴ Scales, Peter. "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." *Family Relations* 30, no. 4, 1981, 558.; Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 541.

⁴⁵ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 203.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

white middle-class began to wane over the course of the 1960s, and larger numbers of women began to keep their out of wedlock children and remain in school or the workforce.⁴⁷ In the past, out of wedlock pregnancies had generally been hidden by women, out of a desire to protect their reputations and marriageability. This was done through boarding houses (which some of the later Crisis Centers created by the anti-abortion movement were modeled after) in which women were pressured to give their children up for adoption to white, middle-class families or to have shotgun weddings. The argument was that a single mother could not raise a healthy child.⁴⁸ However, this trend of hiding “fallen women” was specific to the white middle-class. Working-class women and women of color were already seen as having moral failings by many in the white United States and so there was less importance placed on protecting their reputations. Additionally, many of these women could not afford the cost of these boarding homes or of taking time away from work and so they either sought abortions, gave up their children, or tried to get support from friends and family.⁴⁹ Greater visibility of single mothers and teenage pregnancy within the “respectable” facets of society was the result, prompting an increased fear that the nation was experiencing a moral decline.⁵⁰ This fear of the degradation of traditional family values and its contribution to a morally corrupt United States was one of the foundational beliefs in the formation of the New Right and in its eventual adoption of an abstinence only sex education.

Both opponents of sex education and proponents began to react to these issues in two main ways which would later come to be associated with either party. Proponents generally argued that the problems of teen pregnancy, venereal disease, and out of wedlock birth were

caused by a lack of knowledge and adequate teaching. These issues were fixable with the right

⁴⁷ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 541.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁴⁹ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 404.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 548.

education and openness. SIECUS, in keeping with these ideas, was created in response to concerns about the accuracy of information being taught and the questionable credentials of many teaching sex education classes. Opponents argued that these issues were the results of failure of morality and personal responsibility and that the best course of action was to repress sexuality rather than creating curiosity and the potential desire to experiment through education.

THE SEX INFORMATION AND EDUCATION COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES

The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States was founded in 1964 by Mary Calderone, Wallace Fulton, Reverend William Genne, Lester Kirkendall, Dr. Harold Lief, and Clark Vincent.⁵¹ The directors were selected from a variety of fields which were already concerned with different aspects of human sexuality.⁵² For example, Calderone had previously worked as the medical director of Planned Parenthood in the 1950s.⁵³ Convincing the American Medical Association to promote family planning as a responsible medical practice was one of her pinnacle accomplishments while holding the position.⁵⁴ The board also included two Baptist Ministers, a prominent civil rights lawyer, the editor of *Sexology* Magazine, a Harvard Medical School President, marriage counselors, sociologists, psychologists, and teachers.⁵⁵ These individuals were also active, and often leading, members of a wide variety of organizations including the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, the American Association of Marriage Counselors, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the YMCA, the ACLU, Planned Parenthood, and the National Council on Family Relations among others.

⁵¹ "Our History." SIECUS: Sex Education for Social Change. Last modified, 2020.

⁵² Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." *The SIECUS Report*, 17, no. 4 (1989): 13-17.

⁵³ Vespa, Mary. "American's Biggest Problem? Fearless Dr. Mary Calderone Says It's 'Fear of Sex'." *People*, 1980.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cook, Joan. "Harriet Pipel, 79, Lawyer, dies; An Advocate of Women's Rights," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1991.; "Isadore Rubin, 58, Wrote Sex Texts" *The New York Times*, August 19, 1996. TimesMachine.; Kirkendall, Lester, A. "The Journey Toward SIECUS: 1964 A Personal Odyssey" *The SIECUS Report*, 12, no. 4 (1984): 1-4.

SIECUS would work closely with other established family centered organizations, as well as multiple different channels of education (e.g. churches, schools, medical associations, etc.) to help raise awareness about sexuality within the frameworks of family life and education.⁵⁶ It would also work to educate teachers, therapists, and other professionals how to teach and talk about sex.⁵⁷ The textbook, *The Individual, Sex, and Society*, written and published by SIECUS in 1969, was intended to further this goal.

The organization met the need for sex education created by changing behavioral and cultural norms with advocacy of a moderate curriculum, which while seeking to provide information about sex, masturbation, venereal disease, pregnancy, and more to adults and children alike, still held to many traditional values, including that of chastity until marriage.⁵⁸ SIECUS developed differing curricula to address the individual needs of these varied audiences as well. For example, college programs included sex and pregnancy counseling as well as discussion of contraceptives and how to use them in a variety of credit and noncredit classes.⁵⁹ Initially, SIECUS was widely supported because of this combination of factual information and the idea of abstinence as the best “preventative medicine” for VD and teen pregnancy.⁶⁰ The two overarching ambitions of the organization from the very beginning were to provide accurate information about sex, sexuality, and sexual health and to destigmatize sex and its discussion.⁶¹ To destigmatize sex and make public discussion more possible, SIECUS focused solely and

⁵⁶ Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." 14.

⁵⁷ Vespa, Mary. "American's Biggest Problem? Fearless Dr. Mary Calderone Says It's 'Fear of Sex'." *People*, 1980.

⁵⁸ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 160-165.

⁵⁹ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." *The SIECUS Report*, 17, no. 4 (1989): 1-4.

⁶⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 165-169.

⁶¹ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood. Last modified November 2016. 1; Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." 14-17.

directly on sexual behavior rather than just tangentially or on singular issues within the realm of sexual health.⁶² Sex, the organization argued, should be seen as a natural and important part of being human rather than something to be denied and shunned as a problem and sexuality should be an established aspect of human health.⁶³ This perspective set SIECUS apart from other similar groups. For example, the American Social Hygiene Association worked to combat venereal disease with sex education but, to SIECUS, this was too narrow a scope.⁶⁴ It also showed the beginnings of system which valued education and free access to information as a solution to societal problems – an approach which would later become central to the left.

In its beginnings SIECUS had support from a number of different religious denominations, including Catholics, Baptists, and Lutherans, because of the emphasis the organization put on marriage as the ideal situation in which an individual would participate in sexual activity. President Calderone especially stressed the importance of marriage and religion in her discussions of the topic, often referring to sexuality as “god’s gift.”⁶⁵ However, some of this support from religious groups was lost as the organization liberalized.⁶⁶ This wide range of backgrounds among the founding members and initial supporters shows a distinct lack of partisan bias as well as a willingness on the part of religious groups to discuss sex education issues. This wide diversity in both religious and political backgrounds will later disappear by the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of the second wave of backlash.

SIECUS, while generally moderate in its earlier years, still held a few positions which hinted at the possibility of greater liberalism in the future. For example, the organization discussed a

⁶² Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." 14-17.

⁶³ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14-17.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁶ Irvine, Janice M. *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*. Berkeley, 2002. 28.

number of more taboo topics like masturbation and porn with blunt honesty, encouraged experimentation (initially only within marriage), and provided information to young people and children.⁶⁷ SIECUS argues that children are not inherently asexual despite their innocence, therefore it is important to provide them access to factual and age appropriate information.⁶⁸ To achieve its goal of promoting access to information, SIECUS aimed to expand sex education to all age levels and groups, create of an exchange of information between adults and youth, as well as youth and youth, and encourage sexual education and socialization at an earlier age so that children can better understand themselves and others.⁶⁹ This position was a drastic change from the earlier arguments that children should be shielded from all information that could “corrupt” them and further demonstrated the commitment of the organization to the importance of education as a means of addressing societal problems.

The organization pushed forward ideas including personal choice and informed decision making, and secularism – all of which would eventually come to be associated with much of the Democratic Party’s policy preference, showing how sex education would eventually become a partisan issue, despite the non-partisan environment it began in. SIECUS from argued for the importance of personal choice even in its early, more moderate years, in ones’ decisions about contraceptives, sexual roles, masturbation, and pornography. The organization advocated for “values neutral” sex education in which students are encouraged to take charge of their own lives and learn how to make decisions about issues such as when and how to have sex, contraception use, and, should the situation arise, whether or not to have an abortion.⁷⁰ While SIECUS

⁶⁷ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 165-169.

⁶⁸ Irvine, *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*, 33.

⁶⁹ Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." 14.

⁷⁰ Huber and Firmin, “A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900.” 25-51.

continued to promote marriage as the ideal, emphasis was still placed on the ability of an individual to make these kinds of choices within their marriages, and just a few years later SIECUS would begin to support the same kinds of decision making in sexual behavior outside of marriage as well.⁷¹ Infusing some of the secularism that would eventually come to be associated with the left, SIECUS also argued that morality comes from individuals rather than God alone.⁷² This meant that individuals would need to be responsible for making their own informed decisions and that what was right for one person might not be for another, but that in the end, only the individual could make the decision for their self.

SIECUS also called into question traditional gender and sex roles and stereotypes. Despite initially promoting the importance of marriage, SIECUS was in favor of allowing women to take on different sexual roles and encouraged them to seek pleasure, something which they had frequently been told was only for men. The organization, unlike many at the time, did not seek to relegate women to a life of submission and homemaking.⁷³ There was also efforts to reach out to underrepresented communities like the physically and mentally handicapped. For example, SIECUS worked with the National Federation of the Blind to research and provide information on sex education to blind Americans.⁷⁴ SIECUS also spoke out against racism and the stigma against interracial relationships still held by many Americans and occasionally portrayed interracial couples in their materials, many times resulting in backlash.⁷⁵ However, curricula were typically biased toward white middle-class experiences and so they were not able to reach or have the same impact on a number of communities with different traditions and lifestyles.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 177-178.

⁷² Irvine, *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*, 28.

⁷³ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 191.

⁷⁴ "News," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 2 (1972): 3.

⁷⁵ Irvine, *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*, 55.

⁷⁶ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 210.

THE LIBERALIZATION OF SIECUS AND ITS MATERIALS

In the early 1970s, SIECUS and its curriculum became significantly more liberal and controversial, extending its initial ideas about informed choice into a more complete acceptance of personal choice within a wider range.⁷⁷ Changing norms of teenage and young adult behavior helped to push the organization to embrace a more liberal position on sex education.⁷⁸

Additionally, studies had empirically shown that medically accurate information decreased potentially dangerous risk-taking behaviors rather than increasing them, helping to combat the long-held belief that knowledge about sex would increase casual sex. There was also general consensus that sex education in schools would not replace but rather supplement at home discussion of sexual health.⁷⁹ Programs supporting the teaching of values based decision making also became more common as they were shown to reduce risk-taking behaviors.⁸⁰ SIECUS, in keeping with this trend, recognized making one's own personal choices in sex as a human right and began to argue that the "old morality" of abstinence until marriage had become unrealistic and not entirely functional for many Americans. More emphasis was put on the importance of ownership of one's choices, decision making skills, and communication, sparking more opposition as appropriate levels of autonomy for young people were still the subject of much debate.⁸¹ Sex education was redefined as "training people emotionally and intellectually to make intelligent and well-informed choices among an array of competing alternatives, a massive

⁷⁷ Ibid., 194- 195.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁹ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood.

⁸⁰ Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 149-151.

⁸¹ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.; Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 115-117.

change from the curricula of initial sex education programs.⁸² As part of its instruction in informed decision making in regards to sex, SIECUS also began to emphasize boundary setting (e.g. requiring condom use from a partner) and the importance of knowing, setting, and enforcing one's own boundaries.⁸³ Two new position statements, released in 1973 and 1974, respectively summarize the goals of the liberalizing organization:

Sex education at any age, cannot be effective as long as it occurs in a society which, in many of its aspects, inhibits rational assessment of sexuality as a central force in human behavior."⁸⁴

“Free access to full and accurate information on all aspects of sexuality is a basic right for everyone, children as well as adults.”⁸⁵

These ideas, an extension of earlier program ideology, are those which are eventually adopted by the left and the Democratic Party.

These ideas of personal choice and education as a solution to problems can be seen in other SIECUS activities as well. Beginning in 1974 SIECUS released new publications and policy aimed at helping unmarried youth obtain and use contraceptives and promoting freedom of choice in sexual orientation, use of pornography, and contraceptive decisions. More controversial content was also added to SIECUS programs including education on the proper use of condoms and the risks involved. These decisions were again based on the idea that possession of factual knowledge both solves and prevents problems.⁸⁶ Additionally, the organization produced and sold fifty cent study guides and special publications, like the Teacher's Question

⁸² Kahneman, Wallace C. "Why the Need for a Sex Information and Education Council of the United States as a New, Separate Organization." 14.

⁸³ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 210.

⁸⁴ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 3.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁸⁶ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 202, 209.

and Answer Book, two-dollar leaflets on growth and development teaching, and three-dollar packets containing sample classroom materials, source books, promotional and publicity material. These were just some of the publications made available.⁸⁷ The content of these educational materials and curricula covered a variety of often controversial topics.⁸⁸ For example, the following thirteen different study guides were all available by 1971:

- | | |
|---|--|
| I. Sex Education | VIII. Teenage Pregnancy: Prevention and Treatment |
| II. Homosexuality | |
| III. Masturbation | IX. Sexuality and the life cycle: a broad concept of sexuality |
| IV. Characteristics of Male and Female Sexual Responses | Sexual Relations During Pregnancy and the Post-Delivery Period |
| V. Premarital Sexual Standards | |
| VI. Sexual Encounters Between Adults and Children | X. The Sex Educator and Moral Values |
| VII. Sexual Life in the Later Years | |
| | XI. Sex, Science, and Values ⁸⁹ |

The inclusion of these many of these controversial topics, including discussion of abortion within some of these booklets, was significant as SIECUS initially had to skirt the law in order to provide much of this information.⁹⁰ Contraception for non-married couples was not legal until the *Eisenstadt v Baird* Supreme Court decision in 1972, abortion until *Roe v Wade* in

⁸⁷ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁸⁹ "SIECUS Publications Order Form," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972): 15.

⁹⁰ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 3.; "History of Sex Education in the U.S." *Planned Parenthood*, 1.

1973, and access to contraceptive and other sexual health services was severely restricted for minors until *Carey v Population Services International* in 1977.⁹¹

SIECUS also reviewed and helped to develop guidelines for creation of sex education curriculum. Their publication *Guidelines for Comprehensive Education: Kindergarten through 12th grade* was a major breakthrough in sex education and variations of it are still in use today.⁹² The organization advised school districts that curricula should be created over the course of a few years with expert assistance, rather than over the course of a few months with the sole goal of lowering high school venereal disease and teen pregnancy rates.⁹³ In the SIECUS Report published in 1972, Mary Calderone discusses the problems with these rapid course creations, as well as the tendency of some course to use a guest lecture approach in their courses.⁹⁴ Calderone argues that this style of curriculum do not necessarily meet students where they are, tend to be more expensive, and do not always provide consistent and accurate information, but rather jump around to cover more controversial (read “interesting”) topics.⁹⁵ Sex education curricula were also designed for parents to gain better understandings of sex and to assuage their fears about sex education programs. SIECUS received a \$30,000 grant to teach adults about sexuality and how to talk with their kids.⁹⁶ One of the study guides created and sold by the organization was entitled “Concerns of Parents about Sex Education.”⁹⁷ Yet another curriculum was created to teach individuals how to advocate for sex education and sexual liberation by building support against anti-sex education groups: The Community Action and Communications Kit.⁹⁸

⁹¹ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood, 1-3.

⁹² Vespa, "American's Biggest Problem? Fearless Dr. Mary Calderone Says It's 'Fear of Sex!'"

⁹³ Calderone, Mary S. "Speaking Out," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 2 (1972): 2.

⁹⁴ "News," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972):3-4.

⁹⁵ "News," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972):3-4.

⁹⁶ Vespa, "American's Biggest Problem? Fearless Dr. Mary Calderone Says It's 'Fear of Sex!'"

⁹⁷ "SIECUS Publications Order Form," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972): 15.

⁹⁸ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 2.

The bimonthly SIECUS Report included reviews of publications, books, movies, and videos about sex and sexuality, news about sexuality and education, and evaluations of the status of sex education.⁹⁹ Recommendations of other publications, like *What's Happening*, a magazine written for teens and parents with a special focus on black youth, were also included.¹⁰⁰ Prices, audience level indicators, and locations to purchase these materials were included with the reviews.¹⁰¹ The SIECUS Reports were published every year from 1972 until 2005 and were the follow up to the SICEUS Newsletter that had been published from 1965 until 1972.¹⁰² The report also presented the results of research conducted by both the organization itself, as well as others – *Some Apparent Effects of the Acquisition of Factual Human Reproductive Information Upon Selected Attitudes of Upper Elementary Students*, for example.¹⁰³ Funding for research relating to sexuality was also made available through the SIECUS Report to applicants of varying educational levels and fields.¹⁰⁴ These reports show the dynamism of the sex education movement as it made efforts to tailor its curricula to advances in understandings of sexuality and education, changing social norms, and new community needs. They also show the value placed on science, research, and the importance of education as a means of solving problems.

However, despite SIECUS's liberalization and expansion of topics and targeted student demographics, curricula were still typically biased toward middle-class white experiences and were not necessarily designed to reach out to many multi-ethnic communities or other

⁹⁹ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 1-4.; Selverstone, Robert. "Where Are We Now in the Sexual Revolution?" *The SIECUS Report*, 17, no. 4 (1989): 7-12.

¹⁰⁰ "News," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972): 13.

¹⁰¹ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 3.

¹⁰² Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 3.; Vespa, "American's Biggest Problem? Fearless Dr. Mary Calderone Says It's 'Fear of Sex'."

¹⁰³ Coates, Edward, E. "Some Apparent Effects of the Acquisition of Factual Human Reproductive Information Upon Selected Attitudes of Upper Elementary Students," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972): 5.

¹⁰⁴ "SIECUS Publications Order Form," *The SIECUS Report*, 1, no. 1 (1972): 15.

lifestyles.¹⁰⁵ While the group had begun including information which was supportive of homosexuality and gay and lesbian couples, many in this community did not support the inclusion of homosexuality within sex education curricula. Many gay activist groups and individuals feared that the messages about same sex couples included in sex education classes would be homophobic and detrimental to their cause. Because of this, many preferred that the topic remain completely omitted from public sex education discussions.¹⁰⁶

SUCSESSES SHOW A NONPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR SEX EDUCATION

As a result of efforts in support of sex education, by the early 1970s, 35% of public and private schools provided some sort of sex education. Maryland became the first state to mandate family life and human development education at all levels in 1970 and New Jersey implemented a mandate on primary school sex education in 1970.¹⁰⁷ New Jersey schools were the first to require comprehensive sex education or family life education for elementary school students. The mandate also allowed for a 200,000-dollar annual budget to maintain the programs and substantial training of teachers. Most surprising was that the majority of the public was strongly in support of the issue and that Catholics actually had higher levels of support than Protestants. Many parents also said they would support schools providing condoms to students. The state program received the equivalent of a 5-star rating from SIECUS and emphasized decision making, personal discipline, and intellectual discussion.¹⁰⁸ However, the success of New Jersey's state program was not universal and was the result of an extensive advocacy campaign to convince parents, teachers, and schools of the need for sex education. Despite this, the fact that the program was able to be implemented shows the extent of support for sex education, even that

¹⁰⁵ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 210.

¹⁰⁶ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 186-187.

¹⁰⁷ Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. "The Failure of Sex Education." *The Atlantic*, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

which included contraception.¹⁰⁹ This statewide effort would not have been possible if sex education had been as partisan of an issue as it has become today.

Sex education advocacy also led to achievements at the federal level, again showing the lack of partisan politics attached to the issue. In 1966, the United States Office of Education awarded grants to 645 different agencies, including SIEUS, to develop sex education programs throughout the country.¹¹⁰ The Office of Education Report from 1966, while recognizing that individual communities would have individual needs, encouraged dissemination of information and provided funds to help school districts build their own sex education programs.¹¹¹ This included assistance to programs like a sex education workshop for parents, teachers, students, and other school personnel at a Pennsylvania hospital and marriage and family living as course offerings in Amherst, Massachusetts through.¹¹²

The Office of Education also established Title X (The National Family Planning Service and Population Research Act) which assisted with improvement and inception of sex education curriculum from preschool through college, support for teacher and other personnel training, parental aid programs, and research and curriculum development.¹¹³ The bill, introduced by Maryland Democrat Joseph D. Tydings to the Senate in 1970 and was joined by 30 cosponsors, including prominent Texas Republican and future U.S. President, George H.W. Bush.¹¹⁴ The introduction and passage of this bill with wide bipartisan support showed the lack of partisanship involved in the implementation of sex education programs at this time. The bill provided

¹⁰⁹ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 208-209.

¹¹⁰ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *Report on family planning: Activities of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare*, D.C., 1966. p 25, 29.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Schmeck, Harold M., Jr. "Wide Family Planning Aid for Poor Passed in Senate," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1970.; Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 2.

assistance in the form of grants to assist with family planning programs, including sex education, contraceptive distribution, and STD testing.¹¹⁵ It also provided funding for creating curricula and educating new health teachers. Notably, Planned Parenthood received a portion of this grant money to help create a curriculum focused on decision making and communication skills in addition to general sex education.¹¹⁶ The bill was part of a package suggested by Republican President Richard Nixon, further demonstrating that the partisan takes on sex education and contraceptives present today are a more recent development. However, it is important to keep in mind that for many politicians involved, on both sides of the aisle, support for sex education during this time was the result of a desire to limit population growth among non-white Americans. Some feared that people of color were having too many children and not having them within the “right” family settings.¹¹⁷

Significant levels of support for sex education from the general public are also indicative of an issue free of polarized partisanship. Over the course of the 1960s, sex education in public schools began to gain more widespread support.¹¹⁸ A 1969 Gallup poll indicated that 71% of Americans were in favor of some form of sex education, and, despite a dip in this rating in the early 1970s, by 1978, the number had risen to 77%.¹¹⁹ Sex education programs tended to be favored by individuals with higher levels of education and greater social status. Less religious, younger people, and parents without teenagers were also more likely to support sex education.¹²⁰ Support also came from various groups, including both parents and students, as well as different

¹¹⁵ Schmeck, Harold M., Jr. "Wide Family Planning Aid for Poor Passed in Senate."

¹¹⁶ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 558.

¹¹⁷ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900."

¹¹⁸ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood.

¹¹⁹ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900."; Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 558.; Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 2.; "More Americans Support Sex Education in Schools," *New York Times*, January 24, 1978, TimesMachine.

¹²⁰ Mahoney, E. R. "Sex Education in the Public Schools: A Discriminant Analysis of Characteristics of Pro and Anti Individuals." *The Journal of Sex Research* 15, no. 4, 1979. 265.

churches.¹²¹ The New York State Parent Teacher Association (PTA) expressed its support for a health curriculum to approve a family living and sex education class in a 1968 resolution.¹²² Sex education programs were also supported by churches and church groups. The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission created a pamphlet to help churches and families carry out sex education programs.¹²³ In 1966, a Roman Catholic priest also advocated for an increase in sex education programs in schools.¹²⁴ The variation of groups and individuals who expressed support for some form sex education and the level of public support further show how what we now see as a more controversial and partisan issue was not always so and did not begin to change until SIECUS became more involved in discussion of issues like abortion and homosexuality. Many religious groups and individuals who are now active opponents of sex education, both individually and in connection with the Republican Party, were once counted among the issue's supporters.

TWO WAVES OF BACKLASH TO SEX EDUCATION

Partisanship on issues of sexuality and sex education has not always been drawn along such clean lines as it is today and began to be in the early 1980s – Irvine touches on this distinction, she doesn't focus on it. The first wave of backlash to sex education demonstrates the initial lack of partisanship in these issues while the second shows how a coalition, united by a number of related issues, with more traditional morality and a more authoritarian approach was able to take over and reimagine a major political party. While the earlier backlash is mostly individuals and local groups without partisan affiliation, the second is larger scale, more

¹²¹ Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 143,154-157.

¹²² "State P.T.A. Backs Sex Education Here," *New York Times*, October 22, 1969, TimesMachine.

¹²³ "Southern Baptists Back Guides on Sex Education," *New York Times*, December 14, 1970, TimesMachine.

¹²⁴ "Schools Are Chided by Priest on Lags in Sex Education," *New York Times*, February 14, 1966, TimesMachine.

organized and politically motivated. Tactics were much different between the two waves of backlash, as were either wave's end goals. The first of the two waves focused more on the fear of sexual liberation and sought an end to all forms of sex education while the second wave was more focused on the importance of enforcing certain values, like those associated with the traditional family. Many of those who were not in support of sex education remained the same between the two waves but importantly, their opposition to sex education was not connected to a party identification nor did it generally influence their party affiliation during the first wave.

Opponents of sex education, especially Catholics, in both eras were often older, working-class, and less likely to have any post-high school education.¹²⁵ Sex education programs were generally not especially helpful to these groups as they were designed for white middle-class Americans. Programs often did not reach out to larger demographics or try to meet them where they were at, both physically and abstractly in terms of their approaches to sex, sexuality, and sex education.¹²⁶ Within the opposition to implementing sex education, during both eras, were many black Americans and poor Americans. Fear of potential connections between sex education programs and the eugenics movement were motivating factors in the distrust of sex education programs and these fears were not unfounded as eugenic advocates had been involved in both the birth control movement and the movement to legalize abortion.¹²⁷ Additionally, access to reproductive care and education had often come at the cost forced sterilization for black and poor women.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Haugeberg, Karissa, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 2017.

¹²⁶ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 203.

¹²⁷ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

THE FIRST WAVE

The first wave of backlash to the sex education movement began in the late 1960s and continued into the early 1970s. According to a Gallup poll, in the three years between 1969 and 1971, the percentage of Americans in favor of sex education programs dropped by 6%.¹²⁹ This wave of backlash was non-partisan and was focused solely on opposition to all forms of sex education, rather than presenting alternative solutions.¹³⁰

Opponents, while often religious and anti-abortion due to overlap with the issue of sex education, were not yet tied to or motivated by a particular party or party agenda.¹³¹ Instead, individuals and groups involved were reacting to changing family dynamics and gender roles and their fears of losing parental authority and exposing children to sex information too early, as well as the fear that knowledge of sex would encourage experimentation, perversion, and casual sex.¹³² The changing roles of women as a result of the sexual liberation movement and the feminist movement meant that women were working outside of the home more frequently, waiting longer to marry and have children, and not organizing their lives and aspirations entirely around family life.¹³³ These fears that sexual liberation, especially for young women, was causing a moral decline within the country were only exacerbated by cultural changes which made issues, such as out of wedlock births and teenage pregnancy, more visible. In this way, sex

¹²⁹ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 558.

¹³⁰ Mahoney, "Sex Education in the Public Schools: A Discriminant Analysis of Characteristics of Pro and Anti Individuals." 269-701.

¹³¹ Ibid., 269-701.

¹³² Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 149.; Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 559.; Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

¹³³ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 25-51.; Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 117-122, 149.; Mahoney, "Sex Education in the Public Schools: A Discriminant Analysis of Characteristics of Pro and Anti Individuals." 266.

education became a symbol for moral and cultural decline to many within the suburban middle class.¹³⁴ Ironically many opponents to sex education argued that SIECUS, still in its early, moderate days at this time, was supporting this developing counterculture.¹³⁵ Connections between sex education and moral and cultural decline would also be drawn in the second wave of backlash, however in the first wave this argument was applied to all forms of sex education.

Although the individuals and groups involved in this first wave of backlash were not particularly well organized or connected with each other, they did share a number of tactics. Most frequent were expressions of the opponents' desires to return to more traditional roles for women. Traditional attitudes were that women's beauty and purpose should come from their role in the family and these were being challenged by a growing counterculture. Many feared that these changes were leading to a devaluing of the "most important" role of motherhood and childrearing and, by extension, the family.¹³⁶ Additionally, since, in a traditional view of gender, women were expected to remain chaste, many argued that there was no need for large quantities of sex education, especially that involving contraception and extramarital sex, because ideally women would not be sexually active.¹³⁷ Instead, if women were to be educated about sex, they should be taught that abstinence, and not sexual liberation, is empowerment through rejection of temptation and men's uncontrolled sexual desires – an idea drawn from the Victorian era 100 years earlier.¹³⁸ These arguments show how this first wave of backlash to the sex education movement was very much a continuation of previous opposition to sex education.

¹³⁴ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 43-46.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

¹³⁶ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 118-122.

¹³⁷ Mahoney, "Sex Education in the Public Schools: A Discriminant Analysis of Characteristics of Pro and Anti Individuals." 266.

¹³⁸ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 108-112.

Opponents also cast proponents of sex education, including their perceived primary villain, SIECUS, as being “anti-god,” “anti-family,” and even “anti-American.”¹³⁹ As the Soviet Union had implemented more sexual freedoms and looser family roles, charges of communism were also brought against those advocating for and teaching sex education.¹⁴⁰ Gordon V. Drake wrote numerous pamphlets for groups like the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society decrying SIECUS as “pornographic and communist,” capitalizing on the terror created by the so called “Red Menace.”¹⁴¹ For some, the fight against sex education was also a fight against “elitist cosmopolitan conspiracies” to take control away from local governments and individuals.¹⁴² Interestingly, this has become a common criticism of the left today, likely stemming from the alignment of these individuals and groups with the right as part of the second wave of backlash. Additionally, critics began increasing their use of white Americans’ mistrust of the Civil Rights Movement and black Americans to further scare away potential sex education supporters. Opponents argued that SIECUS curriculum, which attempted to argue against racism, was convincing young white girls that they needed to participate in interracial relationships in order to alleviate their “white guilt.”¹⁴³ They also used stereotypes like that of the sexually aggressive black man who targeted and took advantage of innocent and pure white girls to scare parents into opposition of sex education which promoted too many dangerous ideas, like racial equality and support for interracial relationships. Drake used all of these arguments in a 1969 Christian Crusade Publication.¹⁴⁴ Racial tactics continued to be used by those involved in the Moral

¹³⁹ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 557-560.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 560.

¹⁴¹ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 179-181.

¹⁴² Ibid., 185.

¹⁴³ Irvine 55

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 55.

Majority and second wave of backlash in the form of dog whistle politics, less obvious appeals to racism veiled behind other issues like welfare.

Ironically, SIECUS received also large amounts of criticism for “promoting the counterculture” despite the fact that during this time the organization was still in its early, significantly more moderate days.¹⁴⁵ All of these accusations were especially directed at curricula, like that of SIECUS, which included information about “deviant sexuality” and abortion as both issues went against the traditional family image of a loving heterosexual couple and their 2.5 children and many of those in opposition to sex education were also strongly against abortion.¹⁴⁶ While many charges of anti-Christianism were leveled against sex education and its supporters, there was little correlation between specific religious beliefs and opposition to sex education.¹⁴⁷ This lack of correlation and the still relatively high rates of public support indicate that the prominent, often religiously based opposition groups, were likely a vocal minority.¹⁴⁸

The first wave of backlash saw some success but because the coalition of different socially conservative groups would not solidify until the second wave of backlash, these successes were generally limited to state and local levels. However, these efforts did help to generate some of the grassroots support that would become a large part of building the new right of the second wave of backlash. Many of the organizations that would eventually become part of the latter movement formed during this phase of backlash. For example, the Movement to Restore Decency (MOTOREDE), Mothers for Moral Stability (MOMS), and People Against

¹⁴⁵ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 185-186.

¹⁴⁶ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 557-560.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 557.

¹⁴⁸ Mahoney, "Sex Education in the Public Schools: A Discriminant Analysis of Characteristics of Pro and Anti Individuals." 269 -271.

Unconstitutional Sex Education (PAUSE) all got their start in the first wave of backlash, spending a combined total of forty million dollars to finance campaigns specifically against SIECUS.¹⁴⁹ MOMS, alongside the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society, were spurred to action in Anaheim, a district which had implemented broad sex education programs, initially with widespread support.¹⁵⁰ These groups were triggered by the discussion of masturbation in classrooms run by a SIECUS affiliate.¹⁵¹ One of the more successful movements because of its ability to organize a few different groups behind one goal, a less common occurrence in this wave of backlash, MOMS and its allies were able to ban all SIECUS materials in public schools across the state of California in 1969. A similar ban on all sex education courses in general was enacted in the state of Louisiana in 1968.¹⁵² The SIECUS programming was seen as too radical, despite its more moderate and traditionally based teachings at this time, because of its explicit honesty and emphasis on individual choice and youth decision making.¹⁵³

Despite these major successes, overall, the first wave of backlash was largely unsuccessful at stopping the spread of sex education programs. Additionally, its backlash helped contribute to the liberalization of previously more moderate groups like SIECUS. Throughout this period of backlash, public schools continued to implement the sex education programs, either as a part of existing classes or as separate course options.¹⁵⁴ National legislation was also created to support sex education – namely the Public Health Act of 1970 and its important Title X component. It would take the formation of a political coalition and its eventual merger with the Republican Party to achieve more significant successes for those in opposition to the sex education movement.

¹⁴⁹ Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 2.

¹⁵⁰ Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*, 170-173.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

¹⁵² Haffner, Debra, W. "SIECUS: 25 Years of Commitment to Sexual Health and Education." 2.

¹⁵³ Huber and Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900." 25-51.

¹⁵⁴ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 558.

THE SECOND WAVE OF BACKLASH

The second wave of backlash to the sex education movement occurred at the end of the 1970s and, by the beginning of the 1980s, had been incorporated into the new Republican Party, creating an association between certain values and methods with the right and solidifying sex education as a partisan issue. This era of backlash focused on eliminating certain content from sex education courses and promoting a specific kind of sex education rather than opposing sex education in its entirety, beginning the abstinence only versus comprehensive (contraceptive inclusive) sex education debate.¹⁵⁵ Rather than using anti-communist rhetoric to attack proponents of sex education, language became increasingly focused on accusations that SIECUS and others were anti-family and anti-Christian.¹⁵⁶ Like the proponents of the sex education movement, this second wave of backlash was also a reaction to changing teenage behavior, increasing acceptance of homosexuality and premarital sex, and an increasing number of single mothers and divorce. However, this was a conservative reaction aimed at preserving the status quo. While those in opposition did accept some of the premises of the sex education movement – for instance, that knowledge is beneficial – it continued to maintain that certain standards of sexual behavior, derived from traditional gender roles, were morally superior, healthy, and correct. Both those involved in the sex education movement and those in opposition to comprehensive sex education recognized that there remained a clear need for sex education programs and sexual health services, especially those aimed at teenagers and poorer women who lacked the ability to support a new child. Two different means of attacking these issues gained

¹⁵⁵ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 150-164.

¹⁵⁶ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 560.

popularity, reflective of the values and methods of either side of the political spectrum. One, promoted by SIECUS and other sex education advocates, was a combination of education and government support for access to reproductive services, methods that were generally favored by the left and the Democratic Party. The other played into conservative gender roles and advocated abstinence, beginning the association of traditional values and morality with the right and the Republican Party.

Different from the first wave of backlash, this movement recognizes that some sort of positive action, rather than just denouncement, must be taken to correct what they see as continuing moral decline. Politicians and advocates alike began to focus their efforts on opposing the inclusion of topics like abortion, contraception, and homosexuality in sex education classes and to advocate for more “family life classes” which would push abstinence as the only safe and moral decision as well as exalting the value of a traditional family structure.¹⁵⁷ To discourage sexual activity and abortions, especially outside of the confines of marriage, many courses pushed false and exaggerated claims about the medical risks of abortion and contraception to discourage their inclusion in sex education programs.¹⁵⁸ For example, condoms had been promoted by sex education advocates like SIECUS as a safe and easy means to protect against both disease and unplanned pregnancy. Despite having a 98% effectiveness when used correctly every time, many abstinence only courses compared them to a game of roulette.¹⁵⁹ This not only made the consequences of a failed condom seem significantly more severe through the implications of death, but also presented a greatly exaggerated unreliability. Similarly, abortion was presented as incredibly dangerous, with death listed first in potential complications despite

¹⁵⁷ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 112-119.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-146.

¹⁵⁹ Irvine, *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*, 121.

the fact that legal abortion was safer than childbirth.¹⁶⁰ Both of these fear tactics were used to persuade students that sex, specifically premarital sex, was dangerous. The use of fear tactics and exaggerated claims like these to push for a specific kind of policy has become a preferred method of the Republican Party since, expanding beyond sex education into issues such as terrorism, cybersecurity, drug use, and immigration.

The second wave of backlash also saw the coalescence of a number of different groups on issues related to sexuality and reproduction including anti-abortion groups, abstinence only advocates, those in fear of deviant sexualities like homosexuality, and many faith-based organizations. These groups were united by the overlaps between their issues, especially within sex education where abortion, contraceptives, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality were all becoming more common topics of discussion – especially within curricula created by SIECUS and its affiliates.¹⁶¹ “Family values” became the touch stone for this newly formed coalition.¹⁶² For example, the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), while formed in 1970, became much more active in sex education and advocated for these types of “family values” classes during this second wave of backlash.¹⁶³ A union between fiscal conservatives and social conservatives, augmented by Ronald Reagan and his Moral Majority, then brought these groups under the wing of the Republican Party, cementing abstinence only sex education and many of the values associated with it as part of the Republican agenda. At the same time, this movement pushed comprehensive sex education and many of the values that supported it into the domain of the left.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 98-102.

¹⁶¹ Irvine, *Talk about sex: the battles over sex education in the United States*, 33.

¹⁶² Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 687.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Key to the creation of this alliance and in incorporating new demographics not typical to the party was the issue of homosexuality. Sex education programs such as those provided by the newly liberalized SIECUS were seen as encouraging this sexual perversion, as well as others like masturbation, and therefore moral failings.¹⁶⁴ Because homosexuality was still strongly opposed, not only by many within the white middle-class, but also by large numbers of the working-class, African Americans, and many new immigrants because of strongly held religious beliefs and a desire to present themselves as similar or the same as the white middle-class so as to be more widely accepted by society.¹⁶⁵ This connection between sex education and homosexuality, as well as the connection between sex education and abortion, are what allowed this second wave of backlash to be much more successful than its predecessor – by uniting a number of demographics behind one issue and the party that had decided to take it on.

UNITING FISCAL AND SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES

The Republican Party as we know it today was able to rise to power at the end of 1970s through a combination of two major ideas: 1) social conservatism, especially in response to the radical changes of the 1960s, to protect traditional values and lifestyles; and, 2) fiscal conservatism, a more solidly entrenched value of the party which promoted government budget cuts, smaller government, and “personal responsibility.” The Rise of the New Right, while not originally connected with the anti-abortion movement and opposition to sex education, began to incorporate both issues toward the end of the 1970s.¹⁶⁶ As a result, larger numbers of Republican Party members began to take on the ideas of conservative Christians, especially since conservative backlash to cultural changes and the connected rollbacks of government programs could be attributed to a desire to balance the budget and shrink the size of the government.

¹⁶⁴ Huber and Firmin, “A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900.” 25-51.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 403.

While moderates within the Republican party during this time of transition were more concerned about foreign debt and the health of the economy rather than protection of American culture and family values, they could be convinced to work with social conservatives to achieve their own goals.¹⁶⁷ For example, Title X, which had previously received widespread bipartisan support, was targeted for removal of both “wasteful” spending and preservation of American morality and family values.¹⁶⁸ By 1980, 4.5 million women were receiving contraceptives from the government through Title X programs.¹⁶⁹ Of these, 1/3 of this group was teenagers and the majority were either poor, women of color, or both.¹⁷⁰ Requiring parental consent before minors could access contraception through Title X and the Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) decision to stop funding “left leaning” organizations were supported by both fiscal conservatives and social conservatives as well.¹⁷¹ By cutting funding from this program and changing its usage requirements, social conservatives could be assured that youth were not being corrupted and that the government was not encouraging sex while fiscal conservatives could feel accomplished in reducing both government spending and size.

Taking aim at government programs which supported sex education also allowed the Republican party to push its tenant of “personal responsibility,” arguing that welfare programs acted to discourage hard work and enabled freeloaders. Almost all involved were poor, further playing into arguments about “welfare queens” and single mothers as burdens to the government and a significant number of these women were of color, creating another benefit to cutting these program for those in the party seeking to discretely appeal to more racist voters.¹⁷² Through

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 687.

¹⁶⁸ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 561.; Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 605, 618.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 618.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 618.

¹⁷¹ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 658.

¹⁷² Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 618.

exploitation of the stereotype of black Americans as lazy and therefore undeserving of government aid, many Republicans, like Ronald Reagan used dog whistle politics to further widen their growing coalition against comprehensive sex education to include those Americans upset by the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. In contrast, white middle-class women who became pregnant while unmarried were often cast as victims of male lust and organizations like Pregnancy Crisis Centers took steps to support these women through their pregnancies to prevent abortions.¹⁷³ The now more visible single and unmarried mothers, especially those of color, began to be seen as a burden on government resources, in addition to a failing of the American morality and family values.¹⁷⁴ The idea that federal subsidies for reproductive healthcare and sex education were too costly and led to extramarital sex and abortion united fiscal conservatives with their social counterpoints and begins feeding realignment in stances on women's sexuality and reproductive healthcare to match with a specific party identity.¹⁷⁵ These links between these different ideas and beliefs about women, family, religious values, and the role of government culminated in the formation of the New Right, but it was the election of Ronald Reagan and the Moral Majority which solidified these connections and established the New Right as the Republican mainstream.

Ronald Reagan's Moral Majority was founded in 1979 and Reagan was elected to the Presidency in the 1980.¹⁷⁶ The campaign and ideology of the new President allowed the different wings of the Republican Party to coalesce, forming the basis of much of the Party today. Reagan campaigned on family values, abortion restrictions, and disdain for government spending, especially in association with welfare programs. Electoral success and overwhelming popularity

¹⁷³ Ibid., 404.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 618.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 618.

¹⁷⁶ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 560.

in combination with his status as the leader of the Republican Party, allowed Reagan to make his agenda into that of the party, especially as many Party members road on his coattails, using his influence to increase their chances in their own elections.¹⁷⁷ This pulled the conservative Christian faction of the party into the mainstream and began the movement to “avoid the watering down of American morals.”¹⁷⁸ Abstinence only education and the various interest groups which supported it found a place within the Republican Party agenda, solidifying their position as issues of the right. The values associated with abstinence only education and the methods used to advocate and implement it, including family values, Christian systems of morality, fear tactics, and public shaming were brought into the Republican mainstream right alongside the policies themselves. While some within the Republican Party were disappointed with this rightward and religious shift – GOP women especially – they quickly became a marginalized minority within the Party solidifying a party with more traditional views of women and by extension, opposition to sex education.¹⁷⁹

ABSTINENCE ONLY: A SOLUTION TO RALLY AROUND

To address of the country’s ongoing concerns about sex, sex education, teenage pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases, the newly reborn Republican Party took up advocacy of abstinence only education. These programs were especially important in addressing the “epidemic” of teen pregnancy which appeared to be growing. The appearance of an increasing rate of teenage pregnancy led many who had once supported more comprehensive sex education programs to switch sides, arguing that the programs clearly hadn’t solved the

¹⁷⁷ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 687.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 687.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 403.

problem or discouraged risk-taking behaviors in teens.¹⁸⁰ However, the idea of the “epidemic” was in fact a manipulation of facts which the Republican Party perpetuated in order to drum up support and activate potential supporters. In reality, the idea of a teen pregnancy “epidemic” was inaccurate for three main reasons: 1) it ignored the existence of a larger population of teenagers than ever before; 2) it didn’t take into account the increased visibility of teenagers in society; and, 3) it disregarded the fact that there were not yet clear results on the impact of comprehensive sex education on teen pregnancy rates because many schools had yet to implement any kind of sex education curriculum, much less a comprehensive curriculum.¹⁸¹ This use of extreme exaggeration to create fear was a continuation of tactics used in the first wave of backlash to sex education and was quickly adopted by both parties, although the right used and continues use this tactic across a wider variety of issues than the left.

This not only cemented abstinence only education as a Republican policy, but also both influenced and reflected the core values and methods of the party, making it the perfect solution to supporters’ concerns. Abstinence only education was designed to uphold family values and Christian morality, and prevent abortions and teen pregnancy, as well as saving money and preventing the government from taking too much authority away from parents. In 1981, the Reagan Administration presented the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) or the “chastity law” as a solution to all of these concerns. The bill would fund education programs which “promoted self-discipline” or “chastity education” and much of its funding was received by churches and religious conservatives to create these types of curricula nationwide.¹⁸² This policy not only reflected core values of Christian morality held by the Party and administration especially, but

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 618.

¹⁸¹ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 687.

¹⁸² "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood, 6.

also demonstrated the increasingly popular hands-off approach taken by the Republican Party in which community organizations, like churches, would take more of burden of education and charity away from the government.

Within the AFSA, Title V defined what the goals of these programs should be, reflecting the traditional family values promoted by the Republican Party and further solidifying their importance.¹⁸³ Under Title V abstinence would be taught as the only certain way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy and, extramarital and premarital sex would be strongly discouraged, with an emphasis on monogamy as the standard.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, students would be taught that having a child outside of marriage is harmful to all involved – the parents, the child, and society as a whole.¹⁸⁵ The importance of rejecting premarital sex was equated to the importance of rejecting alcohol and drugs, implying that the consequences of any of the three were similar and incredibly dangerous.¹⁸⁶ Students would not learn about abortion or homosexuality in these classes and instead would be taught the importance of marriage and encouraged to exemplify tradition values of chaste women and honorable men, leftover from the Victorian Era.¹⁸⁷ This new style of curriculum was described as teaching “the bare minimum” and therefore assuaged fears that parents were losing their authority to the state and, in a return to old arguments against sex education, that frank discussion of sex was encouraging sexual activity and deviant sexual behavior.¹⁸⁸ Finally, the bill helped the administration reduce the “obscene burden” placed on the taxpayer by wasting money on

¹⁸³ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood, 6-7.

¹⁸⁴ Pear, Robert. "Despite U.S. Objections, More Schools Offer Family Planning." The New York Times, October 8, 1984.

¹⁸⁵ Pear, Robert. "Despite U.S. Objections, More Schools Offer Family Planning." The New York Times, October 8, 1984.

¹⁸⁶ "History of Sex Education in the U.S." Planned Parenthood, 6-7.

¹⁸⁷ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, #.

unnecessary and controversial programs when funding for core school classes was already lacking.¹⁸⁹

CONTINUING PARTISAN FIGHT AT THE END OF THE 20th CENTURY

In a 1978 survey of randomly selected schools, 35% had separate sex education courses and, according to a National Youth survey from the same year, about 40% of kids aged thirteen to eighteen said they had participated in a sex education course.¹⁹⁰ However, the content of these courses varied greatly. As the decade progressed, it became more likely that these courses would reflect at least some of the information from curricula advocated for by SIECUS and other comprehensive sex education supporters including STDs, the reproductive process, the menstrual cycle, values and decision-making, contraceptives, and homosexuality.¹⁹¹ Although work was and is still needed in teacher training and inclusion of more comprehensive content, courses in the 1970s and 1980s were becoming better and more attempts were being made to understand adolescent development.¹⁹² Despite the appearance of outrage created by the right, parents also continued to express the desire to receive assistance with the sexual education of their children. As a result, in 1980 SIECUS received a major private grant to conduct prototype sex education programs for parents in Philadelphia.¹⁹³ Support for the inclusion of discussions of birth control and other contraceptive devices in sex education programs also continued to rise.¹⁹⁴ The DHHS under Reagan attempted to use the ambitions of both fiscal and social conservatives to cut

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., #.

¹⁸⁹ Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 150-156.

¹⁹⁰ Scales, "Sex Education in the '70s and '80s: Accomplishments, Obstacles and Emerging Issues." 559.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 559.

¹⁹² Ibid., 561-562, 559.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 560.

¹⁹⁴ "More Americans Support Sex Education in Schools," *New York Times*, January 24, 1978, TimesMachine.

funding for Title X and other science based reproductive health policies budget in 1983 by 862 million dollars cut, a reduction 27% above recommendation. However, despite this and multiple other attempts to defund it, the Public Health Act of 1970 and its included Title X provision remains intact.¹⁹⁵ Frequently in these conflicts over Title X, including that of 1983, Congress is divided along party lines – gradually becoming more and more so. This demonstrates the severity of the partisanship that has become attached to a, once nonpartisan, widely supported cause. The ACLU went on to attack the AFLA’s Title V and other Reagan-era abstinence only efforts in 1984 as in violation of the first amendment’s establishment clause by promoting a religiously based curriculum.¹⁹⁶ This further demonstrates the associations between the right, sexuality, and religion that the sex education movement and backlash to it helped to cement into place.

CONCLUSION

It has been more than fifty years since the beginning of the sex education movement and the creation of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States and, since then, the issue has evolved into an ongoing partisan debate. In the midst of this debate, schools across the country have continued to implement sex education programs within their curricula, despite an ongoing struggle over what content would be included.

SIECUS, the sex education movement, and the two waves of backlash that followed played an important role in the shaping of American politics. As the organization liberalized, beginning to tackle controversial topics like homosexuality, abortion, and race, it added fuel to the fire of a growing conservative coalition. Both fiscal and social conservatives were able to unite in opposition to the increasingly liberal ideas of SIECUS, developing tactics which played off the

¹⁹⁵ Haugeberg, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the 20th Century*, 630.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 658.

racial biases of many Americans, as well as their religious beliefs and views about traditional family structures. The establishment of opposition comprehensive sex education and then of support for abstinence only sex education, with help from President Reagan, as a critical part of the New Right's agenda, prompted a similar adoption of comprehensive sex education programs as a part of the agenda of the left. Values associated with each of these approaches to sex education have also become associated with either party: on the left, personal choice and education on informed decision making; on the right, promotion traditional family values and a system of morality based in religion. The conflict between these two views, as argued by both Irvine and I, has spread, impacting stances on other unrelated issues, like the legalization of drugs and criminal justice reform. Tactics developed during the second wave of backlash, such as dog whistle politics, have also crossed over into many of these other policy areas.

The debate over what should and what should not be addressed in public sex education programs will only continue to change as our knowledge and culture does the same. New issues, like toxic relationships, the importance of consent, and evolving ideas around gender and sexuality, are beginning to be included in some programs, perhaps providing an insight into what future debates may center around. While the implementation of sex education programs in public schools may appear to have reached an impasse in many areas, if the progression of the past is any indication, we may continue to see small steps toward support for more, increasingly comprehensive curricula that reflect the growing diversity of our country and world – much like the gradual shift away from opposition to all forms of sex education to advocacy for specific and limited types. SIECUS itself, still an active leader in the sex education movement today, continues its important work in the development, implementation, and review of sex education curricula designed to cover an increasing range of topics, for all age levels, in a variety of different learning environments.

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