

Final words on 'Safer Sex'

Responsibility

ERIC PARISI

"Hey guys, I need some birth control!" is an appropriate last line for Sara Johnson's "Simply Seeking Safer Sex," because those are the words she is shouting at Guilford College, as though it should realize its obligation to meet the need.

Many students here would agree with Sara that our school should provide us with free, conveniently accessible condoms. The sentiment is that the free condoms are not readily enough available if we have to request them; and that by not actively distributing them our school fails to fulfill some obligation to us. We seem to believe that when someone wants to interact sexually with another, it is not the sexual partners but the school that should carry the burden of taking action to ensure safety. We seem to believe that students who want to protect themselves from the consequences of the behavior they have chosen should not have to buy condoms, or even suffer the inconvenience of retrieving free ones; rather, the school, according to Johnson, should "get condoms out to students"! Perhaps that kind of lazy attitude, spawned by a complete lack of responsibility for even the most personal aspects of our lives, is (more than unwanted pregnancy, or any horrible new disease) the real root of every member who wishes to engage in a potentially dangerous activity.

Why is it the financial burden of the community to assure every member who wishes to engage in a potentially dangerous activity the protective equipment, as long as the dangerous activity involves sex? We do not demand that the school take responsibility for protecting us from the other health risks we choose. I may choose to drive my car too fast, making myself a great risk to other's health. No one expects Guilford to install extra safety equipment in my car and assure me I'm over 98% safer.

Faculty and administrators' belief that schools should distribute condoms to students is based on a harmful assumption that the students lack the ability to make decisions. Those who would distribute the condoms consider the recipients unable to be trusted to recognize potential consequences. Treating us as anything less than a group of adults would only encourage us to behave as something less. Why do many of us demand to be treated as children when it comes to sex?

Perhaps we do not all agree that our claiming a need to have condoms shoved at us resemble a child's need for protection. Why then do condom distribution advocates never perceive a need for schools to distribute condoms to professors, whose lives can also be ruined by pregnancy or disease? The answer is simple—professors are given the respect that is due to all mature adults, respect we don't seem to want.

If you find yourself in a position late at night without condoms, then you have to use what you know to make an informed decision about what to do. If on a given day you think you may later that night use substances that inhibit your ability to make a decision, then you might want to use a little foresight and buy condoms ahead of time.

What right does anyone have to demand that our school or anyone else is ever responsible for having condoms in her desk? If she has decided to have sex and use protection, then it is her responsibility alone to ensure that she either has the protection she wants or that she reevaluates her decisions about sex.

But, if being treated like children and having free condoms everywhere were to prevent transmission of a deadly disease, wouldn't it be worth it? No way. Treated as children, we will feel increasingly less need to accept responsibility. By thinking some parent or school will take care of us, we will forget the need for mature control, and cause even more disease transmission than if no condom provisions were made. We'll also cause more rape.

When do we grow up? If we young adults are treated as children, we will behave as children, while a young child treated with some of the respect given his seniors (perhaps even a bit more respect than he has earned) will meet the expectation and behave more maturely.

We should not allow condom distribution in our community, all members of which are aware of the potential effects of sexual behavior and are capable of mature responsibility and control. The characters in the movie *Kids* would certainly benefit from condom distribution because they, as the title suggests, are children. They would benefit from the same protection that could only hinder us.

Hate Mail

SARA JOHNSON

This is where it all began, the Back Page. I wrote a vaguely serious piece about condom distribution. We now have a board in the pub suite that keeps track of the "hate mail" all the editors are getting. It's a joke of course and currently it reads, "Keir: 1, John: 3, Adam: 3, Sara: 3." I have as much as Adam Lucas. I'm trying not to take them as personal offenses but it's hard to see your name printed over and over as someone passes judgement on your sex life. Maybe I shouldn't have put my experience in the nurse's office on the Back Page in the first place. I am actually glad that people are arguing about it, even if it does involve my name a little too much. There are some letters to the editor I have read that I just can't fight the urge to answer back to. Then there are some that are absolutely ridiculous.

Eric Parisi makes several good points about the maturity and responsibility involved in having sex and obtaining proper birth control. I feel that if you are making conscious choices and using birth control that is one step towards maturity in approaching sex. "Acting like an adult" when it comes to sex includes taking advantage of resources providing contraceptives. If you are having unprotected sex, you have not made a mature decision.

I consider myself extremely lucky. I do not consider myself "self-disciplinarily challenged" and I don't think those that know me or the situation at hand would either. I am in a nine-month relationship in which choices about sex have been made slowly and with caution. I considered not just physical dangers but potential emotional problems as well. My pursuit of condoms on that fateful day in the nurse's office was actually a secondary precaution. I am lucky because I have been careful; I have been responsible. If seeking condoms in the nurses office makes me immature or "childlike" as Parisi said, so be it. I'd rather be immature than pregnant.

Although I have been very lucky, there are those who are not. There are people who engage in casual sex, often putting themselves at risk. When speaking of the Guilford community as a whole, Parisi stated that "all members are aware of the potential effect of sexual behavior and capable of mature responsibility and control." If that were true there would be no unprotected, "Saturday night" sex, there would be no AIDS cases or unwanted pregnancy on campus. This is not the case. The fact is that there are people in this community and beyond that know the dangers of sex but do not take care of themselves; they do not think of consequences; they get too drunk and forget the danger they are putting themselves in. This is a straight-out fact. If there is any thing at all that can be done to protect these people, then that's what needs to be done. If condoms need to be shoved into their desk, then if possible someone should try to shove condoms into their desk. Understand that I am not saying it is just ignorant, uneducated people who need to have contraceptives given to them. One of my friends, who I consider to have an amazing intellect, does not seem to understand the importance of safe sex. After taking her to Planned Parenthood so many times, I'm beginning to wonder if she will ever understand the danger she puts herself in. She cared for her uncle as he died of AIDS in the bedroom next to hers. She watched him die, she knows what AIDS is. Still, I sat across from her shocked in Mr. B's, drinking coffee when she told me she slept with a 27 year old ex-heroin addict. I asked her if she used protection; she didn't answer and drank her coffee.

Parisi stated that if "being treated as children" (taking part in condom distribution) saved one life it would not be worth it. I think saving a life is worth putting a bucket in the nurse's office.

By the way, distribution of contraceptives has absolutely, absolutely nothing to do with rape. Rapists don't see a bucket of condoms in the nurse's office and decide to go out and commit rape. To say that "We'll also cause more rape," by providing free condoms is unbelievably ignorant. Rape is a violent crime that is committed by people with deep-rooted psychological problems and who have a lack of respect, to put it mildly, of other people. I can't believe anyone would say that there is cause and effect relationship between contraceptives and rape.

I think for the most part the Guilford community knows what's going on. We know that some form of protection is needed. How it should be obtained is another controversy.

I've lost my point somewhere along the way. I was saying something about how Guilford as a community does need to at least try to protect itself from today's dangers. I'm sorry to say it, but premarital sex has become a fact of life for our generation. We can try to ignore it. We can refuse to "encourage" it by not offering free and easily accessible contraception, but it won't go away. It is too ingrained in our minds by the media and everything around us. I'd like to think that we could all be completely responsible for ourselves, that we could all live safely, but it's just not going to happen. All I can do is watch out for myself, watch out for my friends. Do what you can to protect others who aren't going to protect themselves; take them to Planned Parenthood. Because I am a firm believer in karma, I think we should try to protect those who don't protect themselves. I mean what's the harm in making condoms more accessible? Who is really going to be hurt? Perhaps people would be interested to know that since the AIDS about AIDS issue came out a few weeks ago, a bucket of condoms has been put out in the nurse's office and in Mary Hobbs. I'm told they're having a hard time keeping it full in Mary Hobbs.

OK. Write all the letters to the editor that you want. I'm done talking about it, at least to all of Guilford.

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