

Sex Education and How It Got Into the Schools

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

The idea that people needed to be educated about sex probably began with the founding of the birth control movement by Margaret Sanger, who launched a crusade early in the 20th Century to provide women with birth control information. It was Sanger's work as a visiting nurse that turned her interest to sex education and women's health. Influenced by anarchist Emma Goldman, she began to advocate the need for family limitation as a means by which working-class women could liberate themselves from the burden of unwanted pregnancy.

In 1914, Sanger published the first issue of *The Woman Rebel*, which advocated militant feminism and the right to practice birth control. She also wrote a 16-page pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, which provided explicit instructions on the use of contraceptive methods. In August 1914, Sanger was indicted for violating postal obscenity laws. She jumped bail in October and set sail for England.

In England she became acquainted with a number of British radicals, feminists, and neo-Malthusians whose social and economic theories helped her develop broader scientific and social justifications for birth control. She was also deeply influenced by psychologist Havelock Ellis and his theories on female sexuality and free love.

In 1915, Sanger returned to the United States. The government's case against her was dropped. In 1916, she opened the nation's first birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York. After nine days of operation, the clinic was raided, and Sanger and staff were arrested. She spent 30 days in jail. However, the publicity surrounding the clinic provided Sanger with a base of wealthy supporters from which she began to build an organized birth control movement.

In 1917, Sanger published a new monthly, the *Birth Control Review*, and in 1921 she embarked on a campaign to win mainstream support for birth control by founding the American Birth Control League, the forerunner of Planned Parenthood. She focused her efforts on gaining support from the medical profession, social workers, and the liberal wing of the eugenics movement. Havelock Ellis had converted her to the eugenics creed. She saw birth control as a means of reducing genetically transmitted mental or physical defects, and supported sterilization for the mentally incompetent. She advocated "more children for the fit, less from the unfit—that is the chief issue of birth control."

In 1922, Sanger married oil magnate James Noah H. Slee, thus insuring her financial independence. Slee, who died in 1943, became the main funder of the birth control movement. By connecting with the eugenics movement, Sanger was able to gain the backing of some of America's wealthiest people.

In 1930, Sanger opened a family planning clinic in Harlem with the approval of the Negro leadership, including communist W.E.B. DuBois. Beginning in 1939, DuBois also served on the advisory council for Sanger's "Negro Project." The financial support of Albert and Mary Lasker made the project possible. In 1966, the year Sanger died, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "There is a striking kinship between our movement and Margaret Sanger's early efforts."

From the end of World War II to the present, Planned Parenthood has become the world's largest enterprise promoting birth control and abortion. In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved the sale of the birth control pill. In 1961 President Kennedy defined population growth as a "staggering" problem and formerly endorsed reproductive research to make new knowledge and methods available worldwide.

In 1961, a Conference on Religion and the Family brought together the medical director of Planned Parenthood, the director of the National Council of Churches of Christ, and the leader of the marriage counseling movement in the United States. Out of that meeting came the idea for creating SIECUS, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. It was Dr. Mary Calderone, one of the founders, who introduced the concept of sexuality in 1964. It encompassed much more than the biological meaning of sex. Thus, sexuality education replaced the term sex education to emphasize its more comprehensive scope.

A *SIECUS Report* (Vol. 27, No. 4) states: "In February 1999, SIECUS conducted a public poll on our Internet site to ask the general public who had the greatest impact in bringing about a positive change in the way America understands and affirms sexuality. The top ten, chosen from a list of 100, were Judy Blume, Mary Calderone, Ellen DeGeneres, Joycelyn Elders, Hugh Hefner, Anita Hill, Magic Johnson, Madonna, Gloria Steinem, and Ruth Westheimer. They represent diverse perspectives and views, and each has helped American think about sexuality in a new and different way."

Getting back to our chronology, in 1963, the U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution on population growth and economic development. In that same year, the U.S. government established the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Part of its mandate was to support and oversee research in reproductive science and contraceptive development.

In 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Griswold v. Connecticut* ruled that Connecticut's law prohibiting the use of contraceptives by married couples violated a newly defined right of marital privacy. As a result, ten states liberalized their family planning laws and began to provide family planning services with tax funds.

In 1969 the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws, now known as the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, was founded.

In 1970, Congress enacted Title X of the Public Health Services Act, which provided support and funding for family planning services and educational programs and for

biomedical and behavioral research in reproduction and contraceptive development. Title X also authorized funding for a Center for Population Research within NICHD. This marked the first time Congress had ever voted for a separate authorization of family planning services.

In that same year, New York state enacted the most progressive abortion law in the nation, and Planned Parenthood of Syracuse, New York, became the first affiliate to offer abortion services.

In 1973, *Humanist Manifesto II* was published. It advocated a doctrine of sexual freedom that clearly clashed with traditional views of sex. The Manifesto states: "In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered 'evil.' Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire. ... Moral education for children and adults is an important way of developing awareness and sexual maturity." Among the signers of the Manifesto was Alan F. Guttmacher, President of Planned Parenthood.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the constitutional right of privacy extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion, thereby legalizing abortion throughout the United States. In 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth* struck down state requirements for parental and spousal consent for abortion and set aside a state prohibition against saline abortions.

In 1976, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, named after Planned Parenthood's president, published *11 Million Teenagers*, the first nationally distributed document to focus attention on the problem of teen pregnancy and childbearing in the United States.

In 1979, the U.S. Supreme Court found the Massachusetts statute restricting minors' access to abortion unconstitutional. It ruled that if states required minors to obtain parental consent for an abortion, they must also give minors the alternative of obtaining the consent of a judge, in confidential proceedings and without first notifying their parents.

In 1981, the Alan Guttmacher Institute published *Teenage Pregnancy: The Problem that Hasn't Gone Away*, an analysis of teen sexuality, contraceptive knowledge and use, and pregnancy experience. It emphasizes the need for making confidential contraceptive services accessible to sexually active teens.

In 1982, Planned Parenthood published “Sexuality Alphabet,” as tool for sex education. George Grant, in his book, *Grand Illusions*, writes of this publication: “Planned Parenthood’s sex education programs and materials are brazenly perverse. They are frequently accentuated with crudely obscene four-letter words and illustrated by explicitly ribald nudity. They openly endorse aberrant behavior—homosexuality, masturbation, fornication, incest, and even bestiality—and then they describe that behavior in excruciating detail.”

In 1953, staffer Lena Levine wrote in *Planned Parenthood News*: “Our goal is to be ready as educators and parents to help young people obtain sex satisfaction before marriage. By sanctioning sex before marriage, we will prevent fear and guilt.”

In 1985, the Alan Guttmacher Institute published its report on Teen Pregnancy in Industrialized Countries, indicating that the U.S. teen pregnancy rate of 96 per 1,000 is the highest in the developed world. A two-year study by the National Academy of Sciences agreed with the AGI study and concluded that “prevention of adolescent pregnancy should have the highest priority,” and “making contraceptive methods available and accessible to those who are sexually active and encouraging them to diligently use these methods is the surest major strategy for pregnancy prevention.”

In 1970, fewer than half of the nation’s school districts offered sex education curricula and none had school-based birth control clinics. In 1998, more than seventy-five percent of the districts teach sex education and there are more than one hundred clinics in operation. Yet the percentage of illegitimate births has only increased during that time, from a mere fifteen percent to an astonishing fifty-one percent. In California, the public schools have required sex education for more than thirty years, and yet the state has maintained one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the nation. (Grant, p. 128)

Meanwhile, the AIDS epidemic, which began with eleven cases in 1979, had grown to 24,000 cases in 1986. In 1993, the number of cases was up to 339,250.

By 1987, Planned Parenthood had become the world’s largest non-government provider of family planning services. It had also become politically active, joining more than 250 civil rights, civil liberties, religious, labor, education, legal, environmental, health, and feminist groups that opposed the appointment of conservative Judge Robert Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court.