

A Modesty Proposal

By Andria K. Brown

Many people have been questioning the recent actions of the Tennessee legislature in regard to our children's education, and I think those citizens are all rightfully concerned. I mean, clearly our representatives are not going far enough. How is a bill dictating abstinence-only sex ed, and the prohibition of mentioning gateway sexual activities like kissing and hand-holding, truly going to protect our children? If we want to curb the normal biological impulses of our species, it's going to take more aggressive action. That's why I'd like to strongly suggest that the Tennessee state legislature support the most scientifically based method for preventing unwanted sexual activity among adolescents: mandatory sensory deprivation of teenagers.

There may be some initial challenges with adopting this measure, I'll admit. The cost of government-issued blindfolds, noise-cancelling headphones, noseplugs, and full-body anti-tactile suits will be a significant investment, but I think we can agree that it will pay for itself in the reduction of prom-related expenses. And yes, it may be somewhat difficult for teenagers to go about their daily activities without any awareness of their surroundings, but how can you argue that holding jobs, completing schoolwork, and being involved in the community are more important than total abstinence? It's not like sexually active teenagers contribute anything to society, anyway.

It is well-documented that immoral behavior among our youth begins with them noticing each other. Eye contact, a whiff of shampoo, that accidental brush of forearms during school assemblies: all activities that lead straight to wanton conduct like pre-marital dating. Teaching kids to only say no – not “maybe later,” definitely not “only if we're safe” – is all well and good, but as evidenced by the fact that seventy percent of today's youth don't leave their teens with their virginity¹, it's not quite enough. Research shows that abstinence-only sex ed has no impact on teen pregnancy² and that states with the highest rates of teen pregnancies support abstinence-only programs³, but obviously it's because those non-abstinent kids are working extra hard to make everyone else look bad.

So clearly, some kids are just too stubborn to listen. (Well, unless it's to a comprehensive sex ed curriculum, which has been reported to make teens 60 percent less likely to become or cause someone else to become pregnant⁴.) Explaining the only fool-proof way to avoid pregnancy and STDs, instead of teaching them some amoral, wishy-washy risk-reduction methods, isn't quite taking hold in the hearts and minds of walking hormone bombs the way theocratic, middle-aged politicians had hoped. The next logical step, then, is to lock those gateways up tight, like a sensory chastity belt.

I'm sure sexual anarchists like Sen. Barbara Marrero of Memphis, the only senator who voted against SB3310, would disagree, but if we want to protect our children from the dangers of sex, our only tool

¹ Abma JC et al., Teenagers in the United States: sexual activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, National Survey of Family Growth 2006–2008, *Vital and Health Statistics*, 2010, Series 23, No. 30

² Impacts of Four Title V Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. submitted to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, April 2007

³ National Center for Health Statistics, April 10, 2012

⁴ University of Washington in Seattle, March 19, 2008

left is total denial. As they're fumbling blindly through their high school hallways and straining to hear their teachers speak, we can finally rest assured that we have prepared our kids for a lifetime of making informed, responsible decisions.

Maybe, with such good training, they'll even be in Tennessee's government someday.