

# Safe sex? Getting intimate in the classroom

*Abstinence or protection: the divide in sex education may offer a poor alternative*

**BENJAMIN SHOEMAKER**  
Guest Writer

Many people wonder if teenagers are capable of keeping their virginity until they are married. It seems nowadays that teens are becoming more and more sexually active. The question arises among sex educators as to whether abstinence or "safe sex" should be promoted.

*"There is a resurrection of the idea of chastity as a virtue, a pleasure, a freedom, rather than the notion that if you are not having sex you are missing out on life."*

- James Sclater, Focus on the Family

Many secular sex educators believe abstinence would be ideal, but is very unlikely. These educators only those who are determined and disciplined are able to wait. But when sex educators teach "safe sex" to our youth, they are not teaching the best and healthiest option for them.

14-year-old Jessica Robertson says, "Some adults think that all teenagers are going to have sex. Not me. I want to wear a white dress when I get married." Pro-chastity programs across the country are trying to get other teens to think the same way as Jessica. She demonstrates that there is an attitude of abstinence today among our youth.

"What some would call the old fashioned idea of saving yourself for your mate is not dead," says James Sclater, director of public policy for Focus on the Family. "There is a resurrec-

tion of the idea of chastity as a virtue, a pleasure, a freedom, rather than the notion that if you are not having sex you are missing out on life."

Many programs are going into schools and trying to get their message across to students. Some pro-chastity groups do not claim one way right or wrong but rather healthy or unhealthy. They

alert the students to the many health risks involved with sex. They do not just mention the physical health risks but also the emotional and mental risks involved with premarital sex.

However, there are those who claim it is unlikely that teenagers will abstain from sex. "Pretending it doesn't happen does nothing but drive the activity underground," said John Fisher, Ottawa-based executive director of Egale Canada, a national gay and lesbian rights organization.

Many sex educators admit abstinence would be better in a perfect world, but feel it is simply unlikely that teenagers

would listen. Sue Johanson, a sex educator, explains she believes there is no "safe sex" but rather "safer sex." Sex educators claim they are being realistic and not naive like those who promote chastity.

Those who believe in safer sex bring up statistics that side with their case; for example, 61 percent of 18-19 year olds have had sexual intercourse. Sex educators say they are helping the majority, which is more important.

But pro-chastity programs hope to change these statistics. They are working to persuade others of their optimism that those numbers can be changed with abstinence education.

It all comes down to the teenager's decision. No one can make decisions for teenagers, but role models can steer teens in the right direction. The right direction is abstinence

— this has been

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admitted even by many secular educators.

Adults should be pushing the younger generation toward the best decision possible and not the second best. Proponents of contraceptives are offering today's youth a second-best approach for teens' well-being.

Adults should be pressing the youth to keep their chastity. Showing teenagers what is best for them is an important part of showing our love for the younger generation, even when the best choice is difficult to achieve.

We need to make it clear that the best approach to sex is abstinence, and we must remind teens that abstinence has been accomplished by many other people. It seems hard to resist temptation in such a corrupt world, but we need to push the youth in a positive direction and encourage them to wait.



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE HOLST

**Condoms will protect you from getting pregnant and contracting STD's — most of the time. But even secular sex-ed teachers agree that abstinence would be ideal.**

# The rationale behind senior scramble

*A single person's perspective on dating frenzy and its causes*

**BY ANN REILLY**  
Staff Writer

I am 22 years old, and I am not engaged. I am not in a serious relationship. I'm not even in a casual relationship. And Calvin culture tells me to start panicking.

The concept of "Senior Scramble" has been visited time and time again, but do we ever really get to the bottom of this not-so-subtle pressure to pair off before graduation, lest we become misers and spinsters? I have a couple of theories as to where this mindset originates, presented here with the intention of sparking reflection, conversation and maybe a chuckle or two.

Theory Number One: Self-preservation of the Denomination.

If you didn't already know, the Christian Reformed denomination is not very prevalent. It exists in "pockets" throughout the world, most notably in Grand Rapids, Sioux Center and Rehoboth. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but you get the point. Here at Calvin, CRC kids from all over the place come together. The idea is that our college is one giant habitat for a rare species to find mates, procreate and thus keep the denomination from becoming extinct. And with any luck, we will send our offspring back to Calvin to continue the cycle.

Theory Number Two: Bubble-Induced Laziness.

We are so comfortable here at Calvin. We can assume certain things about the folks who we

take classes with, besides a few oddballs that usually slip under the radar and get admitted. Out in the "real world" we cannot hold these same assumptions, which makes getting to know someone all the more difficult. Finding a life partner at Calvin is just easier. Why get out of our nice little bubble if we don't have to? There are plenty of beautiful men and women who are looking for someone to settle down with before graduation, so why should we look anywhere else?

Theory Number Three: The Residual Disney Effect.

When I was little I watched "The Little Mermaid." Ariel makes the defiant statement to her father "I'm 16 years old, I'm not a child anymore." At the end of the movie, he allows his youngest daughter to get married. I also watched "Beauty and the Beast." The beast needs to find his true love by the time he turns 21, or he will remain a beast forever. Lo and behold, just before the last petal falls, Belle confesses her undying love for the beast. Now, I don't know about you, but Disney was a huge part of my childhood. These are just two examples of

how Disney movies fed me unrealistic expectations for romantic relationships. Now that I'm in college, maybe part of me has held onto these ideals and I expect to find my true love before I get too old. Oh wait, I'm already 22. I guess I'll be a beast (spinster?) forever now.

I don't know if any or all of these theories cause the "Senior Scramble" phenomenon. However, it is good to think about where our notions come

from. Nothing is more harmful than ignorant acceptance of tradition and blindly following the crowd.

This is not to say that if you're in a deep, meaningful, relationship that you are purely on the Calvin bandwagon and should rethink the whole thing. This is more for us single folk in the hopes that we gain a healthier view of relationships before we start thinking we're dysfunctional.



FILE PHOTO

**What is it that makes a senior scramble to get to the altar? We have a few theories.**

## ATTENTION ARTISTS

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# Diamonds and war

**BY LIBBY HOWELL**  
Staff Writer

This past week I attended a showing of the film "Blood Diamond." The film shows how the diamond trade acts as a catalyst for war in Sierra Leone. The showing I went to was sponsored by the Christian Reformed Word Relief Committee and by Amnesty International. After the showing of the movie a panel of missionaries and former citizens of Sierra Leone spoke about their personal experiences with war and the diamond trade in their country.

The personal commentaries were both moving and motivational. One man who experienced the war spoke of how he was used as a human shield by the rebels. He spoke of losing contact with his entire family. A woman spoke of how malaria is rampant across Sierra Leone, as citizens have no access to health care. Another woman talked about pretending to be an old woman in order to hide from the rebels that burst into the complex where she had found refuge. As these three people shared their experiences, the overwhelming theme of the grace of God became evident. All of them believe they would not be alive if not for the power of prayer and the work of the Lord.

Their testimonies were moving and a true tribute to God. They made me question how we live our lives in America. It took a mainstream movie to inform us about an issue that has torn apart the lives of the citizens of Sierra Leone. Amnesty International reports that diamond-fueled wars have killed over 4 million people, and even legitimate minors hired by diamond companies are paid less than a dollar a day. What does it say about our Christianity that it took a mainstream secular film to educate Christians about such a serious humanitarian cause?

I do not want to draw any conclusions. I think that secular film can be an important tool when used responsibly, but I also think that as Christians it is our responsibility to be aware of the struggles of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I challenge you to try out the power of prayer the Sierra Leonians spoke so eloquently of and pray with them for their country.

# Calvinist politics

**BY ERIK BOLT**  
Guest Writer

Frustrated by the situation in Iraq and the wave of corruption scandals in Congress, America overthrew the GOP majority and gave the Democrats control of both chambers on Capitol Hill in the 2006 mid-term elections. In the final two years of his presidency, President Bush now faces a Congress led by his opposition.

*The "righteous rich" are often disasters waiting to happen.*

Those are the facts, for good or for ill. What matters now is how we at Calvin College choose to respond. I can hazard a guess that most of the Calvin community reacted with disappointment: the party of CRC members like Congressman Vern Ehlers and not-Governor Dick DeVos failed to retain the support of the American people, who had in previous elections voted mostly in its favor.

But I will respond differently: The Democrats' rise to power is exactly what needed to happen. I will even go so far as to say that our own John Calvin would agree.

I realize that many readers will strongly object. The Republicans support life, family values and the Protestant work ethic. Their leaders publicly acknowledge God and thank him for rewarding them with prosperity and political success. Of course they are God's party.

Unfortunately for those inclined to associate their faith with political institutions, this mindset is mistaken. Any serious examination of the Christian faith makes it clear that following God most emphatically does not mean worldly success. Nor does God have partisan membership.

The Republican Party's commitment to a limited government is deeply misguided. John Calvin wrote that involvement in government is among the most important things a Christian can be called to do.

Government is not an evil institution, nor is it divinely designed to be weak. He believed that a large and powerful government will protect the rights of people better than a small and powerless one. Calvin College should reflect this view rather than the belief that prosperity follows righteousness, a belief that has produced a warped view of how society should work.

It is wrong to put our trust in the corporate structure suggested by Republican leadership. Republicans of the DeVos ilk have taught us that the rich are the ones God rewards and favors,

while the poor deserve to remain poor because their poverty is their own fault.

The Bible, though, teaches that the rich often are those who put their faith in worldly things, while the poor and weak will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Recent experience tells us that the "righteous rich," whether corporate (Enron), political (Jack Abramoff) or religious (Ted Haggard), are often disasters waiting to happen. Private groups cannot be easily held accountable, and allowing people like this to dominate the free world is not only irresponsible but downright wrong.

Government, however, can be held accountable to lead a nation in accordance with the rights of the people. The government of any democratic country is bound to a constitution; its central tenets include protecting the rights of all people. Though of course all structures, including government, are fallen, national government, to reiterate John Calvin's view, is one of the best spheres in which a Christian can work.

The job of a Christian in politics is not to keep the government small but to ensure that the government carries on its mission with responsibility and integrity. Any other path amounts to chickening out on a colossal scale.

It's time to give the Democrats a chance — and even to reevaluate just who they are. While it remains true that the party's official stance supports abortion and a revisionist view of marriage, it may not be the case forever. Democratic leaders cannot be blind to the forces that put them in power. America did not vote for a Democratic Congress because it has gone liberal; she voted blue because the GOP has gone liberal. Too many Republicans support the same problematic issues as the leading Democrats, and the Bush administration has even failed to support a smaller government.

Who, then, are the Democrats? They owe their majority in Congress to an influx of Democrats who are true to their conservative beliefs. Most newly-elected Democrats are pro-life, pro-traditional marriage and even pro-gun ownership. On top of that, they understand Christ's command to care for the poor. They might even agree with John Calvin that government can protect and lead the people.

These are the men and women to whom our nation now passes, and it is up to us to accept that God works in unexpected ways.

# Dispelling myths of mental health

*A student's experience with bipolar disorder*

**BY DEANNA SPEYERS**  
Guest Writer

When I was in high school my concept of people who suffered from schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorder and the like were based on stereotypes. I thought that they were completely insane, walking around in a daze, homicidal or suicidal and simply not to be trusted.

The summer after I graduated from high school I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I had a severe manic attack and had to be hospitalized for four weeks to recover. Nobody, especially me, could believe what happened. People expected a lot from me; I was an honor student and captain of the basketball and volleyball teams. I got along well with my teachers, peers and family. Without warning I developed an immobilizing mental illness, and rumors that I "went crazy" soon followed.

I was so ashamed that I severed many of my closest relationships, put my plans to attend Calvin on hold and quit my job. I changed from a sociable, outgoing person into a withdrawn and angry individual. My parents were the only ones who saw me like this. After about seven months, I began an almost desperate quest to learn more about my disorder to gain some hope for my future and a chance to feel "normal" again.

I now feel called to bust the stigma of not only bipolar disorder, but all mental illness. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. That means of the 4,199 students at Calvin College, 1,100 may have some form

of mental illness. The age of onset for most mental illnesses is late teens to early twenties, making college students prime candidates. Almost half of all college students will become

*I believe that being bipolar has changed my life mostly for the better.*

seriously depressed and 1 in 10 will seriously consider suicide. Of the 57 million Americans suffering from mental illness, only 8 million will seek treat-

ment. I am always amazed at the number of people who open up to me about their own struggle with a mental illness after I have told them about mine.

Many of them are going through exactly what I did and are searching for answers and acceptance. At the same time, these people are living normal lives and have learned to manage their illness.

I believe that being bipolar has changed my life mostly for the better. I have embraced being bipolar and used this as a way to promote mental health awareness. I now view my parents and three older brothers as pillars of strength and acceptance. My faith has grown immensely, and I have learned to trust that God does not make mistakes and has given me this for a reason. Ultimately, I have learned that being bipolar does not define me; it is merely a part of who I am.

## Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

from the National Institute of Mental Health

- Increased energy, activity and restlessness
- Excessively "high," overly good, euphoric mood
  - Extreme irritability
- Racing thoughts and talking very fast, jumping from one idea to another
  - Distractibility, can't concentrate well
  - Little sleep needed
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's abilities and powers
  - Poor judgment
  - Spending sprees
- A lasting period of behavior that is different from usual
  - Increased sexual drive
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol and sleeping medications
- Provocative, intrusive or aggressive behavior

## Mental Health Statistics

from the National Institute of Mental Health

- Approximately 20.9 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the United States population age 18 and older in a given year, have a mood disorder.
- The median age of onset for mood disorders is 30 years.
- Depressive disorders often co-occur with anxiety disorders and substance abuse.
- Major Depressive Disorder is the leading cause of disability in the United States for ages 15-44.
  - Bipolar disorder affects approximately 5.7 million adults in America.
- Most people with one anxiety disorder also have another anxiety disorder. Nearly three-quarters of those with an anxiety disorder will have their first episode by age 21.5.
- In 2004, 32,439 (approximately 11 per 100,000) people died by suicide in the United States

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