

Sex and Driving

By Barrington H. Brennen, June 15, 2004

Having sex and driving a motor vehicle both demand a lot of energy and responsibility. Which one do you believe demands the greatest responsibility and accountability? I pose this question because the laws of our country confuse the issue. According to our laws, the age of maturity--when someone can vote, become legally independent, and drive a car--is 18. However, the age for sexual consent--when a person can legally consent to have sex--is 16. This means that a sixteen-year-old girl is old enough to independently decide to have sex, but not responsible enough to drive a car. It is also illegal for a person less than 21 to purchase alcoholic beverages. The reasoning seems to be that an unmarried sixteen-year-old teenager has more intellectual acumen, reasoning power, and maturity to have sex, than an eighteen-year-old to vote for the destiny our nation and to drive a dangerous machine (the car), and a twenty-one-year old to purchase a bottle of Kalik.

The Bahamas is not unique with these kinds of laws. Many Caribbean islands and countries around the world have similar laws. I noted with interest though, that Barbados' age of maturity is 18, but the age for sexual consent and the legal age one can get married is 16. I thought one had to be matured to be married! Perhaps the only countries in the world where sex outside of marriage is illegal is Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Madagascar has the highest age for sexual consent at the age of age 21 (perhaps the only one in the world). Countries with the lowest age for sexual consent (ages 12 or 13) are Guyana, Columbia, Japan, Mexico, Malta, Nigeria, just to name a few. Some countries have different ages of sexual consent for each gender. For example: Hong Kong (18 for males/15 for females), Iran (14 for females/17 for males), Botswana (16 females/14 males), Bolivia (14 for females/16 for males). In Pakistan there is no age for sexual consent. This universal commonality to the unimportance of sex makes it difficult for us to do what is right. It seems that the whole world has it backwards; but the Bahamas can do something. We can at least match the age of sexual consent and the age of maturity.

LEGALIZED PROMISCUITY

In the Bahamas, a person under age 18 needs the legal approval of his or her parents to get married. On the other hand they do not need legal approval two years earlier to have sex. What an irony! This certainly proves that our nation officially values sex over marriage and goes at length to protect that concept by making it into policy. Our nation's family policies are inherently designed to destroy the marriage relationship and to give license to adult men and women to prey on innocent girls and boys. This is one reason agencies like SCAN, Social Services, and the Crisis Center are climbing a high wall of impossibility. The laws are working against their progress. This is one reason we have difficulty defining sexual abuse and molestation.

It is my opinion that the age of sexual consent should at least match the age of maturity (18) and better yet, be raised to age 21 when psychologically, adulthood really begins. Adolescence ends at the age of 21 and for some people, at 25. Sexual activity is a very serious decision to make. We have trivialized sex to the point that the sacredness of marriage is threatened.

It should be a serious criminal offense for anyone to have sex with someone aged 21 or under (unless legally married to that person). The punishment should be even more severe if the victim is under 18, and even greater if the victim is under 13.

CHRISTIAN NATION?

I wondered, after reviewing the age of sexual consent in countries around the world, which countries are truly Christian? None. The only country that applies its religious beliefs to its laws is Saudi Arabia where sex outside of marriage is illegal. I am not suggesting the other countries do the same. We cannot legislate morality. The job of law makers is to protect the innocent and preserve the basic unit of society—the family. The Pilgrim Fathers left Europe hundreds of years ago for this very reason. So they can worship and serve their God according to the dictate of their conscience. It is imperative that the church influences the government to make laws that protect the innocent (our children and teenagers). For example a sixteen-year-old is not old enough to volunteer for sex. Secondly, there is a 50/50 chance of getting pregnant when you have sex. Pregnancy brings with it huge responsibilities, and teen pregnancy outside of marriage has negative sociological and economic effects on our nation. This risk alone should cause us to change the laws.

SICK SOCIETY

Anthropologist and psychologist Dr. Robert Edgerton, in his book “Sick Societies, Changing the Myth of Primitive Harmony” begins with these words: “All societies are sick, but some are sicker than others. This paraphrase of Orwell’s famous quip about the equality of animals calls attention to the existence of tradition beliefs and practices that threaten human health and happiness more in some societies than others.” He also states that there are “some customs and social institutions in all societies that compromise human well-being.” He points out in his book that the laws of the society are indicative of its sickness in the past. I ask the question then, could we preserve the future of our nation and families by first evaluating the current laws of our land relevancy in the current society and then be willing to make the changes where necessary? According to Dr. Edgerton, history demonstrates that any society that refuses to examine the relevancy of its laws and traditions in the contemporary setting always fails. Please let us not fall into this trap. Let’s work together to preserve our nation. **Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. You can reach him at 323-8772, or email infor@soencouragement.org, or visit our web site www.soencouragement.org, or write to SOE, P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, Bahamas**