

SPECTRUM

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We have met the enemy

We have met the enemy, and it is us. That is a conclusion reached by Dr. Richard Keeling, director of the Department of Student Health at the University of Virginia. In his discussions on the crisis facing student health today he states that "our young people are the victims of a society that has tried to provide them too much, too fast, too attractively."

When it comes to sexual health, studies indicated that students do not lack knowledge - about AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, drugs and alcohol. In fact, they have been saturated with information, which may explain in part why attendance is generally low at workshops, presentations and discussions dealing with these issues.

The great difficulty health educators face today is that students "do not do what they know". Knowledge is not translated into healthy behavior. That happens in regard to smoking and drinking (and not just among students). It is now a major concern when it comes to sexual behavior. Knowledge does not shape behavior.

Now why is that, especially in regard to students on a university campus? One would think this goes against the very grain of a university education. Is it not our firm belief that knowledge will in fact change people's lives? Or, do we expect it to change only people's economic lives?

Surely we would prefer that university does more than teach job skills. It ought also transmit cultural values from one generation to the next, and it does. But according to Keeling, this is part of the concern. The roots of the problems facing our young people, he asserts, "are cultural". Furthermore, and this ought to be most alarming to the university, young people tend to shape their behavior by what they see rather than by what they read.

But lest that only the university is singled out, Keeling uses a much broader brush. He states that what students see is much different from what "authority figures" in general tell them. Furthermore, these "figures" may state what they believe and hope for "from the pulpit, the podium, or the chair at the dining room table", but do they really do what they truly value? Their behavior, not their words, has the greatest modeling effect.

This implicates all of us. Young people take cues from peers, parents, community leaders and public figures. They see in action a value system that often differs from the one they are told to follow. That value system is displayed for

all to see, particularly in advertising, television, movies, music and music videos.

These very powerful transmitters of culture tell us that happiness and success is equated with sexual gratification, experimentation, physical attractiveness and image consciousness. From the television, which we so naively invited into our living rooms three decades ago, we are introduced to simplistic relationships, "uncomplicated" sex, and morals and values based on immediate and short-term gratification. Our society, Keeling strongly states, "actively endorses, pushes and pro-

motes sensual entertainment, provocative advertising and early sexual experience."

The enemy is clearly us. And, we are reaping the "benefits" of what we have sown for two decades. That "benefit" is today's generation "at risk". What we thought would bring us freedom and liberation in regard to sexual expression has instead brought to many disease, unwanted pregnancies, the devastation of abortion, sexual violence, and even death.

Is there hope? I was struck by a review I read of the movie "Medicine Man," starring Sean Connery and Lorraine Bracco. What is

No means no

She met him in a Vancouver bar. He was a friend of a friend. They arranged to go out for dinner but dropped by her apartment first. "I said no and pushed him away", says the woman. He thought, "I'm going for it", and he went for it. And by then it was too late. I couldn't get away. It just all happened so fast and I was scared to death. Later she says, fear turned to anger, and she decided to press sexual assault charges. Everybody I knew said, 'Don't put yourself through this hell'. But I said, "I don't care, I didn't do anything wrong. This guy should pay." A year later, a judge acquitted the man of sexual assault, saying that his accuser may have given him the impression that she was consenting to sex.

In recent months, the battle of the sexes seems to be at the forefront of the news and the media's favourite topic. This barrage of attention has brought the words "rape" and "sexual assault" out of the closet. For the first time, men and women in open settings are taking honestly about date rape and nonconsensual sex, and when "no" means "no". Dialogue of this sort is increasingly productive and useful. This newfound awareness is helping to evaporate old myths. A rapist is not longer a dark, lurking stranger and sexual harassment can come in many forms from inappropriate suggestions, comments or jokes to rape.

Two weeks ago, people across Canada and the US were horrified by the details of Mike Tyson's rape trial - by testimony about deep vaginal injuries and images of fans cheering the boxer to and from court. Unfortunately, very often

the critical element is a question of who's word to believe: his or hers.

It would seem to be the case that in most instances the jury believes the man. Very often the woman is perceived as a whinner or that she must have been asking for it. Usually, every effort is made to discredit and invalidate her position. The ramifications of this bias are self-evident. However, the courage witnessed by women like Anita

Metanoia by John Valk

unique about this latest Hollywood contribution, according to the reviewer, is that it is a relationship movie, not a love story. As such the director "refreshingly decides to skip the usual mandatory love [sex] scene." (Itallicizing mine). That is unique.

I was even more struck by a step taken at the conclusion of a tele-

conference - "Beyond the Facts" - aired here at UNB Tuesday afternoon. Members of the participating audience, at the invitation of Grace Getty, director of UNB AIDS Awareness, resolved to join together to initiate a community response. These members are concerned about "doing what they truly value."

The Wimmin's Room

Hill and Disiree Washington has created a dialogue. While dialogue itself is only a small positive force; when dealing with this sensitive issue, it proves itself to be educational and extremely beneficial. That is that the visibility of these issues may enable some men

to realize that "no" means "no" and that sex without mutual consent is wrong. Hopefully, if this is true, the pain and humiliation suffered publicly by these women will serve and essential purpose for the relations of men and women everywhere.

STUDIES IN THE WEST INDIES (INTERSESSION)

Applications are still being accepted from students interested in the Summer programme in the West Indies. The response to the courses has been very encouraging thus far and there remain a few spaces that need to be filled. The closing date for applications is today, Friday, February 28, 1992. Interested students should contact:

**Department of Extension and Summer School, University of
New Brunswick
Box 4400, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5A3
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