

Two Powerful Myths About Sexuality

Those who hear my words and act on them are like the person who, in building a house, digs deep and lays a foundation on rock. When a flood arises and the river bursts against the house, it stands because it is well made.

—Luke 6:47-4

Take the Sexual Myth Test below. Answer true or false. When you finish, compare your answers with the correct answers on page 126. Then tally as a class how many got perfect scores, how many got 11-14 correct, and how many got 6-10 correct.

1. *The male penis only becomes erect during lovemaking or while the male is thinking of sexual activity.*
2. *A woman cannot get pregnant before she has her first period.*
3. *Teens have the highest rate of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).*
4. *STDs can result in a baby being born blind.*
5. *Orgasm is the peak or climax of sexual activity.*
6. *Sexual intercourse the night before or the day of athletic competition will reduce excellence in athletic performance.*
7. *Women have a larger epididymis than men.*
8. *Sexual intercourse should be avoided during pregnancy.*
9. *A large penis enhances a woman's sexual gratification.*
10. *Masturbation is a sexual activity common to both men and women.*

11. *The majority of sexually transmitted diseases will go away by themselves.*
12. *Most teen mothers do not complete high school or acquire employment skills and are likely to end up on welfare.*
13. *After two or three birth control pills, a woman can no longer get pregnant.*
14. *The absence of a hymen is positive evidence that a girl is not a virgin.*
15. *There is an absolute, safe period for sexual intercourse during which conception will not take place.*

■ **Share any sexual myths you remember from growing up, for example, the stork bringing babies. Share any current myths you have heard in school, at parties, from friends.**

Myths about sexuality are global and plentiful. They masquerade as facts: A woman cannot get pregnant the first time she has sex. The buildup of sperm in the male body will cause acne.

Every generation seems to have its own myths about sexuality. This chapter will highlight two myths that are attitudinal. They exist in varying degrees of severity.

The first myth is that we are not able to talk about sexuality.

The second myth is that we are supposed to know everything about sexuality.

Let's start with an explanation of the first myth: We are not supposed to talk about sexuality. I can still hear teachers telling me, "Hey, if you are a Christian man or woman, you will never discuss that topic, not in mixed company. Okay, maybe once in a while in the locker room, but that is it." Or, "Hey, I do not want to hear those kinds of dirty jokes." The don't-talk-about-it myth is often strong in families. Sexuality is not always the most comfortable topic for parents and teens to talk about. Most families do not get up in the morning, mom and dad getting ready for

Myths masqu



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DON'T
TALK.

work, the kids getting ready for school, and amid the Wheaties, Grape Nuts, and toast, the kids inquire, “Hey, Mom and Dad, how’s your sex life going? Is it going pretty good? Well, that’s great.”

In my family someone would have died at the breakfast table. Probably me. One of my parents would have taken the box of cereal and jammed it down my throat. I would have gone to school with a big bulge in my neck.

“Bartlett, what’s that thing sticking out your neck?” my friend asks me. But before I can answer, he says, “You brought up sex again at breakfast, didn’t you? No explanation is necessary. I understand.”



Sexuality is personal. Most of us do not hop on a bus, turn to the person next to us, and ask how his or her sex life is going. Most of us would not or should not discuss sexuality freely without trusting the other person. But when we meet someone we care about and want to be in relationship with, it is critical that we can talk to him or her.

It is sad to work with teens, as well as adults, who engage in sexual behavior with each other but cannot talk about sexuality. This is a definite signal that something is amiss. This is not healthy. We need to be able to share what is comfortable and uncomfortable about our sexuality. Often when I bring this topic up, some teens claim that only up-tight adults have problems talking about sex. Teens have no problems discussing sexuality. Not always true. I often hear from teens who have a hard time communicating on this topic. Here is an example.

erade as facts.

This was their third date. He was falling more and more in love. But he was male. He was cool. He wasn't going to say, "I love you more than anyone I've ever met. All I can think of is you." No. All of these feelings translate into, "I had a good time tonight." He steals a glance at the digital clock in the car. She has to be home in a half hour. He is five minutes from her house. He has time. This is the night to find out if there is hope, if she feels what he feels, if this is more than a friendship. He eases the car into a dark, romantic spot, turns off the 537 horsepower, and gazes into her eyes.

"Let's talk," he whispers. Talk is the last thing on his mind. They talk for a good 40 seconds. Then he begins to raise his arm in the direction of her shoulder. When the arm lands softly onto her shoulder, there are two possibilities. She may fly to the passenger's side of the seat and scream, "Get your hands off me. Touch me again, and I'll rip your face off!" Or, she will smile and snuggle up closer.

As his arm slowly descends onto her shoulder, she moves closer to him. Immediately his mind races with the words, "Yes! She does like me! We are more than friends!" Tonight he imagines will be a peak experience for him. He turns to kiss her. She leans to receive the embrace, placing her hand on the seat.

As he moves closer, he pushes the seat belt buckle onto her hand and before she can move it, he sits on the buckle, pinning her hand beneath it. She cannot move it. Pain shoots all the way up her shoulder. She can take her pulse without touching her wrist or neck. She can just feel the throbbing one...two...three.... He notices she is trembling and is glad to see she is just as excited as he is. Finally her arm goes numb and she cannot feel anything.

After what seems an eternity, he pulls away and tells her, "I better get you home." She nods and thanks God that her hand, though numb, is now free. He pulls into her driveway and escorts her to the door.

"I'll call you," he promises.

"Please do," she replies, as she slowly moves into the house. She waves to him, shuts the door, and grabs her hand.

"My hand!" she moans as she massages it with the other. "My hand! I

am going to lose my hand.” She notices that the letters GM are imprinted solidly into the back of her hand. The next morning the letters remain. Nothing she does

will take them away. Friends at school ask why she has GM indented into the back of her hand. “Ah....the concert last night.” She explains. “There was this huge guy stamping people at the gate and he just stamped so hard, it’s still there,” she says with a weak smile.



This example illustrates the don’t-talk myth in action. It takes this guy three dates to make a move. The girl doesn’t want to ruin this romantic moment by blurting out, “You’re sitting on my hand, and it hurts.” She just endures. She just goes along, fakes it. The example shows how crazy this myth is.

Men are just as guilty as women of not communicating. For example, some males will go out with a female, enjoy being with her, and find her easy to talk with. But when the guys are around, they will suddenly act distant and cool. They don’t want their friends to discover that they really like a girl for fear of getting mocked about “the wife” or being “whipped.” Their tough or aloof act confuses or even hurts the girl. These guys resist talking to the girl or their friends about how they really feel.

The don’t-talk pattern can be harmful when adults carry it into their relationships and marriages. For many adults who are incapable of talking about their sexuality, these patterns begin to take root in junior and senior high.

When two people are going further physically than they are verbally, this is often a warning sign that something could be wrong in the relationship. Communication about sexuality is necessary in a healthy relationship.

The inability to communicate about sexuality can be carried into adult relationships. A woman I once counseled complained of not feeling safe dressing in the morning with her husband present. She dressed inside her closet so that her husband did not see her and suddenly want to be sexual. She was not

comfortable telling him that his response to seeing her getting dressed was building up feelings of resentment in her.

Husbands often complain to one another that they and their wives have too little time for each other and not enough time for sex. “My wife is always so busy and the kids come first.” But these husbands hesitate to talk about their feelings with their wives. Communication between people in sexual relationships is vital.

■ **What examples of people having trouble communicating about sex have you heard? Why is it difficult to talk about sex at times?**

■ **Do you find it more difficult to talk about sexual matters with people of the same sex or the opposite sex? Why?**



The second myth is that we are supposed to know everything about sex and sexuality. This myth assumes that at some moment a bright light appears in the sky and descends upon a child. There are voices. Instantly she or he knows everything about sex. The child walks into the house, summons the family around, and announces, “Mom, Dad, my darling sister and brother, I just

want you to know that if any of you have any questions about sex, feel free to come to me. Don’t be embarrassed. No question is too stupid. My door is always open. Anything you want to talk about, feel free. I will always be there for you.” This doesn’t happen. None of us knows everything about sex, but



**MYTH
KNOW
EVERYTHING!**

most of us fear getting caught not knowing.

If you are at a party and someone cracks a political joke about the lieutenant governor, you simply say you don't get it.

"Who is the lieutenant governor?" You ask. "Oh, Smith. Oh, now I get it." But if someone cracks a joke about sexuality, people nervously look at each other for two, three seconds before bursting into fake laughter. Then you motion to your friend and ask, "What does orgasm mean?"

"I don't know," your friend says. "Go look it up."

There is pressure on us to know everything about sexuality. This pressure can be overwhelming.

My friend's brother was getting married. He was 23, a plumber. I was invited to the stag party a week before the wedding. The groom-to-be came over to talk to three of us whom he must have felt safe with.

"I got to tell you guys something," he said, lowering his voice, the smell of liquor on his breath. "I'm a virgin."

One of my friends looked at him incredulously. "But you told me back in high school that you did it with..."

"I know," he said, interrupting him. "I told a lot of stories. I didn't want anyone to think I was weird. But the truth is, I was a virgin. But I just lost my virginity."

"Just now, did I miss something?" another friend joked.

The groom-to-be waved him off with his hand, "No, not here, you idiot. Saturday."

"Oh, you and your fiancée had sex?" the friend asked.

"No," he replied. "Not with her." Now all of us were curious.

I said, "Let me get this straight. You waited 23 years to have sex. Then a week before your marriage you had sex, and it wasn't with your fiancée.

Who did you have it with?"

A sheepish grin crawled on his face. “I went into Chicago and hired a prostitute. Hey, I didn’t want to go on my honeymoon and not know what I was doing. She’s a virgin, too, at least she says she is. Heck, one of us has to know what we’re doing.”

“Well,” my friend commented, “I bet if you had waited, you two would have figured it out. I mean, if you go to the right honeymoon places they have instructions written right on the inside of the medicine cabinet. You can just open it up and follow the diagrams.”



**THOSE WHO
ACT AS IF
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We were making jokes but actually all of us thought this was a pretty sorry story. It is an example of how much pressure in our culture there is to know about sex. We actually felt sorry for this guy. He put sex off all of these years only to do it first with someone he did not care about and who didn’t care about him. What a waste!

The groom-to-be waited over a year before he told his wife this story. He thought she would be angry; he was surprised to discover it saddened her. She could not understand. She told him they had an entire lifetime together to “get it right.” She told him how special that would have been to her. The pressure to know all about sexuality can be strong.

The reality is that none of us know everything and we never will. We will learn about sexuality throughout our lifetime. We will learn things at 16, 17, 20, 30, 40, 50, 80.

Once, when I said this in a class I was teaching, one freshman looked up and remarked, “Eighty! Why bother?” I smiled, approached the desk of this student, and asked if he had eaten lunch.

“Yeah, why?” he responded.

“Good.” I answered, “Is it disturbing to think of your parents being sexual?”

“Gross,” he shot back.

I quietly suggested, “Well, then think of your grandparents having sex.” He immediately slipped into a catatonic state! It took two days for his coach and me to finally get him moving and to basketball practice!

We learn about sexuality our entire lives. Age does not matter. Sexuality is us as body persons on a lifelong journey of interrelatedness with others, especially our partners in marriage.

The sooner we can admit we do not know everything and never will, the healthier our sexuality will be. Often the people who act as if they know everything, know the least. The students who can ask questions, who are brave enough to say they are not sure what that word means, are usually the healthy ones. I personally believe that it is refreshing to know that we can learn about sexuality our entire lives.



■ What pressure do you experience to know all about sexuality? What pressure did you feel when you were younger?

■ With whom do you find it difficult or easy to talk about sexuality?

■ How easy or difficult in your family is talking about sex?

■ If you have dated, how easy or difficult do you find it to talk to the other person about sex?

■ If you haven't dated, how easy or difficult do you think it will be to talk to the other person about sex?