

Time for a Sexual Counterrevolution

Laura Hollis | Apr 16, 2015, TownHall.com

The headlines and national discussion about campus sexual assaults continue unabated. Earlier this week, the Chronicle of Higher Education published yet another story under the headline, "Should colleges be judging rape?" This article, like many others, delves into the complexities of real and fabricated accusations, the need to balance protection of victims with due process for the accused, administrator's insufficient training in criminal and legal matters, the blurring effect of alcohol use and concerns about the overall culture on college campuses.

Accompanying the story was a photo of a large group of Brown University students, standing together silently to protest the university's alleged inadequate response to two sexual misconduct cases. Looking at all these students, a core truth occurred to me that students seem to be overlooking:

Students themselves have the power to change the culture on campus.

About 50 years ago, a revolution ignited on college and university campuses across the U.S. Sparked by their rejection of the Vietnam War -- and with it, much of the value system of their parents -- the baby boomer generation threw off the shackles of what they viewed as oppressive societal restrictions and launched the sexual-revolution.

It was thought that this would produce liberation. And in some respects -- women in the workforce, for example -- it has. But it has had its negative consequences as well.

Abortion, legalized in 1973 amid the sexual-revolution, has taken the lives of over 55 million unborn children. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 51 percent of all abortions are performed on young women under age 24. Forty-five percent of all abortions are performed on unmarried women.

And then there are sexually transmitted infections. Prior to the 1960s, rates of infection in young people were so low that the data is difficult to find. But infections exploded in the 1960s and thereafter. And although Americans age 15 -

24 are only 12 percent of the population, they now account for half of the 20 million new STI's reported each year.

Finally, it is ironic that while etiquette and propriety were viewed as "oppressive," we are now hearing calls for the creation of legal regimes to police intimate behavior.

One would think that common sense suggests revisiting some of the blithe assumptions that got us here in the first place. Perhaps we should counsel against indiscriminate sex, instead of promoting it as the apex of human expression. Perhaps we should advise young people that alcohol consumption is just as dangerous when combined with sex as it is when combined with driving or operating complex machinery. No, it won't kill you. But it will alter your lives -- often permanently -- in ways you will not like.

Perhaps it is time for a second sexual-revolution. A counterrevolution. And who better to bring it about than people the same age as those who launched the first one?

What if American youths decided that they deserved better? That the ground rules for interpersonal relationships should be more than a formulaic yes-means-yes and no-means-no roadmap from a laminated gender-studies handout?

Men: What if you saw yourselves as gentlemen -- men of honor, whose social responsibility it was to protect the women you are with (for an evening or longer)? What if you saw your genetic material as something to be preserved for the creation of the children you deliberately decide to bring into the world with a woman of your choice, instead of accidents to be aborted out of inconvenience?

Women: What if you refused to settle for a drunken hookup in a dorm room with an equally inebriated stranger? What if you decided that your sexual activities would be more rewarding if your inhibitions were removed not by alcohol or drugs, but by the security of a stable relationship?

This wouldn't require new laws, more regulations, heightened social stigma or shaming. This is about the possibilities of radically altering the cultural landscape through the power of personal choice. In a culture like ours that worships "choice," why shouldn't we acknowledge that there are *better choices*?

All of you -- male and female -- have the power to change your expectations, your decisions and your behavior. If you did that, the numbers of sexual assaults on college campuses -- and elsewhere - would be de minimis, as they were in my parents' and grandparents' day.

You have the power to change the culture for the better, not only on your college campuses but across the country.

Difficult? Another generation your age did it before. And a goal like this should be appealing for an age group that consistently says they want to "change the world."

If you truly want to change the world, you can start by changing yourselves.

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