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## The Catholic Secondary School Climate: Forming a Culture of Nonviolence and Healthy Relatedness

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## ARTICLES

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# THE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL CLIMATE: FORMING A CULTURE OF NONVIOLENCE AND HEALTHY RELATEDNESS

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*In The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1998) suggests that the foremost challenge to third millennium education is a "crisis of values" that assumes the form of moral relativism, subjectivism, and nihilism. Teen violence, disengagement with others, power games, date rape, and other forms of unhealthy sexual relationships are manifestations of this crisis. One of the characteristics of the Catholic school that enables it to respond is the climate of the educating community. The Congregation states, "The educating community, taken as a whole, is...called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations" (p. 12). Fostering healthy relationships is key to the formation of young persons in our Catholic secondary schools. This article examines three questions confronting secondary schools: How does interpersonal violence threaten both interpersonal relations and the climate of the educating community? What approaches can be used in secondary schools to contribute to a culture of nonviolence? How are healthy interpersonal relations fostered among teens in a Catholic school? We analyze these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective which draws upon research and practice from the fields of public health, education, and psychology and the theological tradition of Catholic education, particularly moral theology.*



“Schools are mandated to provide a safe, caring environment in which children can learn. They have the sanction of society to teach relevant skills and to generally address many potentially sensitive issues” (Zins, Travis, Brown, & Knighton, 1994, p. 13). Many principals, teachers, students, and families view their school environments as unsafe (Price & Everett, 1997; Zins et al., 1994). Based on a survey of midwestern inner city high school students, Price, Desmond, and Smith (1991) found that almost half of the students knew someone who took a gun to school, while Price and Everett (1997) discovered that three fourths had personally known someone who had been shot. Frequently such violent acts are related to anger, provocation by another student, jealousy of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a desire to feel important or powerful. Sexual and physical violence is a widespread high school problem, particularly in dating relationships. According to the MetLife study, *Violence in America's Public Schools* (Harris & Associates, 1993), one in four students reported having been a victim of violence in or around school. Further, students reported that violence was frequently addressed through disciplinary measures, and much less often, through educational interventions. For schools to be safe and caring environments, school educators and administrators are challenged to understand the etiology of violence, recognize what provokes violent acts in students, learn about violence-prevention strategies, and develop an integrated approach to prevention in their schools.

In their discussion of violence-prevention programs in secondary schools, Sudermann, Jaffe, and Hastings (1995) emphasize the need for primary prevention of intimate relationships, beginning with high school relationships and dating. They suggest,

Prevention with high school students possibly represents one of the most effective actions a community can take to reduce the incidence of violence and to ameliorate its effects...students also represent the future community health care workers, police officers, judges, neighbors, and friends of those who will be affected by violence in intimate relationships. Thus, in raising the awareness and empowering adolescents to respond to violence in the community and in their own lives, the probability of effecting a fundamental decrease in violence is high. (Sudermann et al., 1995, p. 232)

Catholic high schools are uniquely positioned to be involved in shaping moral values; teaching skills; and changing attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors that underlie and promote violence (Sudermann et al., 1995). High school educators not only teach students, but also morally influence students and transmit values and knowledge of our culture. Thus, school systems, administrators, and teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to participate in violence-prevention efforts, and to teach and model healthy relationships and moral choices. To address these issues, we: 1) define interper-



sonal violence and identify associated risk factors; 2) describe school-based violence-prevention strategies and programs; 3) discuss ethical considerations about teen sexuality and violent behavior; and 4) describe opportunities for educators to create safe environments and provide the kind of care that enables students to develop healthy relationships and prevent interpersonal violence. Sections of the article represent four steps that educators might take to reduce the incidents of interpersonal violence and to foster safer, healthier, and life-giving (versus life-threatening) relationships among students.

## **RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT VIOLENCE**

The first step in violence prevention is raising awareness about violence—identifying what it is, the consequences and problems associated with violence, and whom it affects. Violence is defined by the Centers for Disease Control as the use of force with the intent to harm either oneself, such as in a suicide attempt, or another person or group. Categories of violence include self-directed, interpersonal, group or gang, domestic, child abuse, and elder abuse. Violent behaviors cause psychological and physical injury, injury-related deaths, and long-term disability. Additional consequences include the economic costs of health care, lost potential, destruction of families, and unsafe schools and workplaces.

Violence is an epidemic in the United States. It is one of the most important public health issues facing individuals, families, institutions, and communities. Each year, over one million women seek medical care for injuries caused by abuse. Up to 35% of women presenting with injuries at emergency rooms have injuries caused by battering, and 30% of homicide victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends (McLeer & Anwar, 1989; Stark & Filtcraft, 1988; U. S. Department of Justice, 1986). The lifetime prevalence of abuse toward women, as estimated from national probability samples, ranges from 85 per 1000 to 100 per 1000 (Schulman, 1979; Teske & Parker, 1993). Based on a 1995 national interview of 1000 parents regarding their self-reported abusive behavior, the Gallup Organization estimated that 44 per 1000 children (i.e., 3 million of 67 million U.S. children) were victims of physical abuse by their parents (English, 1998; Gallup, Moor, & Schussel, 1997). The 1995 Gallup Poll also found that 23% of surveyed adults had been victims of sexual abuse by an adult or older child (English, 1998; Gallup et al., 1997). In 1990, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) was established to collect state data regarding the number of and types of child abuse and neglect reports to public agencies. The 1995 NCANDS data indicate an increase in reported maltreatment from 2.6 million children in 1990 to 2.9 million children in 1994 (English, 1998; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). It is not just small children who have been victimized in this epidemic of violence; according to the



Department of Justice teens are also being victimized at an unprecedented level. Teenagers are three times as likely as adults over 20 years of age to be victims of violent crimes. In 1992, one in 13 youths was a victim of violent crime (victims of almost one quarter of the 6.62 million rapes, robberies, and assaults committed) (Allen-Hagen & Sickmund, 1993; Moone, 1994).

While each category of violence (e.g., interpersonal teen violence, domestic violence, and child abuse) has inherent characteristics, all forms of violence are interrelated and involve patterns of behavior. Further, victims of violence are more likely to adopt violent behaviors themselves. Domestic violence, child abuse, and teen violence are interconnected. The Surgeon General's Healthy People 2000 initiative identified five national objectives related to preventing or reducing violence (U. S. Public Health Service, 1991):

Objective 7.4: Reverse to less than 25.2 per 1000 children the rising incidence of maltreatment in children younger than age 18.

Objective 7.5: Reduce physical abuse directed at women by male partners to no more than 27 per 1000 couples.

Objective 7.15: Reduce to less than 10% the proportion of battered women and their children turned away from emergency housing due to lack of space.

Objective 7.16: Increase to at least 50% the proportion of elementary and secondary schools that teach nonviolent conflict resolution skills, preferably as part of quality school health education.

Objective 8.10: Establish community health promotion programs that separately or together address at least three of the Healthy People 2000 priorities and reach at least 40% of each state's population. (p. 239)

It is clear that an integrated approach to violence prevention is needed. Violence in our schools is a growing concern. Interpersonal violence among teens is an alarming national problem for our youth, families, and schools. Unlike unintentional injury, the incidence of interpersonal violence has grown steadily in the last decades.

## **RECOGNIZING ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR**

A second step in preventing violence is recognizing the signs of abusive behavior. The large body of literature about abusive behavior and violence includes excellent resources available on several national, state, and local web sites. For example, <http://www.womensupport.org> contains information regarding interpersonal violence as well as a description of Project H.A.R.T. (Healthy Alternatives for Relationships among Teens), a St. Louis school-based program. Project H.A.R.T. was developed to teach teens healthy patterns for relationships that can carry into their adult lives. There are also web



sites for the State Coalitions Against Domestic Violence (SCADV). Other community resources include more than 2000 domestic violence programs operating in local areas. These organizations serve clients, legislators, and the public. They provide training and resources for learning about abusive behavior and strategies for preventing violence and abuse.

Common characteristics of abusive behavior include jealousy, attempts to isolate or control another person, intimidation and threats, explosive temper and displays of power, blaming, verbal assault, and put-downs. Teenage boys often display pinning behavior (e.g., standing in front of a girl and trapping her against the wall by her locker so she can only focus on him, and not catch up with other friends). Abusive behavior includes denial of hitting or other physical harm and experiencing violence in the home. It is common to see a cyclical pattern emerge in some adolescent relationships: 1) A relationship becomes tense and volatile when a partner is threatened or becomes threatening (e.g., a partner demanding an exclusive relationship, pinning behavior, low self-esteem manifested by feelings of "I'm nobody without a boyfriend"); 2) a partner, usually the boy, storms off, drives dangerously, explodes, uses hands-off or hands-on abuse; and 3) the partners make up—the abuser shows remorse and promises never to do it again; the abused interprets the apology as making amends and as a sign of deep love with a jealous streak.

Some signs that a relationship has turned abusive to the victim include bruises or other injury, truancy, missed classes, withdrawal from extracurricular activities, dropping out of school, or increased social isolation. Other signs of abuse include sudden changes in mood or personality, use of alcohol or drugs, pregnancy (30% of pregnant teens are beaten by their boyfriends [Parker, McFarlane, & Soeken, 1994]), crying for no apparent reason, and overreacting to minor incidents with tears or anger. For the abuser, signs include alcohol and drug use, possessive or jealous behavior, harassing or threatening a girlfriend or destroying her things, suicide attempts or threats of suicide over a relationship, marked changes in mood or personality, pressuring girls for dates or sex, public display of anger or ridicule toward girls, and disrespect for female relatives.

A girl often stays in an abusive relationship because of fear of being alone or abandoned or a sense of loyalty to the one she loves (Cooper-White, 1995; Gudorf, 1994; Jezl, Molidor, & Wright, 1996). She may interpret a break-up to mean failure or embarrassment, especially if she has become increasingly isolated from her family and friends. She may believe the break-up is her fault and if she tried harder, she can make the relationship work. Girls often believe a boyfriend's promise to change or excuse his behavior as just being the way boys and men are.



## DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A third step in school-based prevention of violence is to develop an integrated approach. Successful high school programs for preventing violence in dating and intimate relationships must be integrated into the curricular and extracurricular activities of school life, into the school system at all levels, and in partnership with community groups and agencies that deal with abuse victims and perpetrators (Sudermann et al., 1995). Zins et al. (1994) adapt Peterson and Mori's (1985) conceptual framework for the primary prevention of injury as a model for developing and evaluating an integrated violence-prevention effort.

This framework identifies 1) the targets of intervention (i.e., teachers, children, parents, youth, policy makers, school board members, as well as the injury vectors such as guns and drugs); 2) the methods of intervention (e.g., mandated methods such as expulsion for weapon possession, educational methods, peer mentors, environmental interventions, and behavioral interventions); and 3) the tactics of intervention (i.e., how the interventions are introduced to target groups or implemented community- or school-wide). Using this framework, schools can develop, adopt, and adapt various prevention strategies and programs.

This framework is useful for developing or adapting existing primary and secondary prevention programs. Primary prevention occurs before problems start. School-based primary violence-prevention strategies involve programs for all students as well as identification of high-risk groups. Primary prevention strategies include information and consciousness raising, mentoring, social competence programs (e.g., Girls Clubs), firearms control, media advocacy, identifying economic and social causes of violence (TV violence, music lyrics [Cooper-White, 1995; Jhally, 1995; Katz, 1999; Kilbourne, 2000; Miedziam, 1995; Whitehead & Whitehead, 1994], and seductive marketing of alcohol, clothing, and cigarettes).

Secondary prevention involves identifying and assisting individual teens and families with problems related to abusive behaviors. Strategies include conflict resolution; anger coping skills for aggressive teens; hotlines; counseling; parenting workshops; and training for teachers, school counselors, administrators, coaches, and ministers. Thus, there are several targets of intervention, various methods of intervention, and different tactics that can be used with primary and secondary prevention strategies.

Peterson and Mori's (1985) model can also be used to frame the evaluation questions: Are we targeting the right groups? Are the methods we are using resulting in successful outcomes (e.g., changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that are positively related to healthier relationships and nega-



tively related to violence and abuse)? Do we need different tactics to recruit, engage, or connect with various student groups?

For planning a school-based violence-prevention program, Sudermann et al. (1995) discuss how to get started, how to find out what is working, and how successful programs develop school-community partnerships. Zins et al. (1994) also highlight three examples of violence-prevention programs. Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell, and Goodman (1991) have compiled an extensive review in their text, *Violence Prevention for Young Adolescents: A Survey of the State of the Art*.

A school-based educational program called Project H.A.R.T. has been developed in St. Louis and in rural Missouri through a partnership between several Catholic, private, and public schools and school districts and the Women's Resource Center. Project H.A.R.T. is based on two principles: Everyone deserves safe and healthy relationships; and violence, which is learned, can be unlearned. The Project H.A.R.T. curriculum consists of 10 lessons (usually two weeks per class per year). Various pedagogical methods such as discussion, role-play, video demonstration, small group activities, individual assignments, and lecture are used. The curriculum includes understanding emotions, assertive communication, avoiding the cycle of violence, conflict resolution, anger management, challenging gender role stereotypes, and preventing date rape. A pre- and post-test tool evaluates changes in knowledge and attitudes about interpersonal violence. Project H.A.R.T. has been delivered to over 60,000 students in the past 10 years.

In rural Missouri, introducing Project H.A.R.T. was difficult because of cultural factors that discouraged the discussion of sensitive topics in schools and the general attitudes of adults in this region which support male dominance and accept corporal punishment. However, the local youth coalition, school staff, and various community boards supported the effort; and Project H.A.R.T. became a reality in rural Missouri. The curriculum was also adapted for troubled adolescent boys housed in a residential facility.

## **CREATING AN ETHICAL CONTEXT OF HEALTHY RELATEDNESS**

The fourth step in preventing violence and promoting healthy and responsible relationships is by far the most challenging. This step requires situating teen sexual behavior and sexuality within an ethical context of healthy relatedness. This ethical context is fundamentally an incarnational ethic, based on the incarnation of Jesus as fully and completely human, created in the image and likeness of God. An incarnational ethic calls for respect of self and others. Persons are to act in such a way that they enhance and protect fundamental human dignity and worth. An incarnational ethic says that one cannot



be or act in a way that denies, diminishes, or distorts fundamental human dignity and worth. Teen sexuality and teen relatedness are to be seen in this light.

Teen sexual behavior (i.e., behavior that emphasizes sexual actions and is driven by the twin pursuits of sexual pleasure and sexual experience) and violence frequently confront administrators, teachers, and parents. Administrators and teachers find themselves in awkward circumstances. On the one hand, they function in the place of the parents. On the other hand, in a world marked increasingly by individualism, pluralism, and autonomy, administrators and teachers do not have parental authority. School personnel recognize sexual issues and activities in the lives of their students, but school staffs are often unsure what their mode of response should be. The general response is to develop educational programs, bring in experts, highlight the problem, and hope that the attitudes and behaviors of students change when the appropriate insights are caught. Despite the academic rigor and therapeutic acuity of such programs, school personnel still live with the aphorism that "Sexual behavior is caught not taught." Conditions must be created for appropriate sexuality and healthy relatedness to be caught.

Programmatic approaches address dating abuse, unhealthy relationships, and sexual behavior as problems rather than as situated within a larger context of healthy relatedness. An alternative approach for addressing teen sexual behavior and relationships would focus on an incarnational sacramental sexuality. While this model is anchored in a theological ethic, its application does not necessarily require direct appeal to theological language or categories. An incarnational sacramental model of sexuality reflects five points of emphasis: 1) a relationality-responsibility ethic grounded in the Trinity; 2) an appreciation of sexuality as fundamental for healthy relationships; 3) an emphasis on embodiment growing out of incarnational theology and an understanding of creation; 4) a perspective that sees sexuality as a personal and public issue; and 5) reconceptualizing power as life. Each of these points will be explored and the implications of these shifts developed toward an alternative understanding of sexuality within a larger context of moral formation, which is part of the foundation of Catholic education. "It is the formative impact that teachers have on the lives of their students that counts, that makes a significant difference in their lives, that keeps them teachers in a Catholic school" (Hines, 1999, p. 1). Moral formation, the quest for justice, and social transformation are among the hallmarks of Catholic education (United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

## **A RELATIONALITY-RESPONSIBILITY ETHIC**

Discourse about ethics, values, morality, and the like, especially with regard to sexuality, tends to make school personnel nervous. Contrary to some curricular claims, education is not a value-free activity. All pedagogy has an explicit curriculum, an implicit curriculum, and a null curriculum. Each is a



statement of valuing and devaluing, of mainstreaming and marginalizing, of giving voice and silencing. Education operates from the presupposition that learning a particular topic is a good thing and that the learner will be a better person for having learned this topic. Education reflects operative understandings of the good, the true, the right, the good person, and appropriate community. These are categories of morality. This is ethical activity. Understanding education as moral activity is fundamental to the mission and task of Catholic education. A major emphasis in Catholic education is to form and transform persons so they are educated and make the world a better place. As the American bishops emphasize, "The sharing of our social tradition is a defining measure of Catholic education and formation," and "Central to our identity as Catholics is that we are called to be leaven for transforming the world, agents for bringing about a kingdom of love and justice" (United States Catholic Conference, 1998, p. 3).

Charles Shelton, S.J. (1990), holds that morality is an empathic capacity to be aware of others and self in relationship, and to respond in care to others. The capacity for critical empathy stands at the heart of morality. Such a perspective of morality in education stands in communion with current trends in pluralism and multicultural education. Shelton is describing what is properly called relationality-responsibility ethics (Curran, 1999).

Anchored in a theology of the Trinity where the Persons of the Trinity are each unique and distinct but fully in relationship with each other, relationality-responsibility ethics emphasizes persons living with committed fidelity and integrity in the midst of multiple relationships. The focus is on living with responsibility in relation to God, to self, to others, and to the larger community. We live in critical awareness of our multiple relationships. The accent is not on the independent, individual self, as in popular culture. Rather, the accent is on the social self who lives in community. The decisions we make and the actions we take grow out of the experience of community and affect the community. The moral stance is to live with committed, faithful response to the good of self, neighbor, community, and ultimately God in relationship. There is a high regard for living with integrity.

The power of a relationality-responsibility ethical model is that it challenges us to reflect on our lived experiences and it trains our vision to be attentive to the significance of others in relationship. In this sense, a relationality-responsibility model is more real. Persons are born into communities; they are socialized into and by communities; they live with recognition of communities of commitment. Persons are responsible to those communities for their good and bad choices. The moral dimension of a person's experience is formed and fostered in dialogue with the larger community. The community transmits values, shapes identity, gives tools and skills for living in relationships, and lives with commitment to the person. The sort of person we are consistently and our character become our moral core in relationship.



Foundational to this relationality-responsibility approach are holistic commitment to fundamental human dignity and worth and active caring to create the conditions for human flourishing in community. A relationality-responsibility ethic builds upon the moral wisdom of the past, discourses with the present in light of tradition, and discerns the future in view of journeying toward the Kingdom of God.

The morality in contemporary culture, however, is sometimes called quandary ethics. The emphasis in quandary ethics is on resolving a perceived crisis. The call to action is the recognition of a quandary, a moral dilemma. The functional question in quandary ethics is "What should I do now?" The self is the center of the ethical universe. Time is defined by the present moment. Quandary ethics utilizes ethical relativism. The focus in quandary ethics is how one handles moral messes to first benefit oneself. "My girlfriend says she is pregnant. What do you think I ought to do?" "My boyfriend gets mad when I won't have sex with him. He starts driving fast and recklessly. It scares me, so I have sex with him so he won't kill one of us. What am I supposed to do?" "We are seeing evidence of more frequent and riskier sexual activity among our students. What should we do about this problem?" "I hate it when my son acts like he's a pro wrestler. He gets rude and mean. But he and his dad really connect when they watch wrestling. I'm not sure what I need to do."

These are moral questions because they take the form of "What should I do to resolve this crisis?" These are crises of values, attitudes, and actions. Reflective of the purview of quandary ethics, the moral question arises in the compartment of the present moment, in the present situation, for oneself. As such, quandary ethics is divorced from life as a whole. The ethic is defined by the crisis. Quandary ethics, therefore, is never integrating of or integral to life. Ultimately quandary ethics sees persons as problems. Quandary ethics becomes a dehumanizing process of reification. Persons are dehumanized because they get turned into problems to be solved. The pregnant girlfriend is a problem to be dealt with. The aggressive boyfriend is a problem that needs to be mollified. The sexually active students are problems for the school. Further, quandary ethics tends to compartmentalize the presenting problem. It would address the problem of high teen sexual activity, for example, in isolation from issues of race, socioeconomic status, or self-esteem.

Examining these examples from a relationality-responsibility ethic, the young man with the pregnant girlfriend would no longer see her pregnancy as a problem to be solved. While her pregnancy might indeed be problematic, the young man would be invited and challenged to see the pregnancy in increasingly larger contexts. Not only are he and his girlfriend affected by this pregnancy, so, too, are their unborn child, their families, their circle of friends, their school, and the larger community. Part of the community's moral formation and deliberation would be to invite and examine responsi-



ble, appropriate sexual behavior as part of responsible social behavior. Much adolescent sexual behavior, for example, is animated by needs-based pleasure and attachment needs, where persons trade sex in order to feel as though they belong to someone (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1994). The community operating out of a relationality-responsibility model would challenge needs-based pleasure and would form in its members the skill for moral deliberation. So the person would have the skills and the resources to ask: "Why do I want to have sex with this person at this time?" "Am I willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of my actions, even if there are unanticipated consequences?" "Who else will be affected by my decisions?" "Are my decisions and actions respectful of the other person?" "Is it appropriate for us to be sexually involved?" "How does this behavior reflect my faith?"

Critics will say that these sorts of questions are not realistic. When teens have sex they don't engage in such protracted moral deliberation, the critics would argue. Rather, teens "hook up," one thing leads to another, and they have sex. Sex, reflecting cultural values, is more instantaneous and spontaneous. The critics are partially right. Teens often do not engage in these kinds of moral deliberations because the community has not equipped them to do so. The community has not met its responsibility to transmit its values, to form the moral character of its members, to develop the capacity for larger moral deliberation. Parents share the responsibility with educators: to make clear, in word and deed, their values and the convictions of their religious faith. With its clear stance on the sanctity of marriage and the place of sexual intimacy within marriage, Catholic teaching provides a solid foundation on which both home and school efforts can build. The community has failed its obligation to form members who choose, with dignity, persons over needs. Ongoing reformation of the community (conversion) is a feature of relationality-responsibility ethics.

Even when the community has not lived its vision of the good, its perspective on fundamental human dignity and creating the conditions for human flourishing, the community has a narrative of the good of persons that challenges the community to recover its sense of responsibility for the well-being of its members. Hallmarks of relationality-responsibility ethics are discerning the good in relationships, deliberating choices responsibly, and willingness to be accountable for outcomes.

Human activity is moral activity because choices are made and persons are affected by those choices. Quandary ethics tries to clean up the mess. Ethical activity in quandary ethics occurs after the fact. Due to its compartmentalizing and situational nature, nothing in quandary ethics prevents the same quandaries, the same crises, from recurring. Relationality-responsibility ethics front-loads ethical activity. It builds upon the community's communal ethical wisdom. Each person's moral activity adds to the community's narrative of moral wisdom. The community and persons in community learn



and grow from moral successes and failures while striving to enhance fundamental human dignity and creating the conditions for human flourishing.

## **SEXUALITY AND HEALTHY RELATEDNESS**

Sex and sexuality are not the same realities. Sex emphasizes physical action in order to create orgasmic response from a purely scientific perspective. Sex is a biologically based need which aims at genital activity culminating in orgasm and reproduction. Understood this way, sex is an action. Culturally sex is seen as a good because of its capacity to produce pleasure. Pleasure is an ethical category because it is perceived as a good that leads to human action. The pursuit of the good of pleasure leads many persons to have sex. The capacity to give and receive pleasure not only makes persons feel good, it also makes them feel good about themselves. Pleasure can be the physical feeling and pleasure can be the feeling of attachment. Persons are good because they are sexually desirable. Sexual pleasure becomes perverted, however, if it becomes an end in itself because one's body or the body of another is used as an instrument of pleasure or when sex is traded for feelings of attachment. Sex becomes a commodity traded for pleasure. This is needs-based pleasure (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1994).

Sex for pleasure alone is a type of quandary ethic. If one needs to experience sexual pleasure, how does one resolve this need? The focus is on self-pleasure; pleasure for the other is relative to pleasure for oneself. How might a person use the power of sexual pleasure to create a perception of human connectedness? Sometimes people withhold sexual pleasure in order to enforce human connectedness. Sexual pleasure and attachment through sexual pleasure become ends in themselves. The danger is that pleasure becomes transitory, persons are used as instruments of pleasure, attachment masquerades as human commitment, and sex becomes compartmentalized.

Sexuality is more than sex. Sexuality is part of personal identity; it is part of the human personality. Sexuality is a basic, complex, and pervasive way of being human in the world as male and female. One's self-understanding as male or female within a larger community, within culture, is part of sexuality. Sexuality is a developmental process. Persons grow into their understandings of their sexuality and the sexuality of others as they critically reflect upon their life experiences. Reflective of personality and identity, sexuality must be fully integrated within the whole self. Bodily self-image as a function of self-identity and the ability to give and receive affection are parts of sexuality. One's sense of sexuality is influenced by sex role differentiation. Cultural values and family lifestyle socialize the person into particular understandings of sexuality. Such is the case within the Catholic tradition. Sexuality is sacramental when it conveys the activity of graceful love, when it discloses the presence and activity of God in the midst of human caring.



Sexuality is sacramental when it is creative of human flourishing and when offered within the context of a lifelong commitment of marriage.

Sexuality can be both constructive and destructive. Sexuality is destructive when it is reduced to sex. Destructive sexuality manifests itself as sexual manipulation: "If you really loved me, you'd have sex with me." "Put out or get out." Destructive sexuality displays oppression: "Listen. You knew what kind of a person I was when you went out with me. You're pretty darned lucky that I even go out with you. If it weren't for me, nobody would want you. So deal with it." Another expression of destructive sexuality is in the rejection of oneself: "No, I don't really like having sex with him. In fact, I hate it. But why would he even want to go out with me if I don't have sex with him?" Sexuality is destructive when it is reduced to sex-role stereotyping: "What do you mean you didn't do her? What kind of a man are you? You are such a wuss!"

Constructive sexuality holds that persons see their personhood in terms of their relationship with self and others. In that all persons are sexual, constructive sexuality lives with the awareness of the sexuality of others, draws persons into relationship, and creates conditions for intimacy with self and others. Intimacy is about more than sexual expression. Intimacy is the willingness and the capacity to commit oneself to particular persons in relationships that last over time and to meet the accompanying demands for change without compromising personal integrity (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1994). Flowing from the faithful intimacy of God, intimacy involves not only commitment to others; intimacy is sustained by an ongoing commitment to the integrity of oneself. Exercising the power to know the truth of oneself and the truth of the other in relationship is one of the major tasks in intimacy. In the committed pursuit of the truth of personhood, intimacy becomes increasingly disclosed. The truth of personhood has an infinite depth to it, so the pursuit of truth in intimacy precludes stereotyping and confronts prejudices and distortions.

Constructive sexuality creates meaning. Meaning is created for self and others in the exercise of faithful intimacy. Intimacy and sexuality operate in tandem. Animated and sustained by intimacy, constructive sexuality expresses itself in enduring commitment rather than attachment. Attachment is symbiotic at best, parasitic at worst. Commitment recognizes the dignity of self and others and acts in ways that serve to enhance and protect human dignity by pledging loyalty to that dignity. Constructive sexuality gives persons the courage to trust their vision of human relatedness as they test it out.

Constructive sexuality is experienced in relationality-responsibility ethics. Given its awareness of the dignity of sexual persons, intimacy, and commitment, constructive sexuality strives to form and foster human relatedness that creates human flourishing and strives to give human meaning to sexual behavior.



## EMBODIMENT AS INCARNATIONAL

Persons encounter their bodies with a mix of ambivalence and ambiguity. Many persons are only aware of their bodies as physical realities (bodiliness), but more important is the meaning of one's body (embodiment). Bodiliness involves senses of physical size, bodily physical desire, and the body as a commodity. The sense and definition of self for many teens is determined by physical appearance. Physical appearance and how it is perceived are important as parts of identity formation and social location. One's physical appearance is a strong factor in forming relationships. Problems occur when the self is defined by physical appearance alone. Sometimes young women receive strong societal messages that they must be slim and attractive, and that to be slim and attractive is to be desirable. To be desirable is to be somebody. Yet at times the body is a source of betrayal: "I hate myself. My breasts are too small. I'm too fat. Nobody is ever going to want to go out with me because I am a nobody."

Sometimes young men, especially male athletes, come to understand that masculinity is a function of musculature. To be muscular is to be powerful. To be powerful is to get what one wants. To get what one wants is to be a strong, independent male. These are strong sociocultural values that are amplified by instances where the body is used as a bartering commodity in their own sexual lives, in advertising, and in popular culture.

Bodiliness can get disconnected from selfhood and interpersonal relationships. Reflecting quandary ethics, the body becomes an object used to exercise power over others and is used as a tool to satisfy the need for sexual pleasure or the psychosocial need for dominance which masquerades as competence and respect. This expression of quandary ethics becomes particularly potent when the body is used as an instrument of power to take control of another's body. Human dignity gets denied, diminished, and distorted in the process.

One of the most important insights to enter the field of sexuality is the notion of embodiment. Embodiment is seen as an affirmation of the body and the recognition that the body is part of what constitutes personhood (McGuire, 1990). Nelson (1978) characterizes this sense of the body, "The body is the means by which I can know objects, persons and events," and "Our bodies-as-selves give shape to the way in which we feel about the world and about others" (p. 20). For Nelson, the body is a form of communion, a communion between self, others, community, and world. Ultimately the body is a form of communion with God because God created the body as good. Further, the incarnation of Jesus fully affirms the goodness of the body. Bodies are essential to personality; they are part of human experiencing. Much of our sense of self and self-agency is interrelated with our sense of embodiment. We experience things done to our bodies as things that are done to ourselves. When people get hit they say, "Why did you do that to me?" not



"Why did you hit my body?" because they recognize the interconnectedness between themselves and their bodies. When persons are lovingly caressed they say, "You really do love me."

Embodiment is an element both of how persons are known and how they know. Embodiment is not simply experiencing the body; embodiment is also a form of thinking. The sense of embodiment is shaped by the interaction of both personal understandings and social forces. Attached to embodiment is gender, because gender creates meanings and expectations regarding socio-cultural expectations. Also attached to embodiment are racial and ethnic factors, as evidenced in contemporary conversations about "white weight." White weight is a critique leveled by African American women that they are expected to conform to the social weight and body image ideals of White culture, contrary to their own cultural weight ideals and images, if they wish to climb the corporate ladder or be seen as a success.

It is imperative to come to an awareness of the significance that the body plays in an ethics of relationality and responsibility in sexuality. The body is not simply one's material form. The body is at the heart of the context for sexuality. It is the conception of embodiment that protects the dignity of the human person from bodily domination and oppression at the hands of either the self or other. It is embodiment that resists the commodification of the body.

## **SEXUALITY AS A PERSONAL AND PUBLIC ISSUE**

Contemporary culture sees sexual decision making and action as private matters. How one behaves sexually is no one else's business. Sex is a private matter of what one does for oneself to experience pleasure. Interestingly, the privatization of sex began with a Western culture and a dualistic view in Christianity that disdained the body because bodies are sexual, so one should not speak of sex. The body was to be controlled. Victorian cultural values further entrenched sex as a private issue. Proper people did not speak of sex, especially in mixed company. Further, sex was to be but a small part of one's life. Sex was the unspeakably necessary sin which bound one to original sin. Consequently, the culture lost its language ability to speak of sexual values, attitudes, and behaviors. The outgrowth was a culture that closeted sex. Ensclosed in a cultural ethos of ethical relativism, the privatization of sex became: "What's right for you, is right for you. What's right for me, is right for me." Reflecting the loss of a language about the meaning of sexuality and sexual behavior, sexual behavior emphasizes sexual activity within a communication void of values discourse.

Major issues such as AIDS, abortion, gender awareness, and rising teen pregnancy rates help the culture come to awareness of the social implications of sexual behavior. This heightened consciousness of the social dimension of sexuality and sexual behavior brings culture and cultural institutions, like



schools, to reexamine their roles and attitudes. Sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, risk-taking sexual behaviors, coercive sex, reproductive technologies, women's wages and women's worth, the spiraling normative image of male-ness depicted in the World Wrestling Federation, and Internet sex sites are obviously public issues.

A quandary ethic would see each of these as a problem to be addressed and would most likely examine each of these in isolation from each other. Relationality-responsibility ethics would begin to explore for patterns of connection. A relationality-responsibility ethic would investigate teen pregnancy attentive to the factors of gender, racial and ethnic identity, bodiliness, and power. In a relationality-responsibility model schools would be holistically attentive to the student. As schools came to recognize that hungry children couldn't learn effectively, school meals were provided, so schools would come to recognize that students who experience eating disorders or sexually manifested dating violence also cannot learn effectively.

A strength of relationality-responsibility ethics is its holistic perspective. An ethic of relationality-responsibility strives to understand how sexuality, like any attitude and action, affects the whole person in relationship with a larger community context. In a relationality-responsibility ethic there is an ongoing dialogue between persons and the community about valuing, meaning, human dignity, and human purposefulness. Those factors that influence valuing, meaning, human dignity, and human purposefulness must be brought into the conversation.

## **RECONCEPTUALIZING POWER AS LIFE**

Any attempt to understand persons and community must consider the issue of power. Attempts to understand and structure healthy human relationships in relational-responsible communities must be attuned to the exercise of power. In itself power is morally neutral and can be understood as the real, tangible ability to effect outcomes and to achieve purpose. Power is the ability to express the freedom to exercise concrete, operative choices in the world. The exercise of power makes others aware of oneself. A self is the one who has the ability to exercise power. It is in the exercise of power that power becomes a moral question.

Power frequently couples with pre-critical understandings of humanness. A true person is one who exercises control over his or her life. A real person is one who controls and is not controlled by others. Most persons are familiar with ranges of experiences of power as control.

Power as control uses domination together with manipulation to gain control and to exercise control. The man who goes out with his male friends on Friday nights but calls his girlfriend at home displays power as control. She quickly learns that she had better be home when he calls or else he will express his displeasure. She is controlled. Power as control is effective



because it denies and diminishes selfhood and dignity by limiting the other person's ability to make free choices. Power as control exercises control by creating a perception that control will be exercised.

Quandary ethics is enmeshed with power as control. Persons in quandary ethics either believe they have power to control and resolve the crisis; or they see themselves as powerless to do anything about the situation, thereby abrogating responsibility. The moral evil occurs when power becomes controlling. Power as control is part and parcel of destructive sexuality. Experiences of sexual manipulation, oppression, rejection of oneself, and sex-role stereotyping all display ranges of power as control in thought, behavior, and relationship. In its fullest form power as control is displayed by violence or the threat to use violence. Violence absolutely negates the personhood of the other. The other is a thing to be controlled. As a thing, the other has no moral stature, no human value. Things, segments of Western culture tell us, are to be mastered and controlled, and are truly worthless in themselves. A girl who is battered physically or verbally by her boyfriend often articulates a belief that she has angered her boyfriend so the boyfriend has a right to treat her this way. She must modify her behavior to keep him happy (Adams, 1994).

Power as life requires reconceptualizing power. It exercises choices and seeks to attain desired outcomes. Power as life is generative in that it is empowering in its desire to build fuller and fuller relationship. It is generative in its quest to enlarge the circle of power that enhances human freedom and dignity in committed relationship. Power as life openly confronts and resists manipulation and the other expressions of destructive sexuality. Power as life seeks to engender human flourishing. It is a relational power expressed as mutuality. Grounded in mutuality, power as life recognizes and develops interdependent relationships and expresses itself in caring. Caring is living in engaged responsibility with self and other. To care is to be open and vulnerable while risking commitment. Caring is being responsible while not succumbing to becoming a caretaker. In fact, caretaking is a more or less subtle form of power as control because the one cared for is dependent upon the caretaker. Power as life clearly reflects a relationality-responsibility ethic.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

As stated earlier, some are uncomfortable with values talk in an academic environment. They think that such talk is confessional and sectarian, infringes upon academic freedom, and moves the school too much into family life. Education itself is moral discourse. The philosophy of science has consistently demonstrated that any area of study is driven by some set of operative values implicitly or explicitly held. As Hauerwas (1988) well puts it,



There is no way for those who teach...to avoid morality. To teach Shakespeare or to insist that economics majors learn the history of economic thought is a moral endeavor, for it says to the student that this is not only worth doing but that by knowing it you will be a better person. (p. 29)

The sheer fact that one is a teacher or professor is a values statement, for it is saying that what we teach, what we profess, is important for persons to know. In knowing it, they will be better persons.

Morality is best taught by modeling morality. Healthy sexuality is best taught by modeling healthy sexuality (Miller, 1994). Healthy, constructive sexuality is anchored in the core values of human dignity, respect, and creating the conditions for human flourishing.

The challenge to schools is to create an institutional climate of mutuality and caring that exhibits respect for whole persons in community. One task for school administrators, teachers, and staff is to create such an environment among themselves and to project it to the students. A second task is to enlarge the discourse by including parents. Parents are educational partners. It is important to create ongoing experiences of dialogue with parents or those exercising parental authority about these core values. This might be more easily accomplished in parochial schools, which are more explicitly organized around a shared set of values and beliefs and tend to be more morally homogeneous. Public schools, however, are not precluded from the relationality-responsibility ethic of constructive sexuality. Displayed here is a model of human community without appeal to sectarian religious values. The third task, and perhaps the most daunting, is to resist the temptation to use quandary ethics when confronting destructive sexuality, sexual violence, and attitudes and behaviors that deny, diminish, and distort fundamental human dignity.

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