Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health
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Deception Uncovered: An analysis

Zogby Survey 2003:
The opinions of parents toward character-based, abstinence-until-marriage sex education vs. comprehensive (or "abstinence-first," then condoms) sex education

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Coalition members: Christian Coalition of America, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, National Abstinence Clearinghouse, Traditional Values Coalition

Preface

For children in kindergarten through third grade (ages 5 to 8)

- *Boys and girls have body parts that feel good when touched.*
- *Touching and rubbing one's own genitals to feel good is called masturbation.*
- *Vaginal intercourse occurs when a man and a woman place the penis inside the vagina.*

For children in fourth through seventh grades (ages 9 to 12)

- *Couples have different ways to share sexual pleasure with each other.*
- *Homosexual love relationships can be as satisfying as heterosexual relationships.*

For adolescents in middle school (ages 12 to 15)

- *How a person masturbates varies for each individual.*
- *A few boys engage in a very dangerous and sometimes fatal form of masturbation that involves limiting their air supply.*

For adolescents in high school (ages 15 to 18)

- *Some people use erotic photographs, movies, or literature to enhance their sexual fantasies when alone or with a partner.*

The statements above are verbatim portions of the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. These guidelines, developed in 1990 by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], the National School Boards Association, Planned Parenthood and others), represent the foundation of comprehensive sex education (also known as "abstinence-first" or abstinence-plus-condoms sex education).

More than 100 organizations have endorsed these guidelines as the official goals of comprehensive sex education (see the paper titled "Organizations that support the guidelines for comprehensive sex education"). When groups such as Planned Parenthood, SIECUS, Advocates for Youth, the Alan Guttmacher Institute and others lobby Congress, state governments and school boards for comprehensive sex education, it is precisely these guidelines they are thinking about.

These groups — which we will refer to in composite as the "safe-sex" cartel — have not been straightforward in revealing to parents the exact nature of comprehensive sex education. In fact, the proponents of comprehensive or abstinence-plus-condoms sex education have not been straightforward in any respect. Whether lobbying Congress, making presentations to school boards or providing stories to the media, they have been quiet about the specifics of the topics included in their programs.

History of the "safe-sex" cartel's public opinion surveys

Perhaps the deceptiveness of groups promoting comprehensive sex education (and opposing abstinence education) is no greater than when these groups conduct public opinion surveys on sex education.

- Previous surveys by groups such as Alan Guttmacher Institute, Planned Parenthood, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and Advocates for Youth have had serious flaws.

  -Biased sample selection
  -Leading questions
  -Deceptive questions
  -Biased interpretation of results

The purpose of their survey polls has been to declare that the public, especially parents, wants children to receive comprehensive sex education rather than an unambiguous abstinence-until-marriage message.

To do this, the cartel has used biased sampling techniques and leading and deceptive questions. Further, the proponents of comprehensive sex education have misinterpreted the results of questions.

Following are just a few examples of the deception used by the cartel in their public opinion polling surveys.

A case of misinterpretation – SIECUS survey in 1997

A survey jointly conducted by Durex and SIECUS in 1997 contained the following question:

> *"Do you support schools in your district accepting state and federal funds that would prevent them from teaching your children the complete facts about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases?"*

This was a leading question, designed to direct the respondent toward a predetermined response. The question also was dishonest (the Title V abstinence law did not prohibit schools accepting abstinence funds from retaining classes with a component on "safer-sex"). In reporting on the response to this question, SIECUS stated:

> *"More than 82 percent* [of parents] *responded that they do not support schools that accept abstinence-only funding."*

Not only did SIECUS use a leading question, it also misinterpreted the results. Other proponents of comprehensive sex education have used this tactic to claim that parents oppose abstinence education.

A case of sampling error – Planned Parenthood survey in 2002

In April 2002, Glorida Feldt, Planned Parenthood's president, sent a fundraising letter to her organization's financial supporters. Enclosed with the letter was a survey. Here is what Ms. Feldt had to say about the survey:

> *The struggle we face with anti-choice fanatics is truly life threatening – we cannot afford to lose this battle.*
>
> *That's why I hope you will complete your survey and return it to our offices right away.*
>
> *The information we gain from your input, and from the other participants in this survey, will serve as a major weapon in our fight against these extremists.*

One of the questions in the survey read:

> *If you believe that sexuality education should be provided in our schools, what do you believe should be the chief focus? (Rank from 1-4 in order of importance, 1 being most important.)*
> *____Preventing sexually transmitted infections*
> *____Educating about birth control methods*
> *____Having healthy relations*
> *____Teaching abstinence*

This question was worded in such a way that Planned Parenthood would be able to say that "teaching abstinence" is the last thing parents want taught in sex education. Of course, Planned Parenthood released the results of the survey as if it represented actual scientific inquiry. The mainstream press reported it as such.

<u>A case of leading questions – A SIECUS/Advocates for Youth survey in 1999</u>

This survey, conducted by Hickman-Brown Research, was a case study in the use of illegitimate and leading questions. One such questions was as follows:

> *Since the average age when children hit puberty is twelve and the average age when people first get married is 26, teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage sexuality education is just not realistic to the lives of most people.*

Respondents were asked for their level of agreement with this leading question.

The press release issued by SIECUS/Advocates for Youth stated, "70 percent oppose the provision of federal law that allocates over half a billion dollars for abstinence-on-until-marriage education."

<u>A case of reporting error – A SIECUS survey in 2002</u>

A variety of polling tricks used in a survey conducted by Lake, Snell & Perry led SIECUS to declare:

> *By a five to one margin (81% vs. 16%), parents favor sex education programs that teach young people about all aspects of sex and sexuality – including how to use birth control to prevent unintended pregnancy and how to protect against*

STDs – over programs that focus solely on abstinence until marriage and the dangers of sex.

The above examples represent the types of research trickery that allow SIECUS, Planned Parenthood, Advocates for Youth and their ideological allies to claim support by parents for comprehensive sex education.

Besides scientific slight-of-hand, all of these surveys share another thing in common – they avoid describing the types of things taught in comprehensive sex education.

Instead, the surveys refer to comprehensive sex education using innocuous, euphemistic and vague questions that make comprehensive sex education sound, benign, in fact, almost compassionate.

Origination of Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health and the Zogby survey

The member groups of the Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health have long maintained that parents would strongly object to comprehensive sex education if they were asked questions that more adequately explained what such education would attempt to teach their children.

The Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health formed as an ad hoc association exclusively for the purpose of seeking a better understanding of parents' opinion of different forms of sex education.

The Coalition did not want to duplicate the deceitfulness of those groups that have conducted surveys for the exclusive purpose of claiming parental support for comprehensive sex education.

How the questions in the Zogby poll were developed

- Five types of questions were included in the Zogby survey. All 29 questions in the survey were developed to introduce a minimum level of bias.

- Fourteen questions asked parents their level of approval for abstinence-plus-condom education. The questions asked verbatim components of the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. These guidelines, developed in 1990 by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], the National School Boards Association, Planned Parenthood and others) represent the foundation of comprehensive or abstinence-plus-condoms sex education. In short, these guidelines detail what comprehensive sex education wants children and adolescents to learn. (See questions 7 through 20.)

- Six questions asked parents their level of approval for abstinence-plus-character sex education. These questions asked verbatim portions from the National Guidelines for Sexuality and Character Education. These guidelines, developed in 1996 by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, are considered by many abstinence groups to represent the foundation for abstinence education. (See questions 1 through 6.)

- Four questions asked parents their level of approval for comprehensive sex education curricula promoted for years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The questions paraphrased teaching material from these curricula. (See questions 25 through 28.)

- Four questions included different aspects of comprehensive sex education not specifically covered by other questions. (See questions 21, 23, 24 and 29.)

- One question asked parents their level of approval for comprehensive sex education using the type of vague, innocuous wording typically used in the past by groups attempting to show parental approval for comprehensive sex education. This question was included for benchmark purposes. (See question 22.)

Major findings

- Parents overwhelmingly reject comprehensive sex education when they are asked questions that deal specifically with the topics included in comprehensive sex education.

	% of parents who approve or strongly approve	% of parents who disapprove or strongly disapprove
Comprehensive or "abstinence-plus-condoms" sex education guidelines	25.0%	61.1%
Abstinence-plus-character sex education guidelines	73.4%	16.3%
CDC-promoted abstinence-plus-condoms sex education curricula	13.9%	75.3%
Misc. aspects of abstinence-plus-condoms education	22.4%	68.1%

- By a 4.6 to 1 margin, parents approve or strongly approve of abstinence sex education.

- By a 2.4 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of comprehensive sex education.

- By a 5.3 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of the information contained in comprehensive sex education curricula that have been promoted by the CDC.

- All demographic groupings strongly disapprove of comprehensive sex education, although the strongest opposition was found among non-white minority parents (Hispanics and Asians) and among parents who identified themselves as born-again Christians.

- All demographic groups disapprove of comprehensive sex education curricula that have been promoted by the CDC.

Findings on specific questions

- By a 4.4 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of teaching young people that homosexual love relationships can be as satisfying as are heterosexual relationships. (See question 14.)

- It appears that parents have a more mixed opinion on the matter of having children taught factual or biological information (see questions 13, 18 and 19, for example). However, opposition from parents seems to increase substantially if a connection is perceived between *their* children and sexual activity.

- When it comes to allowing teens to obtain contraception without parental approval, parents much more strongly disapprove when *their own* children are involved. About 46 percent of parents either strongly disapprove or disapprove of the idea that teens could obtain contraception without the permission of a parent. (See question 27.) However, when this question was personalized, about 70 percent of parents either strongly disapprove or disapprove of *their child* being able to obtain contraception without *their* knowledge or approval. (See question 29.)

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