

A Spectrum of Appropriateness: Sex Education in Religiously Affiliated High Schools

Claire Hautot

2013 Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies

INTRODUCTION:

The goal of this research project is to explore the topic of sex education in private religiously affiliated schools in the Memphis area. Specifically, I explored the way that the school's religious affiliation affects the sex education curriculum that the administration chooses. As it turns out, the religious traditions of some schools both subtly and directly influence curricula to create models of sex education that are uniquely appropriate for each school. This project focuses on three schools: Christian Brothers High School, St. Mary's Episcopal School, and Westminster Academy. The schools are Catholic, Episcopal, and non-denominational Christian, respectively. By examining the religious histories of each school as well as their sex education programs it became clear that there are multiples approaches to forming a religiously appropriate model of sex education in a private high school. The three schools' religious backgrounds also prevent them from ever being able to have interchangeable sex education programs, despite the fact that they are all Christian schools. I did not know what to expect from the schools going into this project, but I was amazed by the variety in approaches to sex education and to education in general.¹

¹ I cannot thank these educators enough for their willingness to talk to me about what is often a controversial and much debated subject.

Sex education is a hot topic right now across the country. It was very important to me that this research be conducted in Memphis because sex education has been on the forefront of many debates about public education in the city during the past several years. This is because the city of Memphis has an alarmingly high teen pregnancy rate. According the Tennessee State Department of Health, in 2010 there were over 2,600 reported pregnancies in young girls aged 10-19 in Shelby County alone (U.S. TN Department of Health policy). One year ago the state of Tennessee implemented a sex education program as well as new state laws that effectively banned any conversation about contraceptives in public schools. Naturally many people were outraged by this legislation that seemingly ignored a major public health issue in the largest city in the state. The voices of those opposing the legislation are being heard often across the city from sex education advocates such as Planned Parenthood.

The history of sex education in America is best tracked through legislative initiatives at the national level. In 1918 the Chamberlain-Khan Act was passed to delegate money to teach World War I soldiers about gonorrhea and syphilis (Moran). In the 1940s sex education was considered to be necessary and of great public importance due to a fear of sexually transmitted infections spreading amongst soldiers during World War II (*History of Sex Education*). In the 1960s and 1970s the contraceptive pill was made first legally available to married couples and then unmarried women (*History of Sex Education*). Around the same time those opposed to sex education began to make their opinions known on a large scale (*History of Sex Education*). By the 1980s the HIV/AIDS crisis prompted the surgeon general to call for sex education in schools but abstinence-only agendas were already working their way through congress (*History of Sex Education*).

In 1981, President Reagan passed the Adolescent Family Life Act (Dailard). The AFLA sought to encourage abstinence and chastity among teens by financing small local programs and initiatives (Dailard). Then in the late 1990s welfare reform provided additional funding for local organizations that discouraged all sex outside of marriage and prohibited discussions about contraceptives (Dailard). This funding added up to \$440 million over a span of five years (Dailard). In 2000 congress spent \$50 million on yet another abstinence only program (Dailard). Today, many people are arguing for what is called comprehensive sex education in public schools. This type of curriculum includes not only information about contraceptives, STIs, and pregnancy, but also about gender identity, sexuality, discrimination, and reproductive rights.

There have been some gains in the comprehensive sex education fight in the past decade. 2010 marked the first time in over a decade that the national government delegated money for sex education programs that were not abstinence only (Kennedy). This was a \$375 million grant that would be divided between twenty-eight programs over five years (Kennedy). Each of the programs that are receiving money had proven lower pregnancy rates amongst their participants (Kennedy). Most of these programs focused on condom use and distribution (Kennedy). Still, most of these programs are optional out-of-classroom programs and it seems as though it will be quite some time before there is a standardized comprehensive sex education program in public high schools. States that are in favor of comprehensive sex education must turn down the federal funding for abstinence only programs (Huffstutter).

The sex education curriculum that is being used in Tennessee is called the Michigan Model for Health and it was implemented right before the 2012-2013 school year. Often,

public schools contract with outside educators to teach sex education in a way that complies with the Michigan Model and state regulations. This includes discouraging what the State of Tennessee calls “gateway sexual actives.” This means cracking down on behaviors such as holding hands and kissing in school and warning students against any activities that could potentially lead to sex. The sex education program in place in Tennessee hopes to encourage abstinence amongst teens and to teach teens about the many dangers of sex and sexual activity. Interestingly, sex education of any kind is not required in Tennessee public classrooms unless the teen pregnancy rate in a school’s county is higher than 19.5 in 1000 girls aged 15-17 (Tennessee Code Annotated). In those counties it then becomes mandatory that the schools in that county adopt a sex education program that encourages abstinence until marriage and focuses on the prevention of HIV and AIDS (Tennessee Code Annotated). Despite sex education being optional in counties with low occurrences of teen pregnancy, there is virtually no room for variation in sex education in schools that either choose to or have to implement sex education programs.

When a public school in Tennessee needs to implement a sex education program, there must be efforts made to inform and involve parents at each stage. There should be at least one public hearing made about the new sex education program and teachers also have the curriculum available to parents to view during their open house at the beginning of the school year (Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-1305). Shelby County is a county that requires that sex education be taught in public schools. The current policy is that parents must return a permission slip indicating that they are consenting to their children to participate in sex education. If the parent does not return the permission form then the parents will automatically be considered to have “opted out” of the program. The sex

education program that Memphis implements encourages parental involvement even further by sending homework assignments home with students for parents to complete on their own or complete with their child.

When I first learned about this new sex education program I could not help but think that on the classroom level this sounded remarkably like many private Christian high schools because of the focus on abstinence. I have always been interested in the spectrum of sex education that my friends experienced in the schools in many different states, and in schools both public and private. Teaching abstinence, if anything at all, seemed to be standard across the board for Christian schools. Many of my friends from public schools, including myself, recalled the slideshow of STD scare tactic approach. This usually meant that a lot was said about the dangers of sex, but not much was said about how to have safe sex. Tennessee educators, administrators, and legislators put a lot of thought into how to create effective policy for public schools. I think that it is often assumed that because some private schools do not deal with issues of teen pregnancy to the same degree that some public schools do, then they do not have to directly address issues of reproductive health. In a city with such a high occurrence of teen pregnancy, STIs, HIV, and AIDS I was sure that it was worth exploring what private schools had to say about sex education.

This project was the perfect opportunity to hear opinions on sex education that are often ignored. The private educators are just as aware of the statistics about teen pregnancy, HIV, and STI in Memphis as the public educators, but religiously affiliated schools have very different authorities to answer to. This means that the ways private schools choose to approach many topics, sex education included, are often quite different

than the ways the public schools must. The three different schools studied in this project produced three philosophically different approaches to sex education that each addressed their individual religious values.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HIGH SCHOOL:

Christian Brothers High School was founded in 1871 by the De La Salle Christian Brothers and the school moved to several Memphis locations, including what is now the campus of Christian Brothers University, before arriving at its current location in 1965. Christian Brothers High Schools is an all male school serving 870 students in grades 9-12. As a Roman Catholic high school, a member of the worldwide Lasallian Educational System, as well as a member of the National Catholic Education Association, Christian Brothers High School is rooted in the tradition of Catholic education. CBHS does not require that students or parents be Catholic and the school welcomes “boys of all creeds from across the Mid-South” (cbhs.org/Lasallianphilosophy).

CBHS seeks to teach the moral values of Saint John the Baptist De LaSalle to its students. This means having a strong focus on charity and awareness of the poor and suffering. CBHS addresses much of these issues in their humanities curriculum, which places an emphasis on justice education (cbhs.org/Lasallianphilosophy). Christian Brothers High School students must complete at least seventy-two hours of community service before graduation. Additionally, students are frequently reminded that God is a living presence on Earth. This means that gentlemanly behavior and reverence are necessary at all time and in all places. Christian Brothers High School hopes that

students' decisions will be guided by "a moral compass that is instilled on a day-to-day basis in our classrooms" (chbs.org).

The Catholic faith is formally practiced in Christian Brothers High School in a few different ways. All students attend chapel once a month, which is a Roman Catholic service. The students also pray before class each day. Catholicism is also discussed in some way in the religion and ethics courses, although those classes do not exclusively focus on the Catholic faith. The students at Christian Brothers are frequently reminded of their religious and educational history because their hallways are lined with historical placards and memorabilia. There is also large statue of St. John the Baptist De LaSalle himself displayed prominently in the school.

Christian Brothers High School uses an abstinence-only model of sex education. This is very much rooted in its Roman Catholic affiliation. Pope Paul VI made official statements about sex, reproduction, and birth control in 1968 in his *Humanae Vitae*. According to those statements, intercourse is only acceptable between a married man and woman. Additionally, intercourse can only occur with the specific intent of procreation. Pope Paul VI made this clear in saying that the Church teaches "that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life" (Pope Paul VI). The only exception to this rule would be if the husband or wife were infertile from natural causes. In this situation the sexual act is still acceptable (Pope Paul VI).

According to the *Humanae Vitae*, absolutely any actions taken by a married couple before or after intercourse to prevent pregnancy from occurring are strictly forbidden and are sinful in nature. This is explicitly stated, "Hence to use this divine gift while

depriving it, even if only partially, of its meaning and purpose, is equally repugnant to the nature of man and of woman, and is consequently in opposition to the plan of God and His holy will (Pope Paul VI).” The Catholic Church also strictly forbids abortions regardless of any situation surrounding a pregnancy. Pope Paul VI found contraceptives to be “intrinsically wrong” and against the moral order.” The Catholic Church has been vehemently against contraceptives ever since this statement was made.

There is an interesting contradiction to be found in *Humanae Vitae* that is hard to overlook. Pope Paul VI wrote that, “the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which We have just explained (Pope Paul VI).” It seems as though abstaining from sexual intercourse except for times during a woman’s menstrual cycle when she is infertile is still a form of actively preventing pregnancy. This would of course be going against what was early professed about contraceptive methods. This method is often referred to as the Rhythm Method and according to the Mayo Clinic 13-25 women out of 100 will get pregnant using the Rhythm Method in a year (Staff, Mayo Clinic). So although the Rhythm Method is somewhat effective, it is not a comparable alternative to more popular forms of birth control. In 2004 only 12% of the American Catholic population agreed with the Catholic Church’s stance on birth control (Greely). A more recent study conducted by Guttmacher institute in 2012 revealed that 98% of American Catholic women have used birth control and only 2% of American Catholic women use the Rhythm Method (Dreweke).

An additional and similar contradiction found in the *Humanae Vitae* is the approval of sexual intercourse between couples experiencing infertility. Would that not be considered to be useless and sinful? This would be especially true if the husband was infertile. The story of Onan in Genesis chapter 9 is frequently cited in the argument against contraceptives. In this chapter Onan chooses to spill his seed upon the ground instead of impregnating the widowed wife of his brother. God then killed Onan for having sex without the intent of impregnating his inherited wife. According to their faith, Catholic men and women can only have sex that is not sinful once they are married and intending to conceive children.

Each student does learn human biology and reproduction in a science classroom setting. They are also taught about puberty and bodily changes that occur in both sexes. Since all of Christian Brothers High School students are unmarried young men, the school faculty has no choice but to discourage sexual activity (Blancett Interview). Abstinence education is done at the discretion of the individual teachers in Religious Ethics courses. According to a counselor at CBHS, the teachers are not required to talk about abstinence or sexual activity in the classroom (Blancett Interview). Because of this some teachers choose to not discuss those topics at all. This is more common with the female religious ethics teachers (Blancett Interview).

Other teachers answer questions according to official Church doctrine if they are asked. Often, teachers speak about the positive aspects of remaining abstinent until marriage. The teachers are also encouraged to speak about the responsibility of a male in relationships and marriage (Blancett Interview). If the topic of sexual activity is brought up in the ethics courses then the following discussion is usually about how having

intercourse before marriage is unethical according to Lasallian moral code. Students are encouraged to consider that God has plans for each of them that involve abstaining from sex until they are married and that there are always benefits to following God's plan. There are also risks involved with ignoring God's wishes. It is believed at CBHS that to educate the students about contraceptives would be to encourage the use of said contraceptives (Blancett Interview). For this reason it is considered truly unethical and risky to discuss anything other than abstinence.

There are no outright rules about sex, pregnancy, or intimacy in the CBHS handbook. The only statement on behavior reads, "CBHS students are to conduct themselves as gentlemen, and any conduct which reflects unfavorably on the school, either on or off campus, can result in expulsion" (www.cbhs.org). Technically, a student could get expelled for any number of things that are not mentioned in the official handbook.

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL:

St. Mary's Episcopal School was founded in 1847 and has been associated with the Episcopal Church from its very beginnings. Throughout the school's history it has had several locations around the Memphis area. In 1953 St. Mary's Episcopal School moved to its current location at The Church of the Holy Communion². The Church of the Holy Communion During remains closely tied to the school. During the last school year 845 students were enrolled in this all girls pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade institution.

² Interesting fact: There is a connection between the Church of the Holy Communion and Rhodes College. The four-acre plot of land near Poplar and Perkins that the church occupies was purchased with a donation made by Mrs. Emma Voorhies in 1938. Mrs. Voorhies also donated money for a dormitory to be built on the Rhodes Campus. That building was dedicated in 1948 and is still called Voorhies Hall.

St. Mary's ultimate goal is to "equip each girl to be collaborative, creative, and courageous so that she will seize the opportunities in the changing world and thrive in her generation" (www.stmarysschool.org).

The Episcopal faith puts a great deal of emphasis on being inclusive and welcoming to all faiths. They talk to their students about honoring their own traditions. At St. Mary's I sat down with Mrs. Judy Bearman, the school nurse. Mrs. Bearman conducts the majority of the sex education sessions at St. Mary's. Mrs. Bearman said that they believe in telling their students that "If your faith is important to you then it important to examine it" (Bearman Interview). They hope that regardless of the religious background of a student that the student will think about their spiritual plan. The administration of St. Mary's School believes that the inclusive nature of the Episcopal faith is one of the reasons that parents of varying religious backgrounds choose St. Mary's for their daughters. St. Mary's believes that "being strong and comfortable in one's faith, while being knowledgeable and respectful of the faith of others" is one of the most important ideas that they can teach their students.

St. Mary's tries to create an environment where both Christians and non-Christians can come together to worship a singular God, who transcends all individual religious traditions (www.stmarysschool.org). Students in the Upper and Middle Schools attend daily services at The Church of the Holy Communion and the Lower Elementary students attend more age appropriate services less frequently. St. Mary's expects tolerance, kindness, and community service from all of its students.

The Episcopal Church affirms that contraceptives are a personal choice (www.episcopalchurch.org). Because this tenet of the Episcopal faith has been much

discussed, especially in the conversation on contraceptives in Christianity, it has actually become a quite prominent aspect of Episcopalian political life. The Episcopal Church has stood firm on this topic since 1930 when it first formally approved of the use of contraceptives. For this reason, St. Mary's is unrestricted in its curriculum choices regarding sex education and any discussion on birth control. Like birth control, abortion is also considered to be a personal choice that should always be a carefully considered and informed decision.

The sex education program at St. Mary's is done in several stages throughout a student's term at the school. At each stage the parents are notified via letter of the material that will be covered in the sessions. The parents can choose at any of the stages to withhold their child from the sex education program for any reason. Mrs. Bearman says that this is a rare occurrence (Bearman Interview). When a parent voices concerns or calls with questions about some of the material then usually a simple clarification will ease their worries. Only very rarely does a parent actually prevent their child from participating in St. Mary's sex education program. Nurse Bearman reports that many parents have been extremely thankful to St. Mary's for teaching their daughters so many things that they themselves may not have approached on their own (Bearman Interview). One sentiment that is heard frequently is thanks for being proactive on the topic of puberty and reproductive development (Bearman Interview).

St. Mary's implements the most thorough sex education curriculum of the three schools that were interviewed for this project. At St. Mary's, the sex education program begins in the fourth grade with a series of talks called "Girl Power" (Bearman Interview). During these conversations the younger girls learn how to take care of their changing

bodies and they have the first of several talks about periods. In the fifth grade there are another few talks about the menstrual cycle. In the seventh grade the school begins to engage the students in conversations about healthy relationships and identifying unhealthy relationships (Bearman Interview). These talks also address the issue of body image and self-respect and they continue through the eighth grade.

In the tenth grade the school nurse begins a program called “Worth the Wait” which is several weeks long and spread out in five or six sessions, depending on the needs of the students (Bearman Interview). St. Mary’s fully embraces the concept that knowledge is power and that it is the best way to keep their students healthy and safe. For this reason, the students are taught about all aspects of STIs including statistics about STIs and teen pregnancies in Memphis (Bearman Interview). The students are also told about the full range of contraceptive options. Everything is discussed in a highly medical way and in great detail. Mrs. Bearman does not try to tell the students that there is a way to have risk-free sex. She tells all of the students “There is no such thing as safe sex” (Bearman Interview). The school is very concerned about the physical safety of the students.

The sex education program at St. Mary’s also tries to address the great deal of misinformation that circulates amongst the students. The students are given the opportunity to anonymously ask questions during the sessions by writing them down on plain note cards. Each student in the class must write something down on the card even if it is just a note to the nurse. That way, there is no way to tell who asked a question. This encourages the students to ask questions about things they have heard from their peers that may have confused them or contradicted what they have heard in the class.

The emotional aspect of deciding when a person is ready for sexual activity or intercourse is discussed at length. St. Mary's does not ignore the social pressures that influence the girls when they are making decisions about their bodies. St. Mary's School hopes that all of the information that they give the girls will discourage carelessness and encourage them to make careful and safe choices for themselves.

The "Worth the Wait" program that St. Mary's teaches is actually based on a model of sex education called the Scott and White Sexual Health and Wellness Program. This was previously titled Worth the Wait (Scott & White). The Scott and White program encourages waiting until the right time for sexual activity (*What You Need to Know*). This in no way means teens should exclusively wait until marriage. The Scott and White program hopes to ensure that teenagers are not rushing into sex without being informed of the emotional and physical risks of sexual activity and the benefits of waiting until they are more mature (*What You Need to Know*). The Scott and White program is fact and statistics based (Scott & White).

WESTMINSTER ACADEMY:

Westminster Academy was founded in 1996 and is located adjacent to the Ridgeway Baptist Church. There are currently three hundred and fifty students enrolled with two classes per grade from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Westminster is co-educational. The founders of the school (six couples from six different churches) were inspired by the book, Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning, which was written by Douglas Wilson. Wilson was greatly influenced by the writings of C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers. Dorothy Sayers wrote an essay called *The Lost Tools of Learning* in

1947 which has inspired Christian educators across the globe and discusses the basic tenets of Classical Christian education (Sayers). At Westminster Academy I sat down with Mr. Peter Baur, the school's headmaster.

Although Westminster Academy shares the grounds with Ridgeway Baptist Church, the school has never been religiously affiliated with any particular church (Baur Interview). Instead, Westminster is associated with an educational system called Classical Christian Education. The school also describes itself as being ascribed to the Historical Reformed Perspective. The school does not require that students or parents be members of any particular church. The school's statement of faith is described as a summary of classical reformed orthodoxy (W.A. Student Handbook). A few key points in the school's statement of faith are that they believe that the Bible in its entirety is divine revelation and that they believe in the God of the Bible as well as the Divine Trinity. Much of their statement of faith is based in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Second London Baptist Confession of 1689*.

Westminster Academy defines Classical Christian Education as "the cultivation of virtue and wisdom by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness and beauty according to God's Revelation using the classical liberal arts." Its purpose is to train the soul (which is the seat of the mind, will and emotions) to love that which is worth loving" (W.A. Student Handbook). At Westminster Academy, it is believed that God is reflected in all parts of life and students can be taught how to recognize that presence. Mr. Baur was able to give a few interesting examples of this concept, one of which is about architecture. He talked about how some buildings and structures are beautiful regardless of age or time

period (Baur Interview). This is because there are certain proportions and ratios that are inherently beautiful. These proportions and ratios come from God's influence on nature and God has established "transcendent principles of beauty" (Baur Interview). Any building that does not incorporate these natural proportions is not truly beautiful and will one day lose admiration and value (Baur Interview). Mathematically consistent ratios can be found throughout nature in examples such as the shape of trees and the chambers of the nautilus shell (Baur Interview). These are all examples of God's careful design (Baur Interview). They believe that anything they teach should reflect something about God's nature and character (Baur Interview).

One of the goals of Westminster Academy is to "produce students that are fully human (Baur Interview)." These are students who can critically analyze information as well as questions of faith and spirituality. Students should be leaving the school knowing how to use information and how to ask questions and learn on their own (Baur Interview). The headmaster of Westminster Academy described Westminster's curriculum as being a "skills based education" (Baur Interview). Logic, Rhetoric, and Latin (often referred to as the Trivium) are at the core of Classical Christian education and are taken very seriously at Westminster. Logic begins to be formally instructed in the 7th grade but reasoning skills are taught beginning in kindergarten (*Why Logic*). Rhetoric courses at W.A focus on "persuading logically and passionately with integrity" (*Why Rhetoric*). A good summary of the educational goals of Westminster Academy comes from their website:

At Westminster Academy, our goal is to produce a student who can not only analyze, but can also synthesize. We seek to train the child to search for meaning not in the particulars, but to investigate the particulars and

order them purposefully to find meaning. For the Christian, that means tracing all of life to the very person of God (*Why Logic*). There is no such thing as chapel or mandatory church attendance at Westminster Academy. Instead, students go to Assembly where sometimes poetry is read or music is played among other things (Baur Interview). Once the Memphis Symphony came to play for the school. Similarly to architecture, there are proportions in music that create sounds that are inherently appealing to the human ear and reflect God's influence. Assembly is an opportunity to further teach the values of Classical Christian education. Although it is not what a person would consider to be a formal sermon, Assembly is nevertheless a religious experience for the students.

There is no such thing as sex education at Westminster Academy (Baur Interview). That includes abstinence education. It is a topic that the school has chosen to not address within the classroom. The administration believes that there are some things that are entirely under the jurisdiction of parents (Baur Interview). Although the faculty may hope that the students would choose to maintain traditional Christian values such as abstaining from sexual intercourse until marriage, this is never discussed in a classroom setting (Baur Interview). Westminster tries to instill values of respect towards all people which they believe helps to facilitate healthy relationships between their students. Westminster does not believe that as an institution they can make a decision on what is best for the students in the arena of sex education and that only parents can make those decisions (Baur Interview). The headmaster does not believe that any changes in sex education policy would make a difference in parents choosing Westminster over other schools (Baur Interview). He believes that parents enroll their children in Westminster because of its unique education model (Baur Interview).

Parents are both encouraged and expected to be highly involved in their children's education at Westminster Academy. Parents are given opportunities to give presentations, performances, and readings during Assembly. They are also closely linked to the school through an online interface for grades, messages from teachers, and updates from the administration. It is hoped that by getting parents interested in their children's education that the growth that happens at school will always continue in the home. By getting children comfortable with asking complicated questions there will hopefully be open dialogue between parents and children about expectations and values.

So far in Westminster Academy history there has not been a student pregnancy that has come to the attention of the faculty (Baur Interview). There is also not an official school policy regarding student pregnancy. According to the headmaster, a student would never be suspended or expelled from the school for being pregnant (Baur Interview). Mr. Baur said that the Reformed Historical Perspective teaches us that, "though we are all sinners, God is a God of grace and mercy and at our worst He still loves us and we would like to reflect His character in the way we treat others." The closest thing that Westminster Academy has to punishment for sexual activity would be a rule against public displays of affection. According to the student handbook, the punishment for such actions would be no more than being reprimanded by a teacher and possibly a 10-minute detention after school.

COMPARISONS:

One interesting comparison to be made is the way that Christian Brothers High School and Westminster Academy address the presence of God on Earth. CBHS

saw God's earthly presence as a reason to be constantly reverent and well behaved. Westminster Academy teaches students to actively search out signs of God's influence on the world and as a way to understand true beauty. I think that these differences reflect the goals of the two schools. CBHS seeks to produce kind and charitable gentlemen and Westminster Academy seeks to produce inquisitive and spiritual graduates. Religious participation at St. Mary's seems to be much more rooted in the historical traditions of the school than in philosophical discourse on the presence of God on Earth.

Each of the three schools approached sex education in unique ways that complemented their specific religious influences. What was surprising is that, according to the schools themselves, parents do not seem to be very concerned with sex education in their children's private education. Maybe that is because there is such a strong connection between the parents of the students and the private schools themselves. Each of these schools made an effort to create opportunities for parent involvement and communication between the school and the parents. The open dialogue may contribute to keeping parents comfortable with what is and is not being taught to their children. Of the three schools, only St. Mary's Episcopal School was the only one that reported some concerns with the sex education program in place at this school. This makes sense because St. Mary's had the only curriculum that openly discussed the use of contraceptives and sexual activity itself. Usually only one or two students a year were withdrawn from the sex education sessions per year by their parents (Bearman Interview).

An interesting observation is that the school that requires the most frequent direct participation in the school's religious traditions is also the same school that has the most open discussion on sex, sexual health, and contraceptives. St. Mary's Episcopal School required daily chapel and prayer for their middle and upper school students. Additionally, the school that had the least amount of directly religious participation also had the absolute least amount of in-school conversation about sex education. Westminster Academy did not require the students to participate in religious services that were geared towards one particular faith or denomination. Westminster also had absolutely no sex education curriculum in the school, other than their stance that sex education was the responsibility of parents. Christian Brothers High School falls in the middle. CBHS had some form of sex education by telling their students to refrain from having sex for a variety of religious reasons and they also had Catholic religious services in the form of monthly chapel and daily prayer.

The schools are also similar in that they are welcoming to families of all religious backgrounds. None of the schools require that students or parents be member of a certain church or religious denomination. Each school either has official statements in their students handbooks, their website, or indicated to me directly that they welcome and encourage diversity in their schools. Each of the schools does incorporate their specific religious traditions into their curriculum as well so all students are exposed to the school's particular values regardless of the student's religious preference or background. Although each of the schools had religiously and

culturally diverse student bodies, the schools' sex education programs needed to adhere to adhere to the standards of the religious traditions of each individual school.

When compared to public education in Memphis some of the three private schools this project focused on were more similar to the public schools than others. As far as actual sex education instruction goes, Christian Brothers High School was the closest to the model being used by the State of Tennessee. Both Tennessee public high schools and CBHS openly recommend abstinence until marriage to teenagers as the best possible plan. Of course, their reasoning behind that decision is much different. Tennessee public schools talk to students about the risks of sexual behavior despite contraceptives and about the safety of remaining abstinent until marriage. CBHS on the other hand acknowledges that having sex before marriage and the use of contraceptives are both sins in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Therefore there is no other religiously appropriate option other than remaining abstinent until marriage and using the Rhythm Method as the sole form of family planning.

CONCLUSIONS:

Overall this project has proven that there is no singular way to discuss sex education in private Christian high schools. Each of the three high schools that participated in this project had very different approaches to sex education. Similarly each of the three schools also had unique reasons for why they chose their curriculum that corresponded with their religious values. Whether the sex education curriculum is comprehensive, abstinence only, or up to the discretion of the parents, each of the three schools chose options that were uniquely appropriate and thoughtful. It became very clear

over the course of this project that there is no way that all three of these schools could have shared a similar curriculum or even discuss sexual activities in the same way without offending their religious traditions or compromising certain values that are very important to them. Christian Brothers High School differs from the public schools in that the public schools in Shelby County are currently including information about condoms in their curriculum about HIV and AIDS.

One cannot help but to wonder what questions this research bring up about sex education in public schools. If schools that share so many similarities (private, Christian affiliated, and having students of diverse religious backgrounds) cannot possibly share a sex education program, how could schools with an even more diverse student population share sex education programs across a state let alone a country? I am not saying that I have the answers to these questions or that I think that sex education should be removed from schools. The reproductive health of a population should always be a concern of the government on a city, state, and national level and the public classroom is an optimum place to teach on a large scale. What is certain is that if comprehensive sex education becomes available to all students all public schools, it should always be optional. This way, parents of different cultural and religious backgrounds will always be able to control that aspect of their children's education.

When the United States first began to delegate money to sex education it was for community programs instead of developing in-school programs. These community programs were all abstinence based but now there are more and more comprehensive sex education programs available, such as sessions for teenagers now being taught by Planned Parenthood. One way that the national government might be able to support sex

education outside of the classroom would be to increase funding for such programs. These programs would be helpful for parents of students in both private and public schools who felt that their child's sex education was incomplete. I could see how this would be very appealing to Catholic families, who generally disagree with the Catholic Church's ban on contraceptives.

Each of the three private schools chose models of sex education that were uniquely appropriate to their religious and educational values. This made me wonder what would happen if individual school districts could choose their own model of sex education based on their specific needs. I am convinced that if Tennessee changed its laws so that schools were less restricted of what they could teach then Memphis would take advantage of being able to create a sex education program tailored to its needs. This idea runs the risk of more conservative school districts choosing to not teach any sex education at all, but honestly that is already happening in Tennessee anyway. The only time that sex education is required to be taught in Tennessee it is as an intervention more than an education. If anything this project has made it clear that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all method of teaching sex education. There may be some wonderful benefits to allowing communities to decide what is right for them.

Although Christian Brothers High School, St. Mary's Episcopal School, and Westminster Academy are all private Christian High Schools they still have conflicting philosophies that prevent them from being able to share sex education programs. Christian Brothers High School could never condone the use of contraceptives and St. Mary's would not be comfortable if their students were not informed of their contraceptive choices. For the same reason St. Mary's would rather teach sex education

at school than to leave it as the sole responsibility of the parents, the way that Westminster Academy chooses to do. Each of these schools chose approaches to sex education that are completely appropriate for that particular school. Additionally, each of the three schools would never consider talking about sexual activities or reproductive health in the ways that any of the other two schools do. There is a spectrum of appropriateness when it comes to sex education that depends on more than just a national culture. There is so much more to take into account, especially at religiously affiliated schools.

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