

# Personal Responsibility: A Choice

CASSANDRA L. DEBENEDETTO  
FOUNDER, ANSCOMBE SOCIETY, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



Having recently graduated from Princeton University and now working with college undergraduates across the country on matters of sex and relationships, I am more than familiar with the messages of “sexual responsibility” being taught at today’s universities. Here, “sexual responsibility” is understood to consist of two things. First, it means using contraception to prevent pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Second, it means receiving consent from the other person before engaging in sexual activity. Many students accept these teachings and direct their own behaviors according to them. Whether they are sexually active with a committed significant other or they are sexually active with multiple un-committed partners, as long as they use contraception and receive consent they believe they are being responsible. However, there is also a growing population of college students who regard this message of “sexual responsibility” as overly-simplistic, misleading, and even harmful. They believe today’s universities (and, indeed, much of the broader culture) are settling for a type of “damage control” in matters of sexuality. This is actually a severe disservice to young men and women because it assumes they cannot exercise responsibility — with respect to the

cause of the “damage” — in their sexual choices and behaviors.

The truth is, to prevent pregnancy, reduce the spread of STIs, and prevent sexual assault, we need to encourage a type of personal responsibility that extends deeper than current messages to use contraception and gain consent. It is common knowledge that condoms and the Pill are not a guarantee against pregnancy, with roughly 20% of women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy within the first year of condom use.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, condoms only limit the spread of some STIs, leaving young men and women (especially women) vulnerable to diseases that can severely cripple their health and their ability to give birth to healthy children in the future.<sup>2</sup> Not to mention that some women have serious reservations about using the Pill when research has linked its use to immune system suppression,<sup>3</sup> as well as an increased chance of cancer, tumors, heart attacks, and infertility.<sup>4</sup> Even students who are not personally opposed to contraception still believe that encouraging its use within a “safe sex” or “sexual responsibility” program gives a false impression of safety, protection, and responsibility. For them, personal responsibility in matters of sexuality includes not only guarding against unfavorable consequences, but even more so being responsible with the very decisions and behavior that lead to those consequences in the first place.

Many young men and women today desire encouragement, resources, and support to be personally responsible sexually by choosing abstinence. For them, personal responsibility in matters of sexuality means understanding the long-term consequences of one’s choices and behavior, both for oneself and for others, including one’s future spouse and children. Although marriage and family may not be on the minds of most teenagers and college students, there is no reason why it shouldn’t be when getting married and having

children is a reality for the vast majority of people. Young people must understand that children do best when raised within a stable, intact family (i.e. when raised by a biological mother and father who are committed to each other in marriage).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, they must understand that the best preparation for achieving a stable marriage is limiting one's sexual partners to one person, that person being one's spouse.<sup>6</sup> This means that for young men and women, personal responsibility means setting a goal of preparing for a healthy and stable marriage and family, and staying committed to that goal through abstinence.

In this light we can easily see that choosing abstinence is not a decision made out of fear of contracting STIs or conceiving a child. Instead, choosing abstinence means embracing a lifestyle committed not only to one's own immediate well-being, but to the well-being of one's future family.

In matters of sex, we cannot settle for a type of responsibility that merely attempts to cover up irresponsible decisions. Rather, we must commit ourselves to a vision of love and sexuality that fosters greater hope for the future.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Trussell, J. "Contraceptive efficacy." In *Contraceptive Technology: Nineteenth Revised Edition*. Ed. R.A. Hatcher et al. New York, NY: Ardent Media, 2007.
2. See *Unprotected: a campus psychiatrist reveals how political-correctness in her field endangers every student* by Miriam Grossman, M.D.
3. Blum, M. et al., "Antisperm antibodies in young oral contraceptive users," *Advances in Contraception* 5. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989. Pages 41-46.
4. Wilson, Mercedes. *Love and Family*. San Francisco: Ignatius. Pages 271-272.
5. When compared to other family structures, children and adolescents living in intact families (married-biological-parent families) tend to report lower levels of psychological distress, lower levels of behavioral problems, and

- greater academic success. Falci, Christina, "Family Structure, Closeness to Residential and Nonresidential Parents, and Psychological Distress in Early and Middle Adolescence," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 47, 2006, pages 123-146; Hofferth, Sandra L., "Residential Father Family Type and Child Well-Being: Investment Versus Selection," *Demography*, Vol. 43, No. 1, February, 2006, pages 53-77; Knoester, Chris et al., "Parenting Practices and Adolescents' Friendship Networks," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 68, No. 4., December, 2006, pages 1247-1260.
6. See "The Harmful Effects of Early Sexual Activity and Multiple Sexual Partners Among Women: A Book of Charts" by Robert E. Rector, et al. Available: [http://www.heritage.org/research/abstinence/abstinence\\_charts.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/abstinence/abstinence_charts.cfm)

*Cassandra DeBenedetto is a founder of Princeton's student group, the Anscombe Society, which has received national attention for supporting the institution of marriage, the role of the family, and chastity on Princeton's campus. After graduation, Cassy founded the Love and Fidelity Network to meet the needs of college students looking for resources and support to start initiatives similar to the Anscombe Society on their own college campuses. Since 2005, Cassy has been a contributor to the blog Modestly Yours. She and her work have been featured in such publications as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Teen Vogue, as well as on the Glenn Beck Program.*