

A Double Standard

AMBER A. MADISON

AUTHOR



If a girl gets the HPV vaccine, she might have sex. If a girl has too much sex, she is a slut. If a girl has unprotected sex, she could get knocked up. If a girl likes sex, she could turn into a nympho.

The way we handle sex and sexuality, you would think young women were doing it with themselves. Lectures about making wise sexual decisions focus stern eyes on young women and give but a darting glance to young men: “dude, where’s your condom?” But you can’t address sexual responsibility without also examining young men’s sexual choices, and all too often that’s left out of the equation.

We all read the story about the girl giving oral sex to multiple guys on the back of a bus — and the articles were all framed the same: what is wrong with young women’s sexuality? No one thought to ask, what is wrong with young men’s sexuality? Why did so many guys think it was okay to receive oral sex in the back of a school bus from a girl who had just gone down on five of his friends? But what if the story was reversed? Say there was a young man who was giving oral sex to multiple girls on the back of a bus. I’d be willing to bet that our concern would still be with the girl’s behavior, and not the boy’s. The articles would be: why are girls receiving oral sex in such a casual environment? Do they not worry about getting an STI from a guy who’s gotten busy with half the

cheerleading squad? We may not condone the irresponsible sex acts of guys, but we do accept them.

The other thing we accept is that guys will treat girls badly. We prepare women for this inevitability by warning them that guys are out for only one thing. We say men are jerks who can't stand commitment and don't value emotional intimacy (even though, ironically, studies have indicated that husbands are more happily married than their wives, and it's more difficult for men to heal emotionally after a break-up). We tell girls that young men are careless beings who engage in sex and feel nothing. And instead of deterring sexual activity, these stereotypes do two things: first, it lets guys off the hook. These ideas make clear that we have no expectation for men to be emotionally or physically responsible in regards to sex. Second, they inadvertently encourage young women to act just as sexually irresponsible as we perceive young men do. In a world where girls can do anything guys can, why would a girl want to be the one taking sex seriously and getting screwed over when she could instead see sex as something emotionally void and "no big deal."

If we want young people to take responsibility for their sexual choices and reproductive health, we must demand the same of men that we demand of women. Teach young men that they are expected to be caring partners who are informed about contraception and that they are expected to think carefully about with whom and when they have sex. Teach young women to expect more out of a guy than just a sex-seeking robot. That way, when young women are making sexual choices, they'll know the way to a man's heart isn't only through his fly. Because sex is something men and women do together, we need to be taught the same information, share the same responsibility of

preventing unwanted pregnancies and STIs, and be held to the same moral standards.

*Amber Madison is the author of *Hooking Up: A Girl's All-Out Guide to Sex and Sexuality*, the host of the Internet web channel *The Talk* (www.ambermadison.tv), and currently tours college campuses talking to students about sex and relationships. She is a recent graduate of Tufts University where she studied human sexuality through a double major in Community Health and American Studies. She has appeared on *The Today Show*, NPR, various local TV and radio shows, and is frequently quoted in magazines.*