Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXIV, Number 14, 21 September 1990 — Teach sexual responsibilty, not chastity [ARTICLE]

Teach sexual responsibilty, not chastity

By Mark Scheible

I am writing in livid response to Patrick Lannon's column in the Friday Sept. 4 issue of Spectator. Lannon has used weak reasoning and hazy facts to give support to a position that is obviously one of a specific moral dogma.

The issue at hand is what Lannon sees as an increase of sexual promiscuity in younger (heterosexual, of course) age groups and its "effects" on society. His comparative group is teenagers of "just a few generations ago" who he asserts were "ignorant of sex." Lannon is dreaming if he believes such a golden age of chastity ever existed. Just ask your parents or your grandparents (I did), or look at taboo literature of just about any period. What teenagers (and most adults) were ignorant of were sex-related issues of pregnancy and STD's, and how to avoid or cope with the responsibility of either one. And just because we take statistics now does not mean problems over these issues did not occur then. Instead of receiving help from concerned and knowledgeable people, problems were then (quietly) relegated to shotgun marriages, back-alley butchers, and death.

These issues have always existed and can no longer be skirted with simplistic talk of abstinence. Preventative education accomplishes the task of informing young people about issues concerning activities that will be a

major part of their lives. If young people can only fornicate like mad monsters despite this information, then how does Lannon expect them to take celibacy seriously as control? Which shows the greater measure of trust? Of credit to young people's decision-making skills?

Despite the picture that Lannon's selectively cited statistics draw, sex education and safe sex do work. The gay male community, for example, has reached a zero growth rate for HIV infection as a result of extensive safe sex education, not as a result of less sex. As far as society in general goes, until a comprehensive breakdown of populations with STD and conception education versus the resulting occurrences of each, with proper attention paid to differences of sexual activity and frequency among various social groups, is produced, this line of debate on the effects of "promiscuity" is meaningless. Lannon's blanket national statistics are non-correlative.

Let's set the records straight on the rest of Lannon's "social evils." 1) Single motherhood is not an evil. The trauma involved has to do with an unsupportive culture that Lannon seeks to perpetuate. 2) STD's, which include AIDS, are not evils. They are diseases which will be cured through extensive medical research, not by pretending they will go away if we morally shun them. In the meantime, preventative measures of all types must be taught so people can make their own informed decisions. 3) Abortion is not a social evil. There is not enough space to argue why, but it must be repeated (again and again and again) that abortion is strictly an individual woman's decision, that choice being a part of the fundamental right to control her body. Period. 4) Rape is not sexual. It is a violent assault that

uses the sexual act as a means to humiliate, violate, and induce psychological and physical pain to an unwilling victim. The usual motive is misogyny. The question here is one of gender relations and violent crime, not sex. Lannon's inclusion of rape in this debate, used to cast an aura of fear and moral condemnation on all sex-related issues, is irresponsible and dangerously close to the "if you weren't a slut, you wouldn't have been raped" view that many who combat the crime have spent a long time fighting.

In sum, Lannon, if you want to say that abortion and premarital sex are evil in and of themselves, just say it. Do not hide your agenda behind "social ills," "control," and fear of rape. You do not wish that we possess control. Rather, you wish us to *be* controlled--by fear and ignorance of our bodies and our sexuality; you and your ilk, of course being arbiters of that fear.

Yes, Lannon, we are not animals, and such being the case, we have the ability to make our own sexual choices and seek the knowledge we require to pursue our choices along paths that we as individuals decide possess a minimal risk. We are not little prehistoric savages grunting in the grass for a "few minutes of passion" (minutes!). This, too, is a "gross insult to young people". Abstinence does not equate control. Control is making decisions while minimizing risks and taking responsibility for consequences. If this means abstinence for you, then fine. I, for one, will continue to have sex as I and I alone, at my tender age of 20, deem appropriate and safe. Lannon, get off my back and out of my bedroom.

Mark Scheible is a Columbia College senior.