

PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"

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GUESTS:

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MS. ERBE: Some women's groups voice opposition to President Bush's push for more single sex public schools. Is single sex education good or bad for girls?

DELEGATE NORTON: People are welcome to pursue single sex education on their own dime. But not as segregated public education at taxpayer's expense.

MS. WOOD: Choice is a good thing and now children of all ages, not just those from wealthy parents have a choice.

MS. NATIVIDAD: I tell you, for a more integrated world, since sex education doesn't seem like the best preparation for our young people.

MS. SETMAYER: The results speak for themselves, and given the state of public education, if single sex education works, we need to pursue those options.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to, *To The Contrary*, a discussion of news and social trends from a variety of women's perspectives.

In the news, the Bush administration says single sex public schools can make stronger girls and boys. But some women's groups say they promote sexism.

Then, according to the latest U.S. Census, it's no longer a man's world in the dating scene. A shortage of women is developing in some age groups.

Behind the headlines, Lovesick, one woman's personal struggle with sexual addiction.

Up first, single sex schools. The Bush administration is promoting single sex education at public schools, a controversial move supported by some, and strongly opposed by others. While single sex ed is already an option in private schools, Title IX, the law preventing gender-based discrimination in public education restricts many public school districts from creating single sex schools or classes. Title IX requires parity. For example, if a school offers a boy's only math class, a similar class for girls must be set up.

But in response to increasing demand for single sex public education, right now there are only 11 public schools that offer it, the Bush administration is poised to relax federal rules limiting it. Advocates argue girls and minorities benefit from single sex atmospheres, allowing them to feel more confident and engage more in classroom discussion. Women's and civil liberties groups, such as the National Organization for Women, and the American Civil Liberties Union oppose it. They cite studies that show the benefits of single sex ed are inconclusive. They also fear all-girl schools will not get the same public financial support as all boy programs will.

So, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, why do you oppose single sex public education?

DELEGATE NORTON: Bonnie, I cannot believe that I am reliving 30 years ago the fight for Title IX, the fight against segregated public education based on gender and on sex, and if, in fact, the Bush administration believes that all-girls education is better than integrated education, then it follows that we really ought to repeal Title IX, we shouldn't have it available only to some public school children. Of course, the studies that have looked more closely at single sex education in public schools have found real reasons why there are differences, when there are any differences at all.

For example, smaller classes. This is one thing we know, whether there are boys and girls sitting together, only girls, or only boys, works. Put kids in a small enough class so that a teacher can have a one-on-one and you'll get better results. But nobody has shown that putting only little girls together with little girls raises your IQ, raises your scores, and viola everything is all right with education in America.

MS. WOOD: Well, what they have shown is that some children, girls and boys, do better if they're in an all girls school or an all boys school. And I agree with you, maybe it's not best for all children, and we certainly shouldn't put

all girls in all-girls schools, and all boys in all-boys schools.

DELEGATE NORTON: Why not if it's better?

MS. WOOD: Because we don't know that it is. But the point is that for some it is, and parents ought to have the choice to say, you know what, for my little girl it's proven that it is better for her, and I can't afford to send her to a very fancy, very expensive all-girls school, but I'm paying my taxes, and why shouldn't the public school system give me what's best for my daughter. What is wrong with some choice here?

MS. ERBE: Well, what about the fact that, Irene Natividad, that there are 11, a small number obviously compared with the tens if not hundreds of thousands of public schools across the country, but there are 11 charter schools that snuck in there as single sex public schools. So, sort of what's the big deal of changing things?

MS. NATIVIDAD: Well, because if you -- what's the big deal about making it a law? Because it then mandates the use of public money for a certain set of education that not necessarily has been proven, as the Congresswoman pointed out, to be effective. One of the charter schools that's been used as an example of success, the one in Chicago for instance, is really a poor example, because what we found out is that the average expenditure per pupil is about \$10,000 versus \$8,300 for public school students. So, you can't demonstrate that it's the segregation of gender that was the reason for the improvement in academics, or is it based on greater expenditure, or smaller classes?

The studies so far have come from private schools, and when you take out certain socioeconomic factors or ability levels, there is no difference in the level of performance.

MS. SETMAYER: That's actually not true, though. There are about 15 schools now, and what I find interesting is that even if you have used the District of Columbia as an example, the District of Columbia spends a large amount of money per pupil as opposed to other major cities, and they're still --

DELEGATE NORTON: No.

MS. SETMAYER: They spend close to -- how much money do we spend per student here in D.C.?

DELEGATE NORTON: Well, the District spends less than any of the surrounding jurisdictions. And so let's get that on the table.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, we're talking nationally. And the school system here is still in dire need of change.

DELEGATE NORTON: What does that have to do with girls and boys education?

MS. SETMAYER: Because in the girl's school here, and I'll use an example here in Washington, Motten Elementary School (sp), where a principal went on his own and decided to split the classes up girls in girls classes, boys in boys classes, without asking the bureaucracy for permission. And the test scores jumped from 49 percent to 90 percent in standard testing.

MS. ERBE: I do have a question, Congresswoman Norton, which is --

DELEGATE NORTON: She doesn't know why they jumped.

MS. ERBE: Perhaps I'm wrong, but are there not feminist groups that support single sex education? I remember a few years ago, the American Association of University Women, a very progressive group, did a study called Hostile Hallways that was frequently quoted in women's circles about how girls in public schools, especially teen girls, were facing -- that's when they lose their self-esteem because they start getting teased by boys, et cetera.

DELEGATE NORTON: I don't believe so. I don't know any bona fide women's groups that support going back to where we were 30 years ago. And let me say something about self-esteem. The self-esteem of women was way up there when girls couldn't get into Yale, when there were all-girl's, all-men's schools. And, in fact, some argue that now boys have less self-esteem because they're with girls. You've got to watch out for self-esteem arguments. There are some benefits to single sex education, those benefits do not call for rolling the clock back to segregated public education in our country.

MS. WOOD: Nobody suggested that we're going to turn half of public schools into single sex schools.

DELEGATE NORTON: You can't do some and not do all.

MS. WOOD: They're passing a law saying that a certain amount of funds would be set aside for schools to apply to do that. And it doesn't mean that a parent has to send their child to that school. It's just saying, why shouldn't we give more options for it.

And look, some of our top feminist leaders, Hillary Clinton went to an all-women's college.

DELEGATE NORTON: Which she paid for, and it wasn't at public expense.

MS. WOOD: Well, yes, she obviously did. But she obviously didn't think it was a bad thing. And the point is, why should --

DELEGATE NORTON: It's a good thing.

MS. WOOD: Why should only people who have money like Hillary be able to do that?

DELEGATE NORTON: I'm amazed that these Republicans, who wouldn't --

MS. WOOD: Why is that?

MS. ERBE: One at a time.

DELEGATE NORTON: I'm amazed that these Republicans who want to make sure that the rich and the poor get the same thing except when there's a law before the Congress of the United States. That's very interesting that you're for -- it is very interesting to hear Republicans argue that the rich and the poor ought to be entitled to the same thing --

MS. SETMAYER: The same education.

MS. ERBE: Let her finish.

DELEGATE NORTON: -- when, in fact, that's not where you stand on healthcare,

that's not where you stand on putting the same money into inner city schools.

MS. WOOD: That's the very place I think a lot of these schools would benefit. That's why I'm for school choice across the board, because it tends to be inner city children that benefit greatly whether it's going to a parochial school or religious school than it is children out in the suburbs.

MS. ERBE: Let me ask you this, what are you going to do if the Republicans get their way, and all of a sudden you start seeing girl's schools underfunded when compared with boy's schools, just as you see inner city predominantly minority schools underfunded when compared with suburban predominantly white public schools?

MS. WOOD: I think it ought to be the same --

MS. ERBE: And conservatives, quite frankly, the answer is too bad, it's based on housing.

MS. WOOD: That's not the answer of this conservative. Let me just going to say, I agree with President Bush --

MS. ERBE: But you will say you're different from the conservative Supreme Court, for example, which has said, you know, the problem with disparate funding is a housing issue, and no more bussing.

MS. WOOD: Well, this is the matter in my judgment of the schools aren't performing then they either have to put up or shut up, and we move on to a new school. And that should go for single sex --

DELEGATE NORTON: Show first that this makes them perform.

MS. WOOD: I agree, but we've got to have more to study. I mean, you can't have 11 schools across, say, hundreds of thousands of public school system and go, well, these are the only ones we can look at. You've got to give it a chance. And look, if it doesn't work, take the funding away.

MS. NATIVIDAD: How do you measure it doesn't work? You see, academics --

MS. WOOD: A task force.

MS. NATIVIDAD: -- academics seems to be the only measure being discussed, but one of the problems that is prevalent still in many high schools is, indeed, sexual harassment of some of the girls, and the development of attitudes among boys about how to treat girls. Right now, there are rules that are being implemented in public schools that are intended to stem that kind of behavior. When you segregate boys from girls, and they have very little experience with the other gender, it tends to promote a certain kind of behavior that you cannot impact. Whereas, in a public school situation, where they have to interact, the girls may be harassed down the hallway, but you can have funding for measures to prevent it, and prevent behavior.

MS. ERBE: Quick response.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, they have the schools where the boys and girls do interact with one another, just not in the classroom environment while they're learning. So, we're not talking about one extreme or the other. And it's amazing to me the girl's school in -- the Young Women's Leadership --

MS. ERBE: I've got to wrap it up.

MS. SETMAYER: The Young Women's Leadership School in Harlem, New York, is 99 percent minority girls, and 99 percent of them are going to a four-year college. And the ACLU said that they're disappointed that the doors are still open to this school.

MS. ERBE: All right. From single sex education to singles and sex. For years, it's been a common lament for single women on the dating scene "there just aren't enough good men." According to the latest U.S. Census, that's changing. In the 30 to 44 year age group, the ratio of single men to single women is now roughly equal. But men in that group hoping to marry young women may soon have to look harder. By the year 2010, men in that age group will outnumber women five to ten years younger by two to one. Census data also show where singles live makes a big difference in the numbers. The Western states have a surplus of men. Alaska has the highest male/female ratio, followed by Nevada, Colorado, Wyoming, Hawaii, Idaho and Utah. But cities, such as Philadelphia, Detroit, the District of Columbia, and states such as Rhode Island and Massachusetts boast more single women outnumbering single men.

Explain to me and the rest of our audience how this is working, because women are still, what, 51-52 percent of the population, and yet in certain age groups there are more men?

MS. SETMAYER: Well, it depends on how you define men.

(Laughter.)

MS. SETMAYER: It's tough to find a good man, you know, who knows how to act properly, how to treat a woman. I think that there is a --

MS. ERBE: You remind me of Former President Clinton with the meaning of the word "is." What's the meaning of the word "man."

MS. SETMAYER: Well, I'm not perjuring myself either.

Anyway, honestly, I can say, I just turned 27 years old, and I'm still -- I have still yet to find where all these men are, allegedly. I mean I live here in Washington, D.C., which has a high professional rate, professional men and women here, and the dating scene is something that I think for professional women, professional educated women, is something that plagues us. When I turned 25 I was depressed because I didn't have a husband. And my mom said, you're young, relax. But, mom, I want to have a family. And it's amazing to me why I think the dichotomy between men and women now is because we have such a very convoluted definition of what the proper role of men and women are in the family structure, and in relationships. And I think that some of the feminist movements are very confusing, send confusing messages. Well, you're supposed to be an independent woman, and go-getters. But then, when those women who want to have families that find the good men out there, then they're condemned for wanting to be stay-home moms.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Oh, please. Oh, Tara, stop that. Stop that.

MS. ERBE: Okay. One at a time.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Tara, you've got to move out of Washington, D.C.

MS. SETMAYER: Oh, I've been plenty of places, trust me.

MS. NATIVIDAD: These demographic data indicate that if you go out to the West Coast, you will find many more men.

MS. SETMAYER: I was just out on the West Coast. I travel all over.

MS. NATIVIDAD: As a feminist, I just want to correct you. We are not against stay-at-home moms. One of the early feminists, like Bela Absug, was the sponsor of a Social Security bill for housewives. We always --

MS. SETMAYER: You need to tell the current leadership that.

MS. ERBE: Let her finish.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Excuse me, we're not passed that. In fact, child care bills, who are behind them? Who are pushing? A lot of feminists.

MS. ERBE: Let's get back to -- point made, let's get back to, I actually know a woman who moved from Washington, D.C., to Boulder, Colorado, and he dating experience, professional, highly paid woman, you know, professional industry. She wasn't dating anybody in D.C. She just can't keep up with the phone calls she's getting in Boulder.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Well, let me tell you, Tara is absolutely correct. She may go to Boulder, but finding a good man, you know, depending on the requirements now of the modern woman, somebody who is supportive, somebody who cares about the same things she does, is still a factor.

Let me tell you what scares me. There's this old wives thing: When there are a lot of baby boys born, there's war; when there are a lot of baby girls, there is more peace. You know, women's vote. Okay, it's a powerhouse, that block of women voters so far. It could be affected by a shift in demographics. They will still be the majority of those who turn out to vote, but if their numbers lessen physically, there could be an impact in terms of public policy when there are more men.

DELEGATE NORTON: Well, I think you're going to see very differing kinds of ways people hook up. I notice that he said that men looking for women five to ten years younger, and that assumes a kind of marriage and dating relationship that may be going fast by the boards. There are all kinds of women who marry younger men. Look, the stereotypes, Tara, you know, are gone. They're gone in terms of who supports what. Everybody supports families and children, and they're gone about who it is appropriate to marry. And to the extent that that is the case, women who want to get married have got to take off the cloak that says that they must hook up with this or that kind of man.

MS. ERBE: Is this a good thing that we'll get away from the stereotype of the guy having to marry somebody five to ten years younger? I mean --

MS. WOOD: Well, I think this is a dream thing. I don't know if it's so much a stereotype. I think a guy wants a woman who is five or ten years younger.

MS. ERBE: Let me tell you, I love my husband dearly, he's six years older than I am. That's the only thing from my perspective that's wrong with him. I wish he were six years younger, because women statistically outlive men, so I want him around until I'm ready to cash out.

MS. WOOD: Think about when you were 25, would you have wanted to marry a 19 or 18 year old?

MS. ERBE: That depends on the person.

MS. WOOD: You have to wait until you're 35 before you're ready to marry a guy --

(Laughter.)

MS. WOOD: I've been living in D.C., and I think it is tough. I mean, I think the demographic thing is an interesting point, and I'm not going to go the whole feminist route, but it's tough. In a city like D.C., where you do have professional men and women, I do think it's tough for men. They don't want to always take charge. And I want a guy who is going to call me. I don't want to have to call him first. But I think a lot of times, because they see this equality, it makes them more nervous about it.

MS. ERBE: All right.

MS. SETMAYER: It's all about what you can live without.

MS. ERBE: Yeah, right. What can you live without? The secretive relationships. Compromise.

Behind the headlines, though only 3 to 6 percent of Americans suffer from sexual addiction, the condition can be particularly cruel for women. Experts say it is often caused by childhood trauma. According to one study, 78 percent of sex addicted women were sexually abused in childhood.

Sue Silverman chronicles her personal experiences with sexual addiction in the new book Lovesick.

MS. SILVERMAN: You have to ask yourself why are you having sex? I mean, if you're having sex because you're in a loving, committed relationship and you really care about somebody, then clearly it's healthy sex. I was using sex, though, to kind of numb my feelings. I was using sex because that was the only way that I knew to try to get men to love me. So, if you're using it kind of like the way a drug addict would use a drug, you know, to kind of numb out or to make yourself feel better, that's what would differentiate healthy sex from an addiction.

MS. ERBE: And when you did research into this topic, why would people choose to become addicted to sex as opposed to alcohol, or some drug, or something else?

MS. SILVERMAN: Well, my research was really my own life. You know, my memoirs, Lovesick, is about my own life. And it wasn't a choice. The reason why I became a sex addict is because my father sexually molested me. And, in fact, 78 percent of all women sex addicts were sexually molested as children. And so it was my father who gave me that incorrect message, you know, that love is sex, and sex is love, and I couldn't differentiate. You know, because, of course, you know, you love your father and you assume he loves you, but if that's the way he's showing his love, then that's how I got confused.

MS. ERBE: And what did you do about it? Once you realize you have this problem, what's the best way to solve it?

MS. SILVERMAN: I'd seen something like ten therapists over a 15-year period

because I was -- you know, I didn't feel good. I felt something was wrong. But they just, you know, said I was depressed, you know, and they gave me anti-depressants, and we -- that was it, that was the diagnosis. But it was wrong. And so, I kept getting worse. And then, finally, the pieces sort of started coming together, and then I found a therapist who specialized in sex addiction. And that's when I got into what I would call my serious recovery.

MS. ERBE: Do you think women or men are more prone to be addicted to sex?

MS. SILVERMAN: The statistics are saying that men are, but you know probably about between 6 and 10 percent of the population does have a sex addiction. And I actually think those numbers are low, because, you know, look at me, all those years that I was misdiagnosed. If I was misdiagnosed, there are a lot of other women who are being misdiagnosed. And then, plus, there's so much shame, particularly for women, about sex addiction, that a lot of women wouldn't admit it anyway. And that's one reason why I wrote my memoirs, because there really is so much shame around this. And I think that that's why we need to be talking about to try and lessen some of the shame.

MS. ERBE: And, do you think -- you say it was misdiagnosed in you. Do you think it's misdiagnosed often, and how to attack that problem?

MS. SILVERMAN: Well, by talking about sex addiction more, I mean, getting it more out there, you know, in the media, in the news, you know, writing our books. It really has to do with talking about it, educating the public that this really is a crisis. You know, we live in a society that uses sex to sell everything, cars, music, movies, children's clothing, you know, love, that's the -- all the ads and everything, just we really are a nation that does use sex to sell everything, and I think it is a bigger problem than alcoholism.

MS. ERBE: So, assuming she's right, and I don't think there's anybody who is going to disagree that the media are just so -- movies, posters, ads, you name it, so rife with over-sex, if you will. How do we get a handle on that? The bully-pulpit?

MS. WOOD: I mean we've got to have some cultural change here. I mean, she's absolutely right, molestation of children, that's horrific, which was her situation. But she's right, even if that's not happening, you know, your six-year-old can't get out the door these days or turn on TV without just being bombarded by sex. It's on the side of a bus. It's in a magazine. It's in the TV commercials. It is everywhere. It's how we sell everything. And so it's not a matter of even just being molested. We tell all the time in images and movies that sex is love. We do equate the two. And I don't think we should be surprised that a lot of young people are confused and that, frankly, even people in their 20s, and 30s and 40s and on up are confused.

She didn't talk about this, pornography is a huge, huge problem, a booming industry. And it's mostly men, but it's also women.

MS. ERBE: One that's been attacked, particularly by conservative politicians, over the last 20-30 years.

MS. WOOD: Trying to crack down.

MS. ERBE: With no success, it's gotten worse.

MS. WOOD: But we've seen -- I mean, the Justice Department under Ashcroft,

I mean this is one thing I think he should be given great credit for, he is beginning to really crack down on some of the pornography rings. But, look, it's on the Internet, and that's hard to get a handle on.

MS. ERBE: But even if you arrest a million people for it, there are going to be a million more. It's the only thing on the Internet that makes money, we should say. I think e-Bay and pornography are the two things.

DELEGATE NORTON: Bonnie, look, it's interesting and it's important that you had a woman talk about this, very unusual. We've always heard about the nymphomaniac. I don't know if there's even a name for a man who has a sex addiction. Supposing --

MS. ERBE: Satyr, isn't it?

MS. NATIVIDAD: It's not used the same way.

DELEGATE NORTON: And also the notion of this as an addiction is very important. You know, we understand all kinds of addiction now. I have a sweet tooth. People wouldn't call that an addiction, but at times it really is. And it's making people understand that an unusual, intense desire for sex, and especially sex with lots of people, may be a reason to go to get help. And so talking about an addiction that nobody considered an addiction, but rather considered a sin, is very important to do.

MS. ERBE: But, you still see, do you not, in society a man who is running around scoring is a stud, a woman is a 'ho. So, do we need not to change our definitions of what's acceptable and what's not? But, you know what, I'm going to ask you to hold your response to that until we come back from credits.

That's it for this edition of To The Contrary. Next week, we'll introduce you to Frances Kissling (sp), and her mission, defrocking the Catholic Church of its massive political power.

Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time. And we want to hear from you, write to us at To The Contrary at pbs.org, or visit our PBS Online web site at pbs.org.

(End of program.)