The Pregnancy Pact

January 27, 2010 By Shawn Decker

In June of 2008, there was an article in Time magazine that set off a media frenzy. It told the story of the unusually high rate of teenage pregnancy in one particular Gloucester, MA high school. Thus last weekend, in a longer than usual made-for-TV movie gestation period of two years- the Lifetime network gave birth to *The Pregnancy Pact.*

I saw an ad on TV while Gwenn and I were on the road, traveling to speak about safer sex of all things, and I was mesmerized by the promise of bad musical cues, vacant stares into the camera and over-and-under acting. After the horrors of Haiti and my own distaste for American politics (Democrats can't even fill Ted Kennedy's seat?), who could blame me or anyone else for wanting the brain cheese?

Yes, I got some of what I wanted and expected from the brat *Pact*. Just about every commercial break faded out with one maniacal teenage stare combined with a musical swell.... and... black screen... fade out to a feminine hygiene product pitch. But there were some surprisingly effective scenes that were free of camp. For instance, when abstinence-championing mom confides to her pregnant daughter that she and her father didn't *actually* wait until marriage, as she had told her daughter up until that point. It was one simple scene that turned two caricatures- the reckless daughter and stick-up-the-ass mom- into human beings.

And that's the problem.

In a Lifetime made-for-TV movie about sexual health and decision-making as it pertains to teenagers, one that (thankfully) went overboard with the dramatics, that one scene is a work of Avatar-esque fiction in a lot of households, because it simply features a mother and daughter talking. Honestly. About sex.

According to recently released data, it appears that the 2008 Gloucester "pacters" weren't the only teenagers getting their pregnancy on: in 2006 overall teen pregnancy rates were on the rise. Incidentally, just as millions and millions of tax dollars were being spent on abstinence-only sex education. In this article, excellently written by a teenager on LA Youth's web site, the author wonders aloud if television is the only way a young person is expected to learn about sex education in our culture. It's a very good question.

Especially since mum seems to be the word from a lot of moms these days.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

(Thanks to Bob Bowers for sharing the LA Youth article by Meklit Gebre-Mariam through his twitter page.)

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