

New Buzz of Birds & Bees

By Rebecca Wyatt

Sex-education sites are sprouting up all over the Web, to the dismay of some parents.

Once upon a time, parents used to draw aside their offspring at a certain age and inform them about "the birds and the bees." But in the past year, everything-you've-always-wanted-to-know-about-sex sites have sprung up on the Internet for the "Generation Y" set. Thousands of teens now get answers to their most intimate questions from Websites such as www.gurl.com; www.sxetc.org; www.itsyoursexlife.com; www.drtdrew.com; www.goaskalice.columbia.edu; and www.teenadviceonline.com.

As the Internet fills in as teacher and parent, some wonder about the kind of education children are getting. "There is a fine line between what is harmful to minors — pornography — and the sex-education materials that get extremely graphic and explicit," says Donna Rice Hughes, author of *Kids Online*.

Take Planned Parenthood's site, www.teenwire.com, for example. "OK. Sex can be a pretty steamy subject. But if you hope to understand anything about pleasing yourself or your potential partners, you need to understand how your body works during sex," writes "Dr. Dan" before launching into descriptions of anatomy, arousal and orgasm.

Kim Jack Riley, the editor for *teenwire.com*, emphasizes that the site is factual and fills a need of teens to know more about safe sex. "We have absolutely no intention to encourage any person to do anything," says Riley, adding that the 9-month-old site includes abstinence stories.

And Jordan Friedman, the director of health education for Columbia University, says its 7-year-old *goaskalice* site provides health information to people who "were often embarrassed to talk with their doctors, parents, friends and partners." In response to

a question about bestiality, "Alice" outlines its history and advises checking the state laws "in order to make an educated decision about pursuing this type of experiment." Friedman admits some readers may not be ready for all the information contained on "Alice" but believes teens often approach their parents with questions after seeing the site.

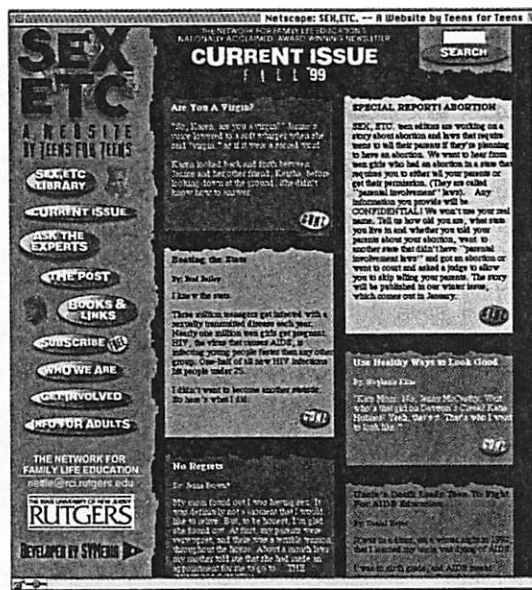
That's a backward approach, says Monique Nelson, chief operating officer for the Virginia-based Enough Is Enough organization, which protests Internet pornography. "Most parents would want to have the first option of talking to their children," she says.

Informing teens about safe sex in case they decide to become sexually

active is selling teens short, says Tim Wildmon, vice president for the American Family Association in Tupelo, Miss. "It's time we tell them they're not animals," he says. "They can control themselves." Wildmon, citing sexually transmitted diseases and teen-pregnancy rates, fears that explicit sexual advice and information can be dangerous absent any moral considerations. "They make no judgment," he says about the editors of the sex-ed sites. "There needs to be a judgment."

Most Websites do emphasize individual choice and decision-making based on "what feels comfortable." On *goaskalice*, a self-identified "very conservative Christian" asks "Alice" if he should have sex before marriage, regardless of his belief that it is wrong, to learn how to satisfy his wife or girlfriend.

"The choices that make you feel most comfortable are the ones that are right for you," was the response. "Of course, sometimes you can't know what's best for you until you sample your options. Sure, what you learn from past sexual experiences can add to the pleasure of future ones; but for many, the energy and excitement of the 'first time' is unrivaled by all the sex that follows." Friedman says providing many options and "nonjudgmental" information gives young people tools to make better decisions.



What Do Women Want ... Cyberly Speaking?

The motto at www.Women.com is "the smart way to get things done." Indeed, the Website is a huge, practical compendium of untrammled femininity, devoted to mainstream concerns such as pregnancy, weddings, health, gardening and entertainment. The site includes more than 90,000 pages of material.

There are 20 special-interest "channels" for cyber-surfing women, plus chat rooms and shopping. The site lists its Top 100 Women of the Millennium, along with an interview with Vice President Al Gore's daughter, Karenna Gore Schiff, and guides to manicures, pet cats and checking accounts.

Nevertheless, in the name of increased readership, *Women.com* expanded its site recently with a new feature called "Undress Your Date," a product developed by *Cosmopolitan* magazine. By pointing and clicking, women choose between a cowboy, artist, fireman, frat boy or business man, then remove

his clothing piece by piece, tossing them on a nearby cyber-bed. Once his underwear is clicked away, the "virtual hunk" is instantaneously shielded by a coy icon — a stop sign in the case of the fireman, who has proven the most popular of the quintet in an online poll, which drew about 13,000 respondents.

Women.com is comfortable with its decision to use its new feature and does not see it as lowering the proverbial bar, says Anna Zornosa, spokeswoman for the Website. "If we had taken the 'date' down all the way past his shorts, then that would have been different," explains Zornosa. "This is not pornography. This is a good thing for our visitors."

Traffic at the site has jumped by 300 percent, at any rate. "We cover a variety of subjects, and we try to give depth to the many issues women are concerned about," says Zornosa. "Information on relationships and intimacy is very important to a lot of them."

By Jennifer Harper