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A GRINDING HALT TO DIRTY DANCING

It's time for proms and time for schools to set limits on what's appropriate on the dance floor

Renée Schafer Horton

This month, hundreds of Tucson teenagers will rent tuxedos, buy sparkling dresses, smile for parents' cameras and drive to ballrooms for the Junior-Senior Prom.

After slipping out of their jackets and high heels, they'll heed the call of DJs and engage in public displays of simulated sex.

Oops, I mean they'll dance.

"Grinding" is this generation's jitterbug. Or at least that's what Ironwood Ridge High School's Student Government representatives said when asked about a contract students must sign before attending Prom.

"I think grinding is appropriate if you're not lying on the floor," said Jessica Finch, 18, a member of the team that came up with the contract after complaints of inappropriate dancing at Winter Formal. "I don't know why people make a big deal of it."

For the uninitiated, grinding is defined as "a dance movement in which the hips are rotated in a suggestive or erotic manner." The partnering position is back to front, which appears at once to be less intimate and more sexual.

In its milder forms, the girl stands with her back to a boy's front, boy's hands on girl's hips, both rotating their pelvises, close but not touching.

Next is a similar position, except the two are joined at the pelvis, grinding together.

And finally, there is the *crème de la crème* of this genre, where the girl bends forward at a 90-degree angle, backside toward her partner. She "backs it up," and the boy, standing, pushes forward. Think dogs mating and you've got the visual.

"I personally have no problem with it," said J.T. Weinberg, 17, the IRHS student treasurer. "We don't mean for it to be extremely sexual. It's no different than swing dancing."

Hmmm. I swing dance, and I've taken a hip-hop class. Some complicated, athletic moves in hip-hop compare with advanced swing. Grinding, however, is not in this league. It's more about sleaze than skill.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that teens, exposed - pardon the pun - to 24-7 cultural raunchiness, emulate sex as dance at formal affairs. But surprised or no, teachers and administrators are tired of it.

"We didn't want to completely limit the students, but there had to be compromise," said Samantha Youmans, IRHS student government sponsor. "With the contract, we basically said, 'We're willing to tolerate this if you cut back on this.'"

They'll tolerate vertical grinding, Youmans said, but not "lap dancing, which we've had to stop a number of times, and we don't want to see some girl bending over with her butt in some guy's crotch. That's where we draw the line."

Thank God someone does.

Actually, the IRHS teens are getting off easy.

Michael Beck, activities director for Cholla Magnet High, said dances are patrolled to eliminate grinding.

Ditto at Desert View High, where even mild grinding is verboten, said Assistant Principal Carmela Levy.

"I asked the seniors if they wanted to see teachers dancing that way, and they all groaned," Levy said. "I said, 'You groaned because you recognize it as inappropriate.'

"They can have fun without displaying that kind of dancing. It simply isn't tolerated."

People claim kids will be kids, but I'm with Beck and Levy: Teens need to set limits in a culture continually seeking to lower the bar of sensibility.

They need to know that public life has certain boundaries. And having this dance come to a grinding halt is the perfect first move.

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