

The Sex Educator

17

SPRING | 2011

A MAGAZINE FOR EDUCATORS
WHO CONDUCT SEX EDUCATION ACTIVITIES
WITH HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

Produced by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
du Québec, Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel Jermes.

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SEXUAL FANTASIES DURING ADOLESCENCE...

BY SOPHIE PILON

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...TOWARD AN EDUCATION THAT HARMONIZES WHAT IS IMAGINARY AND WHAT IS REAL

INTRODUCTION

Many people have strong emotional reactions when they hear the word **fantasy**, and for good reason! Not only does this word refer to a more intimate sphere of life, but many media use the concept to seduce consumers by linking it with sensational, frivolous and sometimes even wild sexuality. As a result, it can seem difficult, or even untimely for professionals who work with young people to tackle a topic as sensitive as this one because they may feel like they are treading on dangerous ground. This issue of *The SexEducator* sets out to show the importance and relevance of discussing this subject with adolescents aged 15 to 17, and to suggest concrete interventions to help you meet this goal. We invite you to take up this challenge because sexual fantasies are much more than simple sexual or obscene thoughts: they are the foundations of our sexuality and forge our identities (Crépault and Lévesque, 2001).



WHY TALK ABOUT SEXUAL FANTASIES DURING ADOLESCENCE?

Adolescence is a period during which fantasmatic activity is stirring and developing (Crépault, 1981). As can be seen in some of what young people say, they can be fascinated and intrigued by this world that is forming, or they can be concerned or even disconcerted by it. They try to understand the phenomena and what is happening inside themselves against a background of curiosity mixed with a desire to be "normal." If there is no opportunity to explore the notion of **sexual fantasy** in a formal setting, young people turn to what they see or hear in the media and around them. Information that can seem interesting, playful and exciting to them, however, can turn out to be ill adapted to their experiences, and full of stereotypes and artificiality.

Some messages suggest standards that can be erroneously perceived as ideals to be achieved. For instance, popular belief says that a person should desire all the time and, therefore, focus excessively on his or her fantasmatic universe. Other messages encourage young—and not so young—people to reveal or live out their sexual fantasies, even though it isn't always appropriate to do so. When young people are bombarded with messages that are not necessarily representative of their fantasies and that tend to confuse imagination and reality, their points of reference are shaken up and they can experience a range of emotions that they sometimes have trouble understanding and managing. Moreover, some researchers worry about the effect that electronic media may have on development of young people's brains and fantasies (Doidge, 2008). When all is said and done, isn't it right to want to cultivate adolescents' knowledge, critical thinking and judgement by dealing with the issue of sexual fantasy?

"I'm a girl and I like boys. But I've been feeling anxious for months now because sometimes I have thoughts about girls that excite me. I've always been straight so I'd really like to stop feeling anxious."

13-year-old girl (Tel-jeunes, 2009)

"Up to what point can we live out our fantasies? Are there limits? How far can we go?"

Anonymous (Élysa, 2009)

"I have lots of sexual thoughts about girls I know, but when I feel like realizing them, I don't have a partner with whom I can fulfil them. So I compensate by masturbating, but it doesn't change anything. I need an answer, quick!"

14-year-old boy (Tel-jeunes, 2009)

"Is there a big difference between boys' sexual fantasies and girls'?"

Anonymous (Élysa, 2009)



EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE¹

The current issue of *The SexEducator* aims to **provide a more accurate and human perspective of sexual fantasy during ADOLESCENCE**. It focuses primarily on questions and concerns that young people are likely to have concerning this topic, and presents information that is reassuring, detailed and, most importantly, devoid of sensationalism. This educational process is also designed to **lay the groundwork to ensure that young people can have healthy and fulfilling sex lives, in real life and in their fantasies**. The following pages will shed light on the contribution and negative effects of the world of fantasies, and discuss the risks and benefits related to revealing or living out sexual fantasies. It is important to remember that fantasies are part of adolescents' psychosexual development and contribute to their sexual awakening. Knowing about the nature of and reasons for fantasies will certainly help adolescents become adults with fulfilling sex lives, which is good for their overall well-being.

FANTASY ... A WORD THAT GETS THROWN AROUND A LOT!

More often than not, young people are exposed to information that trivializes and oversimplifies fantasy. The concept is likened to a few stereotypical and sometimes unbridled sexual scenarios the media strive to rate according to their popularity, to divulge and comment on discussion forums, and to present in artificial and stilted reality shows or pornographic films. Inevitably, young people who are trying to understand their own world of fantasies will refer, at least in part, to this abundance of sensational and superficial information. Therefore, it is important to set the record straight regarding the notion of **fantasy** and to reframe the idea of **sexual fantasy**.

BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS A FANTASY?

Fantasy comes from the Greek word **phantasma**, which refers to notions of **phantom**, spectre or **ghost**, and **vision** (Hirsch, 2004). If we trace back its meaning in Latin, we note that fantasy is also associated with image, representation and imagination (Hirsch, 2004), and therefore with something that is unreal, fictional and illusory (Crépault, 1981). In the general sense of the term, fantasies are imaginative thoughts or imaginary scenarios that express desires or fears concerning someone (Crépault, 1981). They are similar to cravings or longings, wishes or musings of all sorts, but also often evoke narcissistic desires, that is, self-admiration, aggressiveness or hunger (Mimoun, 2007a). For example, a fantasy can be a desire to be rich and famous, to humiliate someone who has hurt us deeply, or to swim in a pool of sweets. Other than these prototypical examples, fantasies correspond to an infinite range of desires. Their contents are unlimited as long as they are influenced by each individual's personal history and creativity. In any event, fantasies are often associated with sexuality and this is the aspect we will be exploring in this issue of *The SexEducator*.

WHAT IS A “SEXUAL” FANTASY?

A sexual fantasy is an image or imagined scenario which is likely to arouse sexually (Lessard, 1997). It can be a type of short, unspecific and disorganized reverie, (Crépault, 1981) or it can be more structured and made clearer by situations, contexts, actions, characters and roles (Loonis, 1999).

While this type of fantasy can involve genital sexual practices such as masturbation, oral sex and penetration, it corresponds more closely to thoughts, feelings, looks, words, touch or gestures that someone imagines because they tend to arouse him or her. Sexual fantasies are not limited to a desire to “have sex”; they can also include exciting romantic situations in which tenderness, affection, kissing and caressing play roles (Hock, 2007). Indeed, adolescents are likely to fantasize about love and sensuality since genital sexual relations are often unfamiliar to them and can be a source of anxiety (Winaver and Bortern-Krivine, 2004).

Some individuals are excited by non-sexual elements such as settings, places, clothing or circumstances (Crépault, 1981). Others get aroused by thinking of things they prevent themselves from doing or that go against conventions and good manners (Loonis, 1999). Fantasies can even include ludicrous, bizarre or eccentric elements that surprise even the person having the fantasy. But the fact remains that fantasies are not bad in and of themselves, and there is no need to repress them since they are “made to measure” to meet the specific needs of each individual (Lessard, 1997). Of course, some fantasies are more widespread than others, but there is room for all tastes. “Fantasies are like films. There are all genres, and some are more popular than others” [*Translation*] (Lessard, 1997, p. 83).

Moreover, sexual fantasies can bear no resemblance to reality or, conversely, be close to real life and rooted in a person's daily life (Pasini and Crépault, 1987; Leitenberg and Henning, 1995). On one hand, they can reflect situations that a young person has had or could experience. On the other hand, they can be closer to unrealistic wishes or unachievable scenarios. We should add that fantasies do not usually follow a logical sequence or stick to space-and-time rules of reality. For example, a person can focus on a specific element of the imagined scenario and replay it mentally, focus on two unrelated actions successively, interweave several contexts into a single fantasy, or repeat and change parts of the scenario to make the fantasy even more exciting (Loonis, 1999).

“Fantasies are like films. There are all genres, and some are more popular than others”

1. Based on the document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* published by Gouvernement du Québec (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2003).

TABLE 1
A FEW ILLUSTRATED CHARACTERISTICS OF "SEXUAL" FANTASIES

Characteristics of fantasies	Illustrations of fantasies
A mental representation ranging from a brief impression to a structured scenario	<p>Brief impression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being desired by someone <p>Structured scenario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having sexual contacts with a partner at the back of a movie theatre without other spectators noticing
Contents linked to sexuality	<p>Genital expression of sexuality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masturbating in front of someone <p>Non-genital expression of sexuality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kissing someone of the same sex • Arousal caused by a sexy piece of clothing
Themes that are arousing	<p>Usual during adolescence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having someone touch the genitals <p>Forbidden:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing off your naked body to several people <p>Eccentric:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being seduced by a cowboy (or cowgirl)
Representations ranging from plausible to unreal	<p>Plausible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting massaged by your partner <p>Unreal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having sexual relations with a popular actor

SEXUAL DREAMS

Sexual dreams are mental images or imaginary scenarios with sexual connotations that occur during sleep (Hirsch, 2004; Freud, 1967). This type of dream is very similar to sexual fantasy, except that dreams occur in a distinct state of consciousness and, more often than not, the person has no control over these imaginary nighttime productions (Mimoun, 2007b). In some circumstances, sensations of pleasure accompany these sexual dreams and boys can get erections or even ejaculate while sleeping. Girls can also be excited by their dreams and, when they awake, realize that their bodies have produced more vaginal secretions than usual (SOGC, 2006). Although fantasies and dreams can express similar sexual desires, the latter do not always coincide with what arouses a person in his or her waking life (Lévesque, 2008). In such situations, a person can feel some discomfort, for reasons that may not be apparent. Still, it is important to know that dreams should not be taken literally. If the meaning we assign to them—and to fantasies—can sometimes seem straightforward and help us know ourselves better, it can also be much less obvious and lead to erroneous interpretation (Mimoun, 2007b).



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL FANTASY?

EXPLORE SEXUAL AND ROMANTIC DESIRES TO KNOW OURSELVES BETTER

Sexual fantasies are a sure way to explore our sexual and romantic desires, and to get to know ourselves better. They help us figure out what we like, what excites us and how we would like to act during a sexual or romantic encounter (SOGC, 2006). They help us *construct our personal identities* (Crépault, 1981; Crépault and Lévy, 2005); they also affect the way we personally define ourselves and our perceptions as men or women, and as individuals in our own right.

SATISFY PERSONAL NEEDS WITHOUT THE CONSTRAINTS OF REALITY

Sexual fantasies allow us both to **feel pleasure**, since they can sometimes provoke sexual arousal, which is usually enjoyable, and to compensate for certain situations we do not really want to experience or sexual encounters we cannot have (Crépault, 1981; Lévesque (2008). They give us an opportunity to recognize the benefits of some experiences without having to deal with the real consequences. Thus, fantasies create an **illusion of freedom** (Pasini and Crépault, 1987; Lévesque, 2008) insofar as they allow us to escape reality for a moment and have completely crazy experiences. Sexual fantasies also enable us to **satisfy psychological and affective needs** that are not met in daily life (Crépault, 1981; Lévesque, 2008; Hirsch, 2004) such as wanting to feel seductive, desired, loved, irreplaceable, or some other feeling. People sometimes turn to fantasy to **deal with their fears** or invent scenarios that allow them to **develop confidence in their sexual and romantic abilities** (Lessard, 1997).

ENHANCE SEXUALITY EXPERIENCED IN REAL LIFE

Sexual fantasies can **motivate an individual to take action** (Crépault, 1981; Lévesque, 2008) and prompt the person to caress, masturbate or make love to himself or herself (Lessard, 1997). Using sexual fantasy while having sexual relations can also intensify arousal as well as make it easier to reach orgasm (Lévesque, 2008; Crépault, 2004; Eisenman, 1982). Fantasies help us, for instance, anticipate or plan a romantic or sexual experience that we would like to have or suggest to our partner (Lévesque, 2008). Finally, they can **serve as inspiration in art production and creation** (Mimoun, 2007a). Art projects can help channel, deal with or divert sexual desires in a constructive manner.

TABLE 2
PURPOSES OF SEXUAL FANTASY

Explore sexual and romantic desires to know ourselves better
Consolidate one's personal and sexual identity
Satisfy personal needs without the constraints of reality
Feel sexual pleasure: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compensate for sexual situations that we cannot or do not want to experience in real life• Have an impression of freedom• Satisfy psychological and affective needs that are not fulfilled in the real world• Fight against fears and develop confidence in one's sexual and romantic abilities
Enhance sexuality experienced in real life
Motivate to take action: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inspire creative, artistic projects

Sources: SOGC, 2006; Crépault, 1981; Crépault and Lévy, 2005; Lévesque, 2008; Pasini and Crépault, 1987; Hirsch, 2004; Lessard, 1997; Crépault, 2004; Eisenman, 1982; Mimoun, 2007a.

EIGHT FACTS AND FICTION ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL FANTASIES

Once you have defined sexual fantasy, myths that are often associated with such fantasies can be discussed.

It is an opportunity to deal with concerns or questions that adolescents have and to give an accurate and human perspective of sexual fantasy during adolescence.

1. HAVING SEXUAL FANTASIES EQUALS SEXUAL DISSATISFACTION.

FICTION.

Sexual fantasy is perceived as natural since it is a very common, even universal form of human experience (Ellis and Symons, 1990; Daleiden et al., 1998). **Whatever scenarios are imagined, the existence of sexual fantasies is not usually due to a lack of sex and does not indicate mental imbalance or obsession with sexuality** (Boubli and Elbez, 2010). Quite the contrary! Having sexual fantasies is a sign of sexual health. Indeed, the ability to create fantasies is linked to the ability to feel desire for someone (Crépault and Lévy, 2005; Lévesque, 2008). In most cases, having sexual fantasies is absolutely healthy, whether they come up spontaneously or are provoked intentionally (Lévesque, 2008).

Conjuring up sexual fantasies can sometimes become problematic, as in the case of obsessive reveries that prevent a person from concentrating or going about their daily business (Hock, 2007). Or it can be worrisome if fantasies interfere with relationships we are trying to form in real life and cause us to feel dissatisfied, for example. Moreover, fantasies can raise concerns when they recur so often that a person finds it difficult not to act on them (SOGC, 2006), regardless of the consequences. When fantasies intrude on a person's life to the point where there are negative repercussions, it can be helpful for this person to talk about it with someone he or she trusts.

2. WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT AN ADOLESCENT WHO DOES NOT HAVE SEXUAL FANTASIES.

FICTION.

Fantasy development is associated with adolescence (Crépault, 2004; Leitenberg and Henning, 1995; Mimoun, 2007a), notably in light of the refinement of abstract and symbolic thinking that occurs between 12 and 16 years of age, and the rise in hormone levels and sexual desire typical at puberty (Bee and Boyd, 2002). The maturation process contributes to construction of imagination and induces adolescents to think about and imagine sexuality. Although on average, individuals report having their first sexual fantasies between the ages of 11 and 13 (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995), **many young people nonetheless explore their erotic imagination much later**. Fantasmatic activity evolves at each person's pace, depending on time of puberty, education, personal history, values and beliefs. This is why the occurrence of fantasies varies considerably from person to person (Crépault, 1981) and why it is impossible to determine a frequency that is normal and desirable.

Moreover, although fantasmatic activity is particularly intense among adolescents (Mimoun, 2007a), the contents of first fantasies are usually very basic and not well developed (Crépault, 1981). Since fantasies usually precede first sexual relations, teens are likely to have fantasies that are vaguer and more ambiguous, because they are unable to turn to specific events they have experienced (Crépault, 1981). Consequently, adolescents should not compare their fantasies to those conveyed in the media that tend to depict the sexuality of adults, and even then ... **We should note that some people may not have fantasies, perhaps because they prefer to chase these thoughts away or want to rein in their sexual impulses** (Lévesque, 2008).

“Fantasmatic activity evolves at each person's pace, depending on time of puberty, education, personal history, values and beliefs.”

3. BOYS FANTASIZE MORE THAN GIRLS DO.

REALITY.

Generally speaking, girls have sexual fantasies at least once in a while, just like boys do (Rokach, 1990). However, boys seem to start having sexual fantasies earlier than girls do, that is, age 11 for boys and age 12 for girls (Gold and Gold, 1991). Moreover, it seems that **boys fantasize more often than girls** (Giambra, 1974). These distinctions can be explained in part by biological differences such as boys' secretion of testosterone (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995). Social theories explain that girls are socialized differently than boys and that historically, cultural messages have not been favourable to girls expressing their

sexuality (Robinson and Calhoun, 1982). This hypothesis suggests that girls have more difficulty admitting that they have fantasies or indulge in these kinds of "unacceptable" fantasies. It remains to be seen if evolving gender roles and culture in Québec will lead to changes in the frequency and acknowledgement of sexual fantasy in the future.

4. CULTURAL PRODUCTS, INCLUDING SEXUALLY CHARGED VIDEOS AND FILMS, INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S FANTASMATIC UNIVERSE.

REALITY.

We have seen that adolescence is a period during which sexual imagination is constructed (Crépault, 1981). In particular, fantasies form based on a teen's experiences and the pleasurable feelings they aroused in him or her. More specifically, and according to psychiatrist Norman Doidge (2008), **explicit images of sexuality that incite sexual pleasure** (by the release of dopamine) **modify the brain in a way that reinforces the connection between visual stimulus and sexual arousal**. Doidge also posits that **these sensational sexual images get mentally "downloaded", causing fantasies to surface, in some people**. Young consumers of pornography who have no sexual experience then perceive boys and girls around them as boring, according to Doidge. Even today's films and videos that have no sexual content link together spectacular sounds and images that make a scenario more captivating but also more removed from reality (Christakis, in Dubé, 2010). Teens who compare their sex and love lives with what is presented in the media risk perceiving a gap and questioning themselves. They might begin to feel afraid if sexual imagery has provoked negative emotions in them (Hayez, 2002) or, conversely, entertain unrealistic expectations that will never be met (for example, a girl who thinks she can experience a passionate, Hollywood-like love story).

Moreover, pornographic images can sometimes cause an imbalance in dopamine production, which stimulates these teens to consume even more of these images (Doidge, 2008). Hayez (2002) believes that this type of dependence affects only a minority of youth, and that pornography is used as a way for the mind to attain arousal or orgasm. We can ask ourselves, as does Hayez, if images that fall into your lap (p. 233) are likely to harm young people's creativity if the latter are tempted to use prefabricated images rather than conjuring up more personal fantasies.



"Explicit images of sexuality that arouse sexual pleasure modify the brain in a way that reinforces the connection between visual stimulus and sexual arousal. These sensational sexual images get mentally "downloaded", causing fantasies to surface, in some people."

5. SEXUAL FANTASIES ARE ALWAYS EXCITING AND PLEASANT.

FICTION.

Contrary to what we may believe, **sexual fantasies that are exciting and pleasant to imagine are not the only ones we can have; some are unpleasant and can even cause feelings of anxiety or disgust** (Crépault, 1981; Lévesque, 2008). For instance, intrusive and extremely disagreeable fantasies can haunt a person for a while after he or she has been shocked by a sexual situation—like coming upon someone around them who is naked or seeing a provocative pornographic image. It is normal that teens be troubled or perturbed by the contents of certain imagined scenarios, whether because of the situations, people, behaviours or settings they represent. Such fantasies can cause

adolescents to feel embarrassed or very uncomfortable, regardless of whether they were somewhat aroused or repulsed (Kahr, 2008). This phenomenon raises an interesting question: Do sexual fantasies correspond to things that we really want to do? An analysis of the following statement will offer some answers.

6. HAVING A SEXUAL FANTASY MEANS LIVING IT OUT.

FICTION.

While few studies have assessed desires to make sexual fantasies come true (Davidoff, 2005), some research indicates that **most fantasies remain in the sphere of the imagination and do not lead to real-life sexual behaviours** (Eisenman, 1982; Mimoun, 2007a). For a number of reasons, most individuals do not give concrete expression to their fantasies.

According to Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1995), two-thirds of women and a third of men have sexual fantasies that cannot be lived out because of they are illusionary or unrealistic. **Sexual fantasies are often ways of escaping—from social or moral pressures—rather than reflections of real-life experiences we would like to have.** In addition, people often hesitate when it comes to making certain fantasies come true, or they are categorically opposed to doing so because they believe that they will be disappointed or won't experience the pleasure expected (Crépault, 1981), or that acting them out will have negative repercussions on themselves or on other people. For example, a young girl might be attracted to a boy she crosses in the metro without wanting to conquer him or try to seduce him. Similarly, a boy will decline or postpone responding to sexual advances he had hoped for because fears that he may not measure up will prevent him from appreciating the experience. Of course, some fantasies can become reality and contribute to a person's sexual satisfaction. In the section on calculating the risks and benefits before living out a fantasy (see p. 16), we will look at how we can introduce young people to the conditions in which it may be appropriate to live out one of their fantasies.



“Sexual fantasies are often ways of escaping—from social or moral pressures—rather than reflections of real-life experiences we would like to have”

At one end of the spectrum, there are fantasies with violent or criminal content—for example, exposing one's naked body to someone without his or her consent or forcing someone to have sex—which most people avoid living out at all costs. For the person who imagines it, this type of fantasy constitutes, in principle, an outlet that does not threaten the persons that are its object (Crépault, 2004); but performing such actions is criminal, unless they are part of a scenario that is accepted by all participants (Lessard, 1997).

7.

A PERSON WHO FANTASIZES ABOUT SOMEONE OF THE SAME SEX IS NECESSARILY HOMOSEXUAL.

FICTION.

Young people often believe that fantasizing about a person of the same sex means they are homosexual (Mandaras, 1991). Of course, this is not true. **Heterosexuals can have homosexual fantasies without actually having to question their sexual orientation** (Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 1995). Homosexuals also sometimes insert people of the opposite sex into their fantasies (Kahr, 2008). In other words, **it is natural to have sexual fantasies that do not necessarily correspond to one's sexual orientation**. Moreover, it is normal for people to have fantasies that are strictly homosexual or heterosexual.

Indeed, having homosexual fantasies can raise issues that can be beneficial and bring up questions that can be resolved in a variety of ways. If such fantasies allow discovery and acceptance one's sexual orientation because they reflect the person himself or herself, they can also lead to better self-understanding.

“[...] it is natural to have sexual fantasies that do not necessarily correspond to one's sexual orientation.”

8.

REVEALING SEXUAL FANTASIES CAN CARRY SOME RISKS.

REALITY.

Sexual fantasies are among the topics most likely to be discussed among adolescents, whether these teens are attempting to satisfy their curiosity, tone down their concerns or access sexual pleasure (Hayez, 2002). Revealing one's fantasies generally has the effect of increasing intimacy and complicity between the individuals involved (Hock, 2007; Pasini, 2003). However, disclosing such information involves certain risks. Here are a few.

Fantasies reveal a very intimate aspect of someone that is usually kept hidden from others and safeguarded against people's social judgement (Crépault, 2004; Leitenberg and Henning, 1995). **Once disclosed, personal desires are subject to criticism and likely to be passed on to other people. To avoid being so vulnerable, people often prefer to keep their sexual fantasies to themselves or talk superficially about parts of a fantasy** (Kahr, 2008; Mimoun, 2007a). Especially when someone is in a romantic relationship, **telling one's secrets to a partner can lead to misunderstandings or be poorly received**, particularly if the fantasies do not include this partner, are against his or her values, or are very different from his or her own (Mimoun, 2007a). In this case it is important to assess the degree to which the revelations we wish to make will influence a relationship positively. In short, there is no obligation to reveal a fantasy; moreover, to do so successfully requires mutual trust and involves respecting the other person's sensibilities (Hock, 2007). Table 3 presents examples of questions that can help assess the pros and cons of revealing a fantasy.



TABLE 3
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE
REVEALING A FANTASY

- Do I feel perfectly at ease with the idea of revealing one of my fantasies?
- How much do I really want to reveal it?
- Will it feel good to reveal this fantasy?
- How much do I trust the person with whom I want to share it?
- How intimate and close is our relationship, and do I want to make it even more so?
- How will this person react to my secrets?
- What will the effects of my secrets be on the relationship I have with this person?
- Could my revelations eventually harm me?
- Is it possible that my secrets will be repeated to other people? If yes, how would I react? Am I ready to take that risk?
- How will I feel the next time I see the person to whom I reveal my fantasies?

TOWARD AN EDUCATION THAT HARMONIZES WHAT IS IMAGINARY AND WHAT IS REAL

HAVING FANTASIES... FINE, BUT HOW FAR CAN WE GO?

Having sexual fantasies is a healthy and sure way of exploring one's sexuality since fantasies help satisfy desires with no strings attached. It is important to know that no fantasy is bad in and of itself, and that it is up to each person to determine which fantasies are compatible with one's desires, from the most trivial to the most significant ones, the most plausible to the most fantastic. Table 4 describes how fantasies contribute to sexual satisfaction.

TABLE 4
PURPOSES OF SEXUAL FANTASY

- No one can see or judge your sexual fantasy, or be the target of social sanction if you keep it to yourself.
- Sexual fantasy can lead to a state of arousal in the absence of a partner or of stimulation by another person.
- It intensifies the level of arousal during masturbation or any other sexual activity.
- It more often than not guarantees that the sexual pleasure sought will be attained.
- It enables you to experience situations that you do not want or cannot give concrete expression to.
- It allows you to experience situations that you are not prepared to deal with in real life.
- It allows you to find out about your sexual preferences and desires.
- It helps develop self-esteem and confidence in your sexual and romantic skills.
- It allows you to anticipate or plan sexual encounters.

Sources: Crépault, 2004; Davidoff, 2005; Leitenberg and Henning, 1995; Crépault, 1981; Mimoun, 2007a; SOGC, 2006; Lessard, 1997.

All teens should learn that it is imperative to control rather than be controlled by pleasure (Pasini, 2003, p. 235). Although it is well known that sexual fantasy contributes positively to our lives, sexual imagination should not be focused upon excessively. In other words, while it may be beneficial to escape from reality from time to time, using fantasy to persistently escape reality and daily life can become unhealthy. Teens for whom fantasies cause significant discomfort or have negative effects such as those described in Table 5, should talk to someone they trust—a friend, doctor, nurse, psychologist or sexologist, for instance—who will keep the conversation confidential.

“Although it is well known that sexual fantasy contributes positively to our lives, sexual imagination should not be focused upon excessively. In other words, while it may be beneficial to escape from reality from time to time, using fantasy to persistently escape reality and daily life can become unhealthy.”

TABLE 5
THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL FANTASY

- Sexual fantasy can provoke unpleasant feelings.
- It can inhibit sexual arousal.
- It can interfere with daily life if obsession develops.
- It can cause a person to have difficulty developing real relationships or to be unsatisfied with a real relationship that he or she cannot control, unlike fantasies.

Sources: Lévesque, 2008; Hock, 2007; Doidge, 2008; SOGC, 2006.

REVEALING OR LIVING OUT A FANTASY... UH, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Revealing a sexual fantasy can have certain benefits. But it can also have negative consequences, as we saw in the section on Facts and Fiction Associated with Sexual Fantasies. Before revealing a fantasy to someone, is it really desirable to share such intimate thoughts with him or her? Table 3 (see p. 9) listed a few examples of questions to ask beforehand. As for living out a fantasy, remember that it is not healthy to want to do it at any cost. Although the media sometimes encourages instant gratification (Tisseron, cited in Dubé, 2010), living out a fantasy does not necessarily lead to personal growth and can even have the opposite effect. Sexual situations that are conjured up have real-life implications that are not always considered when imagined. All in all, the idea to communicate to young people is that they should not mistake their desires for reality (Cré-pault, 1981) since something that can provoke pleasure in the imagination will not necessarily have the same effect in real life, insofar as reality cannot be controlled like sexual fantasies can.

CALCULATING THE RISKS AND BENEFITS BEFORE LIVING OUT A FANTASY

Living out certain fantasies contributes positively to sexual satisfaction. To increase chances that it be so, teens should assess the risks and benefits of a sexual experience that is tempting before deciding to experience it. Indeed, having sexual fantasies is not compulsory; and it requires mental stability and judgement. If we want to increase the likelihood that young people construct positive fantasies, we must talk to them about the criteria for sexual health. Table 6 lists elements that contribute to healthy and responsible sexuality, and constitute points of reference that can guide adolescents who wish to live out sexual fantasies.

“[...] something that can provoke pleasure in the imagination will not necessarily have the same effect in real life, insofar as reality cannot be controlled like sexual fantasies can.”

TABLE 6
CRITERIA FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

<p>1 Strive for overall physical, mental and social well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept or develop your sexuality to ensure well-being. <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <p>To what degree will acting out the fantasy bring me the pleasure and fulfilment I expect?</p>	<p>4 Take into account society's standards and expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of and concerned about the effects your behaviour can have on others and on society (respect others, the public sphere and public environments). <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <p>By living out this fantasy, am I disturbing or harming someone?</p>
<p>2 Make choices that correspond with your values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect your personal values, beliefs, cravings and desires <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <p>Do I feel like living out this fantasy? Am I ready to do it? Does acting out this fantasy interfere with my personal values and beliefs?</p>	<p>5 Take into account society's expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain consensual romantic and sexual relationships. Respect basic human and sexual rights (right to equality, to private life, to dignity, to physical integrity, among others). <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <p>Does the fantasy include acts that are considered violent or criminal in the real world?</p>
<p>3 Prevent or avoid risky sexual behaviours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections. Prevent unwanted pregnancy. Choose sexual behaviours that are likely to contribute to health and integrity, on physical and mental levels. <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the fantasy I want to act out involve risks for my health? 	<p>6 Develop critical thinking and judgement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of the influence of social circumstances. Distinguish what is real from what is fiction in the media and in various social messages. <p><i>Questions to ask yourself</i></p> <p>Am I feeling outside pressures or are there messages that are causing me to want to live out this fantasy? Is this fantasy really mine?</p>

Inspired by the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education* (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).

Pedagogical activities

Let us now look at various ways in which we can address the topic of sexual fantasies when working with young people aged 15 to 17. Before initiating an activity, it may be helpful to read pages 39 and 40 of the document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform**. These pages contain the “Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education” that will help you prepare for discussing a topic that everyone considers very personal. Special attention should be given to group dynamics and to respect for others.

The following table gives a few indications about how to integrate activities proposed in the Québec Education Program (ministère de l'Éducation, du

Loisir et du Sport, 2007). To obtain the best possible results, these activities should be organized in collaboration with complementary educational services staff. They are not intended only for schools; they can also be proposed by various youth organizations, such as youth clubs and youth centres.

* Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec et ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2003, available at au: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/csc/promotion/pdf/19-7048.pdf.

Possible associations with the Québec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs

GOALS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Construction of identity
- Construction of a world view
- Action-oriented empowerment

BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING

Health and Well-Being

Ensure that students develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety and sexuality

Focuses of development:

Self-awareness and awareness of own fundamental needs

Need for respect of own physical and psychological well-being, need for acceptance and growth, need for recognition and fulfilment, need for expressing emotions and self-affirmation.

Awareness of the impact of personal choices on health and well-being

Awareness of the principles of balanced sexuality, awareness of how behaviours and attitudes influence psychological and physical well-being.

Media Literacy

Enable students to exercise critical, ethical and aesthetic judgment with respect to the media and produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights.

Focus of development:

Awareness of the place and influence of the different media on daily life and in society

Reflection on the functions of media, influence of media messages on one's world-view and everyday environment.

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

Exercise critical judgement

Form an opinion, express a judgement and qualify a judgement.

Achieve one's potential

Recognize one's personal characteristics, take one's place among others, and make good use of one's personal resources.

COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Promotion and prevention services program

Give students an environment favourable to the development of healthy living habits and skills that will positively influence their health or well-being.

Staff from the school's psychological services can be used to support an activity or, after an activity, to meet with students who express the desire to talk with or confide in someone.



ACTIVITY 1

SEXUAL FANTASIES! OOH LA LA!

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define fantasy and sexual fantasy Present the effects of a limited and sensationalistic vision of fantasies Explain the functions of sexual fantasies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fantasy ... a word that gets thrown around a lot! (p. 7) But what exactly is a fantasy? (p. 7) What is a "sexual" fantasy? (p. 7-8) What is the purpose of sexual fantasy? (p. 9)

PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

1

Definition of fantasy

Present the topic "Ten Ground Rules for Sex Education," and then ask the adolescents to write their definition of fantasy on a sheet of paper (but not examples of fantasies). Collect their papers and write the answers on the board in a column named "Fantasy." Next, make two other columns, named "Fantasies, Take 2" and "Sexual Fantasies."

Note: Ask students to indicate their gender on their sheet so that answers can be compared between genders at the end of the activity.

2

Distinguishing between fantasies and sexual fantasies

Ask the adolescents to get into single-gender or mixed-gender teams of 3 or 4. Ask them to answer the following question: *If I had asked you to define **sexual fantasies**, how would your answer have been different?* Specify that a representative will write their team's answers in the other two columns on the board.

The following questions can help students structure their thoughts:

- *To what human faculty do fantasies refer?*
- *What do fantasies look like?*
- *What do fantasies contain?*
- *What purpose do fantasies serve?*

3

Short presentation

Based on the answers written on the board, point out the elements specific to sexual fantasies and those associated with fantasies in general. Complete the content using information in the sections "What are fantasies really about?" "What is a "sexual" fantasy?" and "What is the purpose of sexual fantasy?" (p. 3 to 5).

If most young people defined sexual fantasies instead of fantasies in the beginning, ask them why they were misled. Depending on the group dynamics, invite the adolescents to think about this question or answer it orally. The objective of this question is to bring up the notion of how the media present a limited, sensationalist image of fantasies, and then link this to the team work planned for the next stage.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

4

Team work

Give each team one of the following three media products:

- *Romantic films and reality shows where the goal is to form couples;*
- *Magazines for adolescents;*
- *Popular video clips.*

Adolescents must answer the following questions:

- *How does the media product represent sexual fantasies?*
- *What kind of consequences could this representation have on you?*

5

Plenary session

For each of the media products, invite the representatives to present their respective teams' answers to the questions asked. Then invite the adolescents to comment or complete their classmates' answers.

Present the functions of fantasies based on elements already mentioned by the adolescents (in stage 2) and complete the presentation using content from the section "What is the purpose of sexual fantasy" (p.9).

6

Conclusion

Invite the adolescents to summarize what they have learnt and to comment on the activity. Conclude the activity by reminding the teens that limited definitions of sexual fantasies and media representations of sexuality can harm their own sexuality because such messages can incite ideas about fantasies that are disconnected from reality and can be very disappointing.



ACTIVITY 2

FACTS AND FICTION ABOUT SEXUAL FANTASIES

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demystify the notion of <i>sexual fantasy</i>. Know how fantasies contribute to sexual development and the negative effects fantasies can have. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight facts and fiction associated with sexual fantasies (p. 10-14) Having fantasies... fine, but how far can we go? (p. 15) Revealing or living out a fantasy... uh, what does that mean? (p. 16) Calculating the risks and benefits before living out a fantasy (p. 16)

PREPARING THE ACTIVITY



Team work

Ask the adolescents to get into teams of 3 or 4 to answer the questionnaire on facts and fiction associated with the concept of *sexual fantasy*. For each question, the teens must note the arguments used to support their answers.

QUESTIONNAIRE

FACTS AND FICTION ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL FANTASIES

		(circle the correct answer)	
1	Having sexual fantasies equals sexual dissatisfaction.	Fiction	Reality
2	We should be concerned about an adolescent who does not have any sexual fantasies.	Fiction	Reality
3	Boys fantasize more than girls do.	Fiction	Reality
4	Cultural products, including sexually-charged videos and films, influence young people's fantasmatic universe.	Fiction	Reality
5	Sexual fantasies are always exciting and pleasant.	Fiction	Reality
6	Having a sexual fantasy means living it out.	Fiction	Reality
7	A person who fantasizes about someone of the same sex is necessarily homosexual.	Fiction	Reality
8	Revealing our sexual fantasies can carry some risks.	Fiction	Reality

Réponses: 1. Fiction; 2. Fiction; 3. Reality; 4. Reality; 5. Fiction; 6. Fiction; 7. Fiction; 8. Reality.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

2

Plenary session

Part One: Results

Read each statement aloud and ask the adolescents to give their answers and explain their choices. If need be, complete their answers using content from the section "Facts and fiction associated with sexual fantasies" (p. 10-14).

Part Two: Discussion

Facilitate a short discussion based on the following questions:

- *Are there any statements that surprised or shocked you?*
- *What are the advantages of having fantasies? What are the potential disadvantages?*
- *What warnings would you give someone regarding sexual fantasies?*

3

Conclusion

Conclude the activity by repeating the message that should be communicated to young people regarding sexual fantasies: it's a healthy and safe way of exploring our sexuality, but sexual imagination should not be used excessively if we want to keep in touch with reality. Specify that if fantasies have undesired effects or cause significant unease, adolescents should speak about it to a person they trust, someone who will respect their confidentiality and offer them the support they need.

At the same meeting, make a connection with the next activity.



ACTIVITY 3

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL? TO LIVE IT OUT OR NOT?



DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOAL	CONTENT
30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine, based on the scenarios, the risks and benefits linked to revealing or living out sexual fantasies using sexual health criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table 3: Questions to ask yourself before revealing a fantasy (p. 15) Table 6: Criteria for sexual health (p. 16) Calculating the risks and benefits before living out a fantasy (p. 16)

DOING THE ACTIVITY



Team work

Part One:
Analyzing the scenario

Ask the adolescents to get into single-gender or mixed-gender teams of 4 or 5, and give them one of the following four scenarios. Each team must answer the general question and the specific questions for each of the scenarios.

GENERAL QUESTION

What are the risks and benefits involved in revealing or living out the fantasy described in the scenario you have before you.

SCENARIOS

FIONA

Yesterday, Fiona was chatting on-line for the first time with Jules, who she's liked for some time now and who goes to the same school as her. One thing led to another: their on-line conversation culminated in sexually charged topics and Jules asked Fiona to reveal her greatest sexual fantasy. Fiona felt a sweet mixture of embarrassment and nervousness but, because the question bothered her, she didn't really know what to say. To impress Jules and above all draw his attention, she decided to invent a fantasy: "I would like us to touch each other in a movie theatre." In reality, Fiona never had any sexual contacts before and felt nervous at the very thought of having them. That evening, she started having regrets and fears. "What if Jules spoke to his friends about it? And what if my girlfriends, who know about my romantic experiences, found it out from him? They'd think I am lying or bluffing! They'd laugh at me, they wouldn't trust me anymore! And if Jules invites me to see a movie, what will I say to him?" Today, Fiona is in school. She is afraid of seeing Jules. She feels very small and exposed. She also has the impression that others can read her thoughts and figure out that she lied. In addition, she fears that others are making jokes about her and that Jules will think that she is easy or a tease.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to Fiona's behaviour?
- What do you think about Jules' request?
- What made Fiona invent a fantasy?
- What kind of questions should she have asked herself before creating this fantasy?
- How does the Internet facilitate revealing oneself, compared to other means of communication?

HUGO

Hugo, 17 years old, has been asking himself a lot of questions lately. Last month, he dreamt that he was having sex with another boy from his school, and he has been thinking about it ever since. He feels uneasy because he was very aroused by this dream, although he is in a relationship with a girl that he really likes kissing and caressing. He is wondering what it would be like to be with this boy, since he felt so good in his dream!

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What questions could Hugo ask himself?
- Does the fact that Hugo dreamt about having sex with a boy necessarily mean that he is homosexual? Why?
- How can Hugo's uneasiness be explained?
- Should Hugo try to live out his dream?

AMY

Recently, Amy met a boy at a friend's party. They spoke only briefly, but she thought he was very kind and charming. Ever since, she has been thinking about that evening and what could have happened. When she sees him at school, she imagines him walking right up to her and declaring his love to her. He would then take her in his arms and kiss her passionately.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to Amy's thoughts?
- What are the factors that are perhaps at the origin of this fantasy?
- How does this fantasy represent Amy's vision of love?
- What will happen if Amy keeps entertaining this fantasy?

JUSTIN

Justin, 15 years old, feels a strong desire towards his friend's older sister (Lisa, 24 years old). He often imagines himself making sexual advances to her and that arouses him a lot. However, whenever he is in Lisa's presence, Justin becomes shy and barely speaks to her. He thinks that she is much older than him and he feels uneasy at the idea of having a conversation with her.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- To what extent is Justin's fantasy achievable?
- Should Justin reveal his fantasy to Lisa? Why?
- Should Justin speak about this fantasy to his friend? Why?
- In your opinion, how pleasurable would it be for Justin if this fantasy came true?

INTEGRATING THE ACTIVITY

3

Plenary session

Ask a volunteer to read the scenario that his or her team analyzed and to present the answers given to the questions. After discussing each scenario, encourage reflection by asking further questions that all the students can answer, then summarize relevant elements raised by students and provide additional information, if needed.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

- What do you think about this situation scenario?
- How would you react if you were in such a situation?
- What are the potential benefits and negative effects of these fantasies?

4

Conclusion

Conclude by reminding the youth of the following elements. It is absolutely normal for adolescents to have or not to have fantasies; these are part of normal psychosexual development, but each person feels them and values them differently. Fantasies are personal and don't have to be shared with friends or romantic partners. Sexual fantasies are an experience of sexuality that contributes to better self-knowledge; they can result from scenarios imagined, seen on TV, or read in a novel. Finally, it is up to every young person to create their own fantasmatic universe in a way that is true to who they are or who they want to be. Everyone is allowed to dream...

2

Part Two: In-depth analysis of the same scenario

To take the adolescents' thinking a step further, present Tables 3 and 6 to them ("Questions to Ask Yourself Before Revealing a Fantasy," p. 9, and "Criteria for Sexual Health," p. 11). Ask them to discuss among themselves the elements they haven't thought about previously.

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