

The Sex Educator

11

SPRING | 2008

A MAGAZINE FOR INTERVENERS AND EDUCATORS
WHO ARE OFFERING SEX-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL AGE

A production of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec
in collaboration with the Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel-Jeunes

REASSESSING AND REFRAMING SEXUAL RELATIONS

BY ANNE-MARIE BÉRARD

TO RECEIVE *The SexEducator* FREE OF CHARGE, REGISTER AT: msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/abonnement
TO GIVE YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE MAGAZINE, GO TO: msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/evaluation

Québec 



It is no surprise that sexual relations are one of the things young people are most concerned about. For example, we can see evidence of this in the many questions and interventions we find on the Tel-jeunes Web site (www.teljeunes.com).

Using some of the adolescents' main queries as a starting point, we hope to provide tools for professionals who work with youth toward stimulating reflection and even redefining what "sexual relation" means to young people.

To get a clearer understanding of why such redefinition is necessary, read two cases based on questions about sexual relations that were posted on the Tel-jeunes Web site.

CASE Girl, age 15

"What does it mean if sometimes I don't feel like playing with my boyfriend's penis or having him play with my genitals either, but I would like it if we massaged and kissed each other, talked affectionately to each other, and other things? When this happens, I tell my boyfriend that I want to "make love" but he says that to make love, you have to use your genitals and not just stay at the foreplay stage. Am I right to say that "making love" is not the same thing as "having sex"? Am I normal to think like that? I don't think so, but I want your opinion."

CASE Boy, age 16

"What is having an "active" and "complete" sexual relation? Is it to have sex in the greatest possible number of positions? I don't know them all. I've heard that the most complete is one involving all three holes (vaginal, oral and anal sex). Is this true? It sounds like a lot of action. Please answer quickly. I don't want to look like someone who doesn't know anything."

What do you think these young people are alluding to when they ask questions about sexual relations? We see that they are clearly preoccupied with genital expression of sexuality. Should we be concerned about this? If so, why?

Our concerns stem from the fact that a view of sexual relations centred on the genitals is simplistic, in the sense that it confines sexual expression to the genitals. Such a representation of sexual relations is supported by some common terms, a few of which we have included here but which we think need to be qualified.

The SexEducator

NO. 11, SPRING 2008

THIS MAGAZINE IS PRODUCED BY:

Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec
- Direction des communications
- Direction générale de santé publique
• Richard Cloutier
- Direction générale des services sociaux
• Jacinthe Bonneau

Université du Québec à Montréal
- Anne-Marie Bérard, sexologist, B.A.,
Master's student in sexology

- Francine Duquet,
Professor, Department of Sexology

and Tel-jeunes

- Christine Turcotte, Counsellor
- Louise Blais, Director of services

Graphic design: Immaculæ conception graphique

Translation: Sylvie Gauthier

The SexEducator is also available in French under the name *Ça sexprime*.

What do you think of the magazine?

Give us your opinion about this magazine and help us improve its contents. Go to: <http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/evaluation> and select *English version* and then *Evaluation of the Magazine "The SexEducator"*.

Back issues

Back issues of the magazine are available in PDF format. Go to www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss and select *English*, then *Documentation/For educators/The SexEducator*.

Legal deposit

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2008
Library and Archives Canada, 2008
ISSN 1913-1526 (Print version)
ISSN 1913-1534 (PDF version)

Reproduction, in whole or in part, of this document is permitted on condition that the source is credited.

© Gouvernement du Québec, 2008

Subscriptions

Anyone interested in receiving *The SexEducator* free of charge can subscribe by going to msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss/abonnement and selecting *The SexEducator*

TERMS THAT SHOULD BE QUALIFIED

A “complete sexual relation”

This term defines a sexual relation on the basis of vaginal or anal penetration (Moigno, 1991). Consequently, a question arises: Is a sexual relation “incomplete” if it doesn’t involve vaginal or anal penetration? Does this give us reason to think that such an understanding of sexual relations creates pressure or causes confusion about the need to go “all the way”? Does this mean that people who do not engage in vaginal or anal penetration do not have “complete” sexual relations? It may be more appropriate to use the term “sexual penetration” and indicate that this refers to vaginal or anal penetration.

Foreplay and “precoital” sexuality

The terms “foreplay” and “precoital” infer that expressing one’s sexuality without engaging in sexual penetration (coitus/sex act) is a prelude or an introduction, and that there is a goal to reach, a culmination point: vaginal or anal penetration. Does this point of view explain the addition of the qualifier “complete” to imply vaginal or anal penetration? The case of the 15-year-old featured on page 2 illustrates this attitude.

“Active sexuality”

In the literature, the expression “active sexuality” is often associated with coital relations (Robert, 2002) and genitality (Schuster, Bell and Kanouse, 1996; Schwartz, 1999; Maillochon, 2003). Does this mean that expressing one’s sexuality without including exploration of genitals is being inactive, as is implied in the case of the 16-year-old’s questions outlined in our introduction?

EROTIC JUNK FOOD

Sexologist Jocelyne Robert (2005: 21-22) makes a parallel between junk food and sexuality centred on genitality, which she labels “erotic junk food” or “sexual fast-food”:

For years efforts have been made to educate us, to offset the problems caused by junk food, to convince us to adopt new dietary habits and motivate us to make informed choices. It is high time we started on a similar process concerning erotic nourishment before we lose the meaning of ‘savour’ [Translation].

For Robert (2005), erotic junk food is omnipresent, accessible, commercial, invasive, often free, predictable and simplistic; it provides no unexpected tastes or variety of flavours, involves no creativity, celebration, permutation or harmonisation. It is from this perspective that she describes consumption of sex and pornography as “erotic junk food”.

Therefore, sexual relations need to be redefined or reframed to avoid their being reduced exclusively to genital exploration or simply to ‘disembodied contact’, an expression that speaks volumes. To achieve this goal, we first need to examine two major concepts: **relation** and **sexuality**.

THE WORD “RELATION” MAKES UP HALF OF THE TERM “SEXUAL RELATION”

The word “relation” is central to the term “sexual relation”. Desaulniers (1997: 9) suggests that a sexual relation should be considered “*first as a relation, then as a human relation, and only last as a particular type of human relation. Indeed, identifying sexual relations only with genitality and sex is to narrowly confine them*” [Translation]. When combined with the word “sex”, Desaulniers continues, the term “relation” is often discarded: both the partner and a part of oneself as a human being are set aside.

Does this mean that sexuality is then reduced to a MEANS and people to MACHINES? This point of view is characteristic of our performance-based society where representations of sexuality are centred on action, speed, fervour, immediacy and genitality, says Desaulniers (1997: 4). She believes that everyone is affected by this performance model and *no one is immune to the problem*, not even men and women working in this field.

Various instruments of young people’s socialization such as family, school, work place, peers and media (Cloutier, 1982) are integral parts of a society that values performance in all spheres of life. Is it surprising, therefore, that adolescents worry about performance even in relation to sexuality? This concern is apparent in a number of their enquiries concerning sexual relations, to the detriment of the quality of the relation itself. In such a context is the expression “to make love”, with all the emotional commitment it entails, outdated (see the case of the 15-year-old girl presented in the scenario on page 2)?

We must also remember that young people don’t live in isolation and that as a result “*most of their concerns are not purely theoretical*”; rather, their concerns indicate that their “*questions reflect what is really going on around them, and even more importantly, their most immediate concerns.*” (MEQ-MSSS, 2003: 14).



THE EXPRESSION “SEXUAL RELATION” ALSO INCLUDES SEXUALITY

What about expressing one’s sexuality in a relation that is sexual? As Jocelyne Robert (2002) suggests, our culture privileges coitus (penis-vagina intercourse) as the expression of sexuality. One of her books, provocatively entitled *Le sexe en mal d’amour: de la révolution sexuelle à la régression érotique*, the sexologist argues that current prevailing sexual models are utilitarian and excessive, and that we are swamped by these images, films, games and sex toys (2005: 17). She maintains that adolescents who are immersed in a “genitalistic” world can end up believing that anything is possible and even acceptable (2005: 128). In an essay entitled *La sexualisation précoce des filles*, Pierrette Bouchard, Natasha Bouchard and Isabelle Boily (2006) draw attention to the fact that although adolescents are inevitably in search of identity, they receive troublesome messages about sexuality through the media, such as the importance of sexual know-how.

“Human sexuality is multidimensional” (MEQ-MSSS, 2003: 9), and considering it only from an angle of genital exploration is very simplistic. However, the focus on genital functions does not originate only from mass media. In numerous encyclopaedias and dictionaries—sources of information likely to serve as foundations for our sex education activities—sexual relations are associated with genital functions.

Similarly, for various writers, sexual relation is synonymous with intercourse which, in turn, is associated in part or in whole with:

- the **sex act** (Cohen, 1974; Moigno, 1991; Westheimer, 1994);
- **sexual practices** (Francoeur, 1995) and **behaviours** (Waynberg, 1999);
- **coitus** (Cohen, 1974; Westheimer, 1994; Francoeur, 1995; Waynberg, 1999);
- **penetration of the penis into the vagina** (Richter, 1993; Westheimer, 1994; Francoeur, 1995; Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2004); and
- **anal penetration** (Moigno, 1991; Francoeur, 1995).

HOW DO WE GET YOUNG PEOPLE TO REDEFINE “SEXUAL RELATION” IN A MORE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

- By discarding notions of genitality, sexual acts and behaviours? No!
- By considering genitality as one of various possibilities for expressing one’s sexuality? Yes!

With this goal in mind, we will now look at sexual relations through different aspects of human sexuality: cognitive, sociocultural, psychoaffective, biological and moral.

TABLE 1 SEXUAL RELATIONS AND ASPECTS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY*

| Aspects of human sexuality | Meaning in a sexual relation |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cognitive | Knowledge acquired and to be acquired about sexual relations that provides a more comprehensive perspective of sexual expression. |
| Sociocultural | Awareness of social and cultural representations of sexual relations: gender roles, stereotypes, behavioural and affective norms, and others. |
| Psychoaffective | Elements of a person’s psychology (desire, self-affirmation, satisfaction, intimacy, communication, sharing, etc.) and affectivity (emotions and feelings) before, during and after having sexual relations. |
| Biological | Anatomical and physiological components of sexual relations, that is, anything related to contact between bodies (such as stimulation of the five senses, arousal, orgasm, reproduction/contraception, risk behaviours for sexually transmitted infections (STI), stimulation of sexual and genital organs, coitus). |
| Moral | Values, beliefs and principles linked to sexual expression during relations. |
| Different ways to consider “sexual relations!” | |

* Inspired by Badeau (1998). Note: These aspects are not listed in hierarchical order.

REFRAMING A SEXUAL RELATION WITHIN ITS COGNITIVE ASPECTS

Cognitive aspects refer to knowledge acquired and to be acquired about sexual relations, thus allowing individuals to make up their own minds and develop their own concepts of sex. The challenge in the process of cognitively redefining sexual relations is to demonstrate to young people and to adults that it is possible to share one's sexuality with another person without the experience being centred only on genital exploration. By paying particular attention to the words 'relation' and 'sexuality' contained in the expression 'sexual relations', we have situated sexual relations within a more comprehensive perspective, and assigned a definition that goes beyond SEX. We call your attention to this quote by Cohen (1974: 203), who proposes an inclusive definition of 'sexual relation':

While the term "intercourse" applies to the sex act proper (coitus), a sexual relation covers a much broader scope of activities. It encompasses the psychological and physiological connections that develop between two people who desire each other [translation].

Robert (2005: 27) adds, "*sexuality is broad, wide-ranging and all-encompassing, panoramic and much more extensive than the genitality part of it, to which it is usually confined*" [translation]. For her part, Desaulniers (1997) asserts that a sexual relation should not be thought of in a technical and instrumental manner but rather as a means of entering into a relationship with another person, which does not reduce it to sexual behaviours and know-how.

In the light of these assertions, we suggest that two people who desire each other can have a sexual relation **without engaging only in genital exploration or, at the very least, without feeling they absolutely have to perform this act.** Table 2 (to which elements can be added) illustrates this broader concept of a sexual relation.

TABLE 2 A SEXUAL RELATION CAN TAKE THE FORM OF..

| ...GENITAL EXPRESSION OF SEXUALITY | and/or | ...NON-GENITAL EXPRESSION OF SEXUALITY |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Mutual masturbation (stimulation, caressing sexual organs and/or genitals: clitoris, breasts, vulva, vagina, penis)</p> <p>Vaginal penetration (penis-vagina)</p> <p>Oral-genital contact (fellatio, cunnilingus)</p> <p>Anal penetration (penis-anus)</p> <p>Others</p> | | <p>Exploration of the five senses (giving and receiving sexual gestures: holding hands, looking at each other, massaging or caressing each other, talking lovingly to each other, among other things.)</p> <p>Exploration of erogenous zones* other than sexual/genital organs (nape of the neck, ear lobes, inside the thighs, feet, stomach, mouth, etc.)</p> <p>Revealing and sharing feelings and emotions, expressing one's values, tastes and limits beyond the sexual relation</p> <p>Others</p> |

* Body parts that are particularly sensitive to stimulation and that generate sexual pleasure (Department of Sexology, UQAM, 1996: 23).

The challenge for educators is to help adolescents become aware that "*it's not because a sexual behaviour exists that they have to do it*", and therefore to help them tell the difference between a described behaviour and one that is prescribed (Desaulniers, 1997: 5). Similarly, it should not be suggested that Table 2 is exhaustive since the effect would be to create standards about what a person HAS to do. And yet, such rigidity is exactly what we would like young people to move away from. **There is no single way to define a sexual relation.** Table 2 presents certain behaviours that refer to a sexual relation that is considered as true self-expression, as respecting both the self and the other (we will examine this notion of respect more thoroughly in the sections on psychoaffective and moral aspects of sexual relations).

REFRAMING A SEXUAL RELATION WITHIN ITS SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS

One way our culture conveys messages about sexual relations is through the media, one of the main agents of socialization for adolescents (Cloutier, 1982). Therefore, it is important to spend some time on this topic, especially since, as we mentioned earlier, images of sexual relations projected in the media are more often than not very simplistic.

However, we must certainly not limit our interventions to condemning the media, or indeed young people’s idols. Rather than just saying “Don’t do what they do,” we should encourage them to reflect by asking questions such as: “Can trying to copy what your idols do or what you see in the media have an impact on your sexuality and that of other young people your age?” The main objective in bringing up sociocultural aspects of sexual relations is to help adolescents construct their identities “without being limited to simply imitating trends” (MEQ-MSSS, 2003: 43).

Referring to role models in the media during educational interventions not only gets adolescents’ attention but also sharpens their critical faculties regarding these models. Concretely, it is a matter of their becoming aware of how the concept of sexual relations is conveyed by “cultural agencies including magazines, Internet sites and musical idols” [translation] (Bouchard, Bouchard and Boily, 2006), and of identifying stereotypes, sex roles, and behavioural and affective norms that value performance and success—genital exploration—in sexual conduct.

The fact that “in the media world, young couples [...] have perfect bodies, are experienced lovers, and have concurrent, never-ending orgasms” [translation] (Robert, 2002: 50), or that videos feature “female singers [mimicking] sex acts” [translation] (Bouchard, Bouchard and Boily, 2006: 17) demonstrates that sexual relations are presented as the opportunity to prove one’s know-how. It is not only a question of “having sex” but of doing it “well”.

REFRAMING A SEXUAL RELATION WITHIN ITS PSYCHOAFFECTIVE ASPECTS

If we refer to Badeau’s (1998) description of psychological and affective aspects of human sexuality, sexual relations can be reassessed according to expression of emotions and feelings, communications, sharing, and intimacy between partners, for instance. The authors of the ministerial document entitled *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* state that the emotional dimension of sexuality is composed of attitudes and feelings for oneself and for others (MEQ-MSSS, 2003: 9). Robert (2002: 98) considers that the most important attitudes to develop vis-à-vis a sex partner are trust, respect, tactfulness, a capacity to discover and to reveal oneself, and being able to let oneself go.

At first glance, the psychoaffective aspects of a sexual relation can appear to be the opposite of genital exploration. Although some people make a distinction, whether conscious or not, between expressing feelings and “sex”, it is important to note that expression of affectivity within a sexual relation is compatible with genital exploration. In this regard, Bureau (1995: 29) explains that if both sex partners are close, they will be joined by a “bridge built of sexual pleasure as well as of love, affection, tenderness, closeness, empathy, and care for one another [translation], from which, in his opinion, comes the expression “to make love”.

Robert (2002: 99) suggests that the satisfaction felt during sexual relations is not limited to genital release; rather, it depends on a feeling of intimacy, an affective bond, and the special place partners create for each other. That being said, exploring psychoaffective aspects of sexual relations provides an opportunity to initiate subjective reflection with adolescents about their past or present sexual relations, or about how they view future relations. We can bring them to define prerequisites for pleasurable sexual relations using the questions in Table 3.

During this integrative thinking process, young people should be presented with various options regarding how they wish to express their sexuality with another person while respecting their own needs, preferences and desires, as well as their limits and fears. In this regard, it could be interesting to analyse the degree to which peer pressure, the wish to conform, fear of disappointing the partner, and alcohol and drug consumption obstruct self-expression in a sexual relation.

TABLE 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK TO MAKE SURE A SEXUAL RELATION IS PLEASURABLE...

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Am I ready to have sexual relations at this time? Do I really feel like it and want to do it, or am I responding to outside pressures? |
| Have I chosen someone that I care for, to whom I’m attracted and for whom I feel love or affection? |
| Do my partner and I feel good together? Can we fulfill each others’ needs for tenderness, pleasure and communication? |
| Am I attentive to my needs as well as to the other person’s? |
| Have my partner and I taken the time to get to know each other, to talk and discuss what we like and dislike, and to share our feelings? |
| Can my partner and I go somewhere that we like and do we have enough time not to feel rushed? |
| Do I have enough confidence to take initiatives at certain times and let myself go at others? |
| Have my partner and I shown that we have enough sense of humour to laugh at minor incidents that can happen along the way? |

Inspired by Durocher and Fortier (1999).

REFRAMING A SEXUAL RELATION WITHIN ITS BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Generally, the biological aspects of sexual relations are associated with genitality, which itself refers to “*coital relations, sex acts, touching genitals and sex games*” [translation] (Badeau 1998: 6).

Discussion of biological aspects of sexuality is indispensable to educational activities linked to awareness raising and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STI), HIV and unwanted pregnancies, and even to addressing the issue of alcohol and drug use in connection with sexual experiences. Indeed, biological aspects can be used to raise the topics of STI and HIV transmission, how the reproductive systems of both sexes work, knowledge of the body, and the effects of alcohol and drugs on expressing one’s sexuality, for example. Moreover, young people can be asked questions related to biology that can later help them experience greater satisfaction during sex. Examples of these questions are given in Table 4 and can be asked along with those in Table 3, which pertain to psychoaffective aspects.

We believe these questions highlight the importance of clearly defining the terms “sexual relation” and “risky sexual behaviours” for educational and prevention activities. Why? Because the term “sexual relation” on its own is ambiguous and more often than not refers to vaginal penetration, even though this is not the only type of genital contact that presents a risk for STI, HIV or unwanted pregnancy. It is also important to be clear about the sexual behaviour targeted by a prevention message (Waynberg, 1999). Other terms, such as “active sexuality” and “complete sexual relation” should be qualified to ensure that behaviours are not falsely perceived to be safe because partners think they have not had a “real” sexual relation in the common sense of the term (Schwartz, 1999). The following case is a good illustration of feelings of false security.

TABLE 4 EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEXUAL RELATIONS

| |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Do we use anything to prevent STI, HIV or unwanted pregnancy?* |
| How well do I know my body and my partner’s?* |
| Do my partner and I seek to reach orgasm? |
| Do I take drugs or alcohol before having sex? If yes, why do I do that (see the questions in Table 3)? What influence can using drugs or alcohol have on how a sexual relation develops? |

* Inspired by Durocher and Fortier (1999).

CASE Girl, age 15

I wonder if I’m at risk for STI. Even if I give my boyfriend blow jobs, since I haven’t had sex yet, I’m still a “virgin” and so I’m not “at risk”. I’m playing safe, right? (Question inspired by those listed on the Tel-jeunes Web site)

This remark questions the term “virginity”, which is typically presented as the absence of vaginal intercourse (Harrington Cleveland, 2003) and understood therefore as synonymous with inactive sexuality.

Virginity synonymous with “inactive” sexuality?

It is recommended not to associate virginity with “inactive” sexuality since adolescents can think of themselves as virgins while having intimate contacts (Schuster, Bell and Kanouse, 1996). Indeed, the term virginity—typically associated with the absence of vaginal intercourse—can sow ambiguity among young people who see themselves as being sexually inactive, and therefore virgins, when in fact they have risky sexual contacts (e.g. genital contact, oral-genital contact or anal penetration). The term should therefore be clarified during sex education sessions.

Biological aspects of sexual relations, hormonal chemistry, apply just as well to other aspects linked to the body and different physiological reactions provoked by the five senses (hearing, smell, sight, touch and taste).

It is important to remember that the biological aspects of a sexual relation do not include only coitus and genital exploration. **The idea isn’t to condemn genitality but to ensure that a sexual relation is not restricted to it alone.** When discussing biological aspects of sexual relations, we can encourage adolescents to be creative so they can, as Badeau puts it (1998: 15), “*initiate new ways of expressing themselves physically*” [translation]. How? By showing them new and original positions? Of course not! Aside from the sensations that come from stimulation of sexual organs or genitals, the biological aspects of sexual relations can be broadened to include all senses as well as sensuality.



SENSUALITY

Sensuality refers to the sensory capacities of the body, that is, to the pleasure felt through one or more of the five senses (see Table 2 for examples of sexual gestures).

An openness to sensuality seems to be in keeping with the remarks of the MEQ-MSSS (2003: 30) which suggest that when teaching 15- to 17-year-olds, we should demystify “*sexual thrill-seeking (pleasure at all costs) versus the gradual discovery of sexual satisfaction (assured pleasure).*”

According to Premo and Geet Éthier (1995: 135), establishing contact with a sex partner involves all five senses: sight, smell, the sound of the partner’s voice, touch and taste. Premo and Geet Éthier consider that modern culture favours powerful overstimulation of the senses (strong perfumes, sudden touch, sounds) to the detriment of subtle stimuli, and thus stifles any sensual subtlety, but that it is also possible to re-educate the senses so they can become sharper again. In this perspective, young people can be encouraged to discover, or rediscover, what the five senses bring to a sexual relation, and thus broaden their notions of pleasure and physical contact, which are all too often associated with genital release, or orgasm.

Of course, the process of reframing the concept of sensual pleasure within sexual relations cannot occur independently from each individual’s experiences and values.

REFRAMING A SEXUAL RELATION WITHIN ITS MORAL ASPECTS

Discussions about sexual relations can also involve an exercise in clarifying values where, as Badeau (1998: 16) states, the goal is to distinguish between one’s preference values and reference values and to examine ways to abide by them. How can this be achieved? First, young people should be made aware about the need to temporarily refrain from some types of sexual activity and take a bit of time to think about it, even if our performance-based society encourages them to move quickly (see Table 5).

These questions about expressing one’s sexuality in a relationship help us go beyond sexual behaviours and acquire better knowledge of ourselves as sexual beings. Isn’t this what we hope for adolescents in search of identity?

IN CONCLUSION

The expression “sexual relation” is often associated with genital exploration. An emphasis on sexual conduct and on becoming familiar with manipulation of genitals quickly and effectively reflects our society’s requirements of performance and consumption. An adolescent experiencing first love and first sexual relationship is not shielded from this reality, quite the contrary. Would we rather pass on a narrow or a broad image of sexual relations? Here are some suggestions for pedagogical activities that will guide you through this process of reflection with young people.

TABLE 5 MY SEXUAL RELATIONS: A QUESTION OF VALUES

| |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>My reference values—those I know and to which I subscribe</p> <p>They include, for example, the fundamental values of our society that are linked to sexuality: gender equality, liberty and equality of sexual orientation, mixing of the sexes, mutual consent, individuality, intimacy, responsibility and dignity*. We can also add respect (for oneself and for the other), authenticity, autonomy, responsibility (personal and social), confidentiality, sharing, and other considerations.</p> |
| <p>My preference values—those I put into practise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does my sex life reflect my reference values? That is, is there a difference between what I say (reference values) and what I do? - In other words, does my sex life resemble me? For example, if respect is one of my reference values, do I respect myself and my partner in our personal relationship and when we have sexual relations? |
| <p>My sex partner’s preference values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Am I aware of his or her preference values? What are they? - Do they match my own? - Do I feel like subscribing to them? What are the advantages and risks of doing so? |
| <p>What I can do to abide by my preference values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can I do to ensure that my partner respects my values both in daily life and during sexual relations? - What are the advantages and the risks of doing so? - What is preventing me from abiding by my values when I express my sexuality with a partner? E.g.: fear of being judged, fear of the other person, fear of disappointing, pressure from my partner, wanting to comply with what other people say. - Do I think some behaviours are necessary? Do I feel obliged to submit to certain behaviours? Who is obliged and why?*** |

Note: This Table can be used with Table 3, which presents relational and affective aspects of sexual relations.

* See Regroupement professionnel des sexologues du Québec, 2001.

** Question inspired by Desaulniers, 1997.



Suggestions for pedagogical activities for adolescents in secondary 4 and 5

These activities can be conducted within the framework of the Québec Education Program and your own intervention settings, whether you work in the health and social services network or with

a community group. However, before starting these activities, we suggest you look up the “Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education” (MEQ-MSSS, 2003: 39-40).

MAIN ANCHOR POINTS IN EDUCATIONAL TRAINING:

Incorporation into the Québec Education Program

GOALS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Construction of identity
Construction of world-view
Empowerment

BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING

Health and well-being:

To 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 his or her basic needs:

Self-affirmation; respect for one's physical and psychological well-being; need for acceptance and growth; need for recognition and fulfillment, need to express emotions.

Awareness of the impact of his or her choices on health and well-being:

Awareness of the principles for a balanced sexuality.

Media literacy:

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

Focuses of development

Awareness of the place and influence of the different media in his or her daily life and in society:

Examination of media consumption habits and guidelines, and awareness of the influence of media messages on personal world-views and everyday environment.

Understanding of media representations of reality:

Recognition of the positive and negative impacts of media messages; distinction between reality, imagination and virtual reality.

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

Exercising critical judgment:

Form an opinion, express judgement, qualify opinion.

Achieving one's potential:

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

Cooperate with others:

Contribute to team efforts, interact with an open mind, assess one's participation in team work.

Communicate appropriately:

Become familiar with various modes of communication, use various modes of communication, manage the communication process.

LEARNING CONTEXT

See indications at the beginning of each activity.

Incorporation into complementary educational services programs

Promotion and prevention services programs

Provide students with an environment conducive to the development of healthy lifestyles and skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES SUGGESTED

- Become aware of generally simplistic representations of sexuality and sexual relations;
- Develop critical thinking towards issues linked to such representations;
- Consider sexuality and sexual relations from broader perspectives.

ACTIVITY 1

Sexual relations: Beyond SEX!

DURATION

60 minutes
(can be conducted
over 2 sessions)

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Identify simplistic representations of sexuality and sexual relations conveyed through various media;
- Recognize the influence of such representations on perceptions of sexuality and sexual relations (both for individual students and for other young people of the same age);
- Be familiar with interpersonal aspects (psychoaffective and moral) needed for expression of healthy sexuality.

1

Brainstorming

Ask adolescents to define the concepts of “sexuality” and “sexual relation”. The facilitator writes the answers on the board so they can be used later.

2

Team work

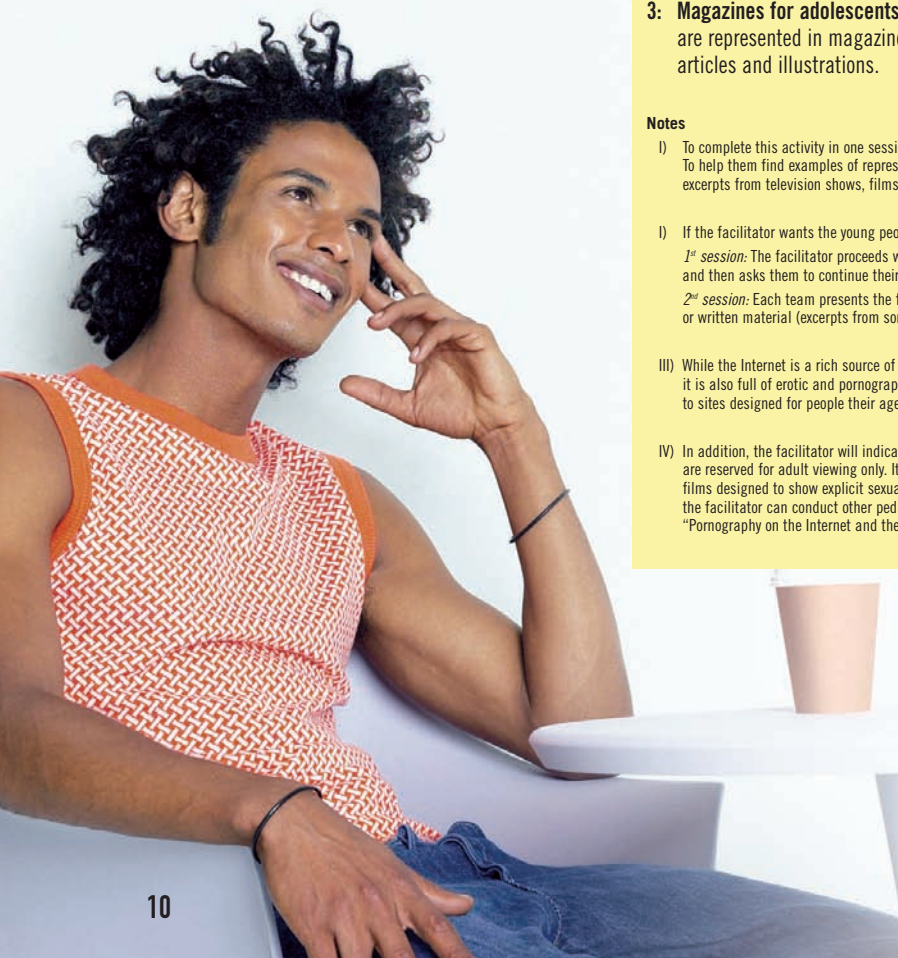
Form mixed groups of three or four people, who will answer the following question: *Determine how sexuality—sexual relations, more specifically—is represented in various media that young people know.*

Three media influences are proposed: television productions, music groups and magazines for young people. Each team is randomly given a number (from 1 to 3) that corresponds to one of the following three media influences (more than one team will focus on each media area).

- 1: Television productions.** Teams will determine how sexuality or sexual relations are represented on television, giving concrete examples from ads, soaps, reality shows, and films aimed at a young public.
- 2: Productions by music groups.** Teams will determine how sexuality or sexual relations are represented in productions by music groups popular with young people, giving concrete examples of words in songs and music videos.
- 3: Magazines for adolescents.** Teams will determine how sexuality or sexual relations are represented in magazines for young people, giving concrete examples from headlines, articles and illustrations.

Notes

- To complete this activity in one session, ask adolescents to think about excerpts from ads, television shows, videos, and articles. To help them find examples of representations of sexuality, bring material into class: magazines, words from songs (in English or French), excerpts from television shows, films or videos.
- If the facilitator wants the young people to do in-depth research, the activity should then be conducted over two sessions.
 - 1st session:* The facilitator proceeds with steps 1) and 2), during which the adolescents begin the project, and then asks them to continue their research outside the time allocated to the session.
 - 2nd session:* Each team presents the fruit of its research to the group using indexed audiovisual (excerpts from video or television shows) or written material (excerpts from song lyrics or articles).
- While the Internet is a rich source of information about television productions, music groups and magazines, it is also full of erotic and pornographic material. The youth must therefore be instructed to limit their searches to sites designed for people their age and that information collected from adult sites is not admissible.
- In addition, the facilitator will indicate that references to adult films (erotic or pornographic) are not acceptable since they are reserved for adult viewing only. It is suggested that the facilitator summarize what is meant by erotic and pornographic films: films designed to show explicit sexual behaviours and in which images are centred on the actors’ sexual organs. If needed, the facilitator can conduct other pedagogical activities on this topic, using issue 9 of *The SexEducator*, “Pornography on the Internet and the consequences for youth: How do we intervene?”



3

Team work (continued)

Each team must establish a definition of sexuality or sexual relations for the media influence in question, based on data collected in step 2. In other words, what are the messages linked to sexuality or sexual relations that stand out (analysis criteria: roles attributed to each sex—stereotypes—and behaviours most often associated with sexuality or sexual relations)?

Note

The activity should not be used to condemn actors, films or popular singers for their representations of sexuality. The objective is to understand the representations of sexual relations conveyed and then encourage adolescents to think critically about them.

4

Plenary

Each team presents definitions (main messages) they developed in step 3; the facilitator then writes them on the board next to the answers adolescents gave in step 1.

Plenary questions:

- *Are there similarities and differences between your definitions (step 1) and those conveyed in the media (results of step 3)?*
- *How are sexuality and sexual relations generally represented by the different media discussed?*
- *Do you think the media influences young people's representations of sexuality and sexual relations? Explain. (At this point, the facilitator notes the similarities in results for steps 1 and 2).*
- *Does trying to reproduce these models have repercussions, whether positive or negative, on the sexuality of young people your age? Explain.*

Note

We assume that representations of sexuality and sexual relations will have mostly been of coitus and genital exploration.

5

Final presentation

The facilitator ends the activity by emphasizing the importance of the three following elements.

1 *"Sexual relations: going beyond SEX!"*

You can refer to the sections of the magazine entitled "The word RELATION makes up half of the term sexual relation" (page 3) and "The expression sexual relation also includes SEXUALITY" (page 4). In several media targeting youth, sexual relations are associated with coitus and genital expression of sexuality. However, it is important to contrast the notion of RELATION with the expression "having SEX", which refers to sexual know-how and performance (go over the answers given during the plenary). The facilitator specifies that this is a simplistic view of sexuality, which only involves sex acts and therefore only one dimension of a sexual relation.

2 *Be critical of simplistic representations of sexuality conveyed in a number of media, given their significant influence on young people. The facilitator indicates that developing critical thinking helps adolescents recognize that it isn't because a sexual behaviour exists that they must or need to do it (Desaulniers, 1997). Giving the impression that the reverse is true can negatively affect the sexuality of young people since the psychoaffective and moral aspects required to express one's sexuality in a healthy manner are pushed aside.*

3 *Reflect on the psychoaffective and moral aspects of sexual relations. To do so, the facilitator hands out copies of Tables 3 and 5 from the Magazine, reads them out and introduces them as valuable tools for discussion among friends or with a partner.*



ACTIVITY 2 **Sexologist for a day**

DURATION
60 minutes

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Find popular expressions that are associated with sexual relations;
- Demonstrate the limited meanings of these expressions by presenting a more inclusive view of sexual relations.

1

Introductory statement

The facilitator explains that although sexuality and sexual relations are most often associated with their biological aspects, multiple aspects are actually involved; she or he presents them using Table 1 on page 4.

The facilitator then makes it clear that the job of a sexologist (professional who works in the field of sex education) is to help people develop a more global view of sexuality and sexual relations (use examples in Table 2 on page 5). For this activity, the adolescents are asked to play the role of a sexologist and to proceed with case analyses.

2

Case analyses

Teams of two or three people analyse one of the four cases presented below, which are assigned randomly. (Indicate that these cases are inspired by questions listed on the Tel-jeunes Web site)

Case no. 1: Girl, age 15

“What does it mean if sometimes I don’t feel like playing with my boyfriend’s penis or having him play with my genitals either, but I would like it if we massages and kissed each other, and talked affectionately to each other? When this happens, I tell my boyfriend that I want to “make love” but he says that to make love, you have to use your genitals and not just stay at a foreplay level. Am I right to say that “making love” is not the same thing as “having sex”? Am I normal to think like that? I don’t think so, but I want your opinion.

Case no. 2: Boy, age 16

“What is having an “active” and “complete” sexual relation? Is it to have sex in the greatest possible number of positions? I don’t know them all. I’ve heard that the most complete is one involving all three holes (vaginal, oral and anal sex). Is this true? It sounds like a lot of action! Please answer quickly. I don’t want to look like someone who doesn’t know anything.

Case no. 3: Girl, age 15

I wonder if I’m at risk for sexually transmitted infections or HIV. Even if I give my boyfriend blow jobs, since I haven’t had sex yet, I’m still a “virgin” and so I’m not “at risk”. I’m playing safe, right?

Case no. 4: Boy, age 17

I’m gay. I’d like to know if my friend and I can consider that we’re having sexual relations when we caress each other’s genitals. Everyone says that a sexual relation is when a penis penetrates a vagina or anus. But we don’t want to do that. Does this mean that we may NEVER have real sexual relations with each other?

Instructions

Working in teams, “sexologists for a day” read the case they are given and then write down answers to the three following questions.

- 1) *What is worrying the person in the case? What is bothering him or her?*
- 2) *What is this person’s perception of a sexual relation?*
- 3) *As a sexologist, what would your answer be? (Tell the adolescents to base their answers on the introduction in step 1 and on Table 1, which presents a comprehensive overview of sexual relations.)*

Note

Since there are only four cases, some will be assigned to more than one team. This does not, however, hamper the effectiveness of the activity. On the contrary: differences and similarities in each team’s answers will feed the discussion and encourage critical thinking.

3

Back to the larger group

The facilitator reads out the four cases. The teams associated with each case present their thoughts. After each presentation and for each case, the facilitator highlights one or several terms that restrict the meaning of “sexual relation” as well as the issues linked to these terms. “Foreplay” is the concern for Case no. 1; “complete sexual relations” for Cases no. 2 and 4; “active sexuality” for Case no. 2; and “virginity” for Case no. 3 (see the section “Terms that should be qualified” on page 5). The facilitator raises an issue linked to the ambiguous nature of these expressions: the risk of not feeling targeted by prevention messages on STI, HIV and unwanted pregnancies (see the section of the magazine entitled *Reframing a sexual relation within its BIOLOGICAL aspects* on page 7).

4

Concluding statement

After team presentations, the facilitator reminds adolescents that although it is inevitable that bodies get close during sexual relations, this closeness should not be limited to genital exploration. The facilitator notes that sexuality can be expressed in a variety of ways during sex, and presents concrete examples from Table 2 on page 5, to which the group can add other elements.



Sexuality and sensuality go hand in hand

ACTIVITY 3

DURATION

60 minutes
(can be conducted over 2 sessions)

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Define sensuality;
- Situate sensuality within the expression of sexuality with a lover;
- Recognise sensuality as an opportunity to engage in forms of pleasure other than that attained through genital stimulation.

1

Brainstorming

The facilitator asks the adolescents to define the term sensuality.

- *In your opinion, what does the word sensuality mean? In other words, when we tell someone they are sensual, what do we mean by that? If it can be helpful, describe this type of person (without naming names, except perhaps for celebrities) based on his or her behaviours and attitudes.*

Note

The last part of the question is obviously biased since it is designed to verify whether or not students confuse the words “sensual” and “sexy”. The facilitator writes their ideas on the board.

2

Description

The facilitator explains the meaning of “sensuality” as presented on page 8, and connects the ideas the adolescents expressed in step a) that correspond to this definition.

3

Plenary

Note

If the ideas expressed refer more to a person’s “sexiness” or to the simplistic representation of sexuality that is conveyed generally (where the accent is on technique, genitality and performance), ask the following question (if not, proceed to the next step):

Of the ideas you came up with, which ones do not really define sensuality? What do you think they are really linked to?

4

Exposé

The facilitator presents the elements of a sexual relation from Table 2 on page 5 (right-hand column, non-genital expression of sexuality) as the ones that are often forgotten. He or she notes that sensuality is often perceived as “foreplay” and therefore cannot constitute a so-called “complete” sexual relation on its own. Concrete examples can be given: the facilitator can make links between cases 1 and 4 in Activity 2, and refer to the section “*Terms that should be developed*” on page 3. The facilitator thus presents sensuality as one of various forms of sexual expression that does not reduce sexual relations strictly to genital contact, and adds that the two “go hand-in-hand!”

Note

Avoid giving all the examples linked to sensuality presented in Table 2 on page 5. The adolescents should show some creativity by providing examples of their own in the following step.

5

Team work

The facilitator asks students to form mixed teams of two or three and to produce a tool for sensuality education for young people. This tool can be a song, poem, sketch or advertising poster. They must follow this instruction:

- *Based on the discussion we had about sensuality, present different ways of having fun and feeling good in a relationship with a lover.*

Notes

- If some teams lack inspiration, give a few examples of sensuality listed in Table 2.
- Specify that allusions to practices involving sexual organs are not acceptable. This is not meant to condemn genitality in a sexual relation but rather to ensure that partners don’t limit themselves or feel obliged to engage in these acts in order to have fun.
- Given the scope of this project and time restrictions, the young people can be given the option of completing the work either during a second session or at home; they can show their work to the group during a concluding session. The presentations could be part of a contest or exhibition, the effect of which could be to fuel competition.



6

Concluding statement

The facilitator notes that perceptions of sexual relations limited to genital exploration and coitus encourage young people, as well as adults, to want to perform, that is, to show off their sexual know-how. The risk is that the focus is then on engaging in certain imposed behaviours rather than on respecting one's own taste, desires, needs, limits and values, hereby missing out on more subtle—but no less satisfying and creative—pleasure than that elicited by genital exploration. Finally, the facilitator can use sexologist Jocelyne Robert's (2005) expressions "sexual fast-food" and "erotic junk food" (see page 3) to help young people better understand the issues surrounding sexuality constrained to genital exploration, which compares to always eating the same things.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

BADEAU, Denise. "La cinquantaine au masculin en regard de l'expression de la sexualité : piste pour une intervention sexologique", *Contrasexion*, vol. 15, no.1, January-February 1998, p. 3-21.

BOUCHARD, Pierrette, Natasha BOUCHARD and Isabelle BOILY (2006). *La sexualisation précoce des filles*, Montréal, Éditions Sisyph, 80 p.

BUREAU, Jules (1995). "L'intimité et l'identité sexuelle : une approche existentielle", *Revue sexologique*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 7-35.

Canadian Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press Canada, 2004, 1830 p.

CLOUTIER, Richard. *Psychologie de l'adolescence*, Boucherville, Gaëtan Morin Éditeur, 1982, 321 p.

COHEN, Jean. *Dictionnaire de la vie affective et sexuelle : dictionnaire médical, psychologique, sociologique et juridique*, Tournai (Belgique), Casterman, 1974, 272 p.

DÉPARTEMENT DE SEXOLOGIE, UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL.

Lexique des termes sexologiques, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1996, 23 p.

DESAULNIERS, Marie-Paule. "Évolution des conceptions de la sexualité : performance ou relations humaines?", *Sexologie actuelle*, vol. 6, no. 1, October 1997, p. 4-10.

DUROCHER, Lise, Martine FORTIER (1999). *Programme d'éducation sexuelle*, Montréal, Centres jeunesse de Montréal, 1 v. (various page numbers).

FRANCOEUR, Robert Thomas. *The Complete Dictionary of Sexology*, New York, Continuum, 1995, 790 p.

HARRINGTON CLEVELAND, H. "The influence of female and male risk on the occurrence of sexual intercourse within adolescent relationships", *Society for Research on Adolescence*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2003, p. 81-112.

MAILLOCHON, Florence. "Le jeu de l'amour et de l'amitié au lycée. Mélange de genres : filles et garçons pour le meilleur et pour le pire", *Travail, genre et sociétés*, no. 9, April 2003, p. 111-135.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC and MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX DU QUÉBEC. *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*, Ministère de l'Éducation, Québec, 2003, 56 p.

MOIGNO, Yves. *Dictionnaire pratique de la sexualité*, Allier (Belgique), Marabout, 1991, 400 p.

PREMO, Ma and M. GEET ÉTHIER. *La célébration sexuelle*, Boucherville, Éditions de Mortagne, 1995, 311 p.

RICHTER, Alan. *Dictionary of Sexual Slang: Words, Phrases, and Idioms from AC/DC to Zig-zig*, New York and Toronto, J. Wiley, 1993, 250 p.

ROBERT, Jocelyne. *Le sexe en mal d'amour : de la révolution sexuelle à la régression érotique*, Montréal, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2005, 226 p.

ROBERT, Jocelyne. *Full sexuel : la vie amoureuse des adolescents*, Montréal, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2002, 191 p.

REGROUPEMENT PROFESSIONNEL DES SEXOLOGUES DU QUÉBEC. *Professional code of ethics*, adopted on 16 November 2001, Montréal, Regroupement professionnel des sexologues du Québec, 2001, 26 p.

SCHUSTER, Mark A., Robert M. BELL and David E. KANOUSE. "The sexual practices of adolescent virgins: Genital sexual activities of high school students who have never had vaginal intercourse", *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 86, no. 11, November 1996, p. 1570-1576.

SCHWARTZ, Israel M. "Sexual activity prior to coital initiation: A comparison between males and females", *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1999, p. 63-69.

WAYNBERG, Jacques. *Le dico de l'amour et des pratiques sexuelles*, Milan, Éditions Toulouse, 1999, 244 p.

WESTHEIMER, Ruth K. *Encyclopedia of Sex*, New York, Continuum, 1994, 319 p.

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/its

Santé
et Services sociaux

Québec 

TEL-JEUNES
www.teljeunes.com
1 800 263-2266

UQÀM