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“Hard to Teach”

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Martha E. Kempner, M.A.

Director of Public Information

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CONTENTS

“Hard to Teach”

ARTICLES

4

ADVOCATES ON BOTH SIDES ARE AS PASSIONATE AS EVER:
SIECUS CONTROVERSY REPORT
2004–05 School Year

Maxwell Ciardullo, Public Policy Assistant,
SIECUS
Washington, DC

20

LAKOFF FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATORS:
THE POWER AND MAGIC OF “FRAMING”

Deborah M. Roffman, MS, CSE, CFLE, Sexuality Educator and Consultant
Baltimore, MD

26

LESSON PLAN:
CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY: BASEBALL IS OUT; PIZZA IS IN

Al Vernacchio, M.S.Ed., Sexuality Educator
Philadelphia, PA

32

LESSON PLAN:
YOUR GENDER—BEYOND BLACK & WHITE

Lis Maurer, Coordinator, Center for LGBT Education, Outreach & Services
Ithaca College
Ithaca, NY

34

ACTIVITY:
HARM REDUCTION AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Rachel Herzing, Program Director,
Health Initiatives for Youth
San Francisco, CA

36

SUMMARY:
ENCOURAGE SELF-AWARENESS AND RESPECT
FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLINICAL SETTING

Laura Hill-Sakurai MD, Assistant Professor
Christina Lee, Medical Student
William Shore MD, Professor
University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine (UCSF)
San Francisco, CA

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

FROM THE EDITOR

The Many Meanings of the Phrase “Hard to Teach”

By Martha E. Kempner, M.A. 2

FROM THE EDITOR THE MANY MEANINGS OF THE PHRASE “HARD TO TEACH”

Martha E. Kempner, M.A.

Director of Public Information

The title of this issue, “Hard to Teach,” stems from a publication we created a number of years ago called *Filling the Gaps: Hard to Teach Topics in Sexuality Education*. At the time, we had heard from many educators that there was a lack of resources to help them tackle certain topics such as sexual orientation, gender, masturbation, and abortion. To fill that void, we scoured existing curricula for good lessons and enlisted our own educators and outside experts to create new lessons where none were available. The responses we got back told us that this compilation of lesson plans was extremely helpful.

In our offices this publication was nicknamed “Hard to Teach” and over the years, the phrase kept popping up. Certainly there are still topics that remain “hard to teach” because they may spark controversy or cause discomfort on the part of students and educators. But to us the phrase means much more. Communities can be “hard to teach” because controversy, or the fear of controversy, can lead to restrictive programs and block progress. Certain audiences can be “hard to teach” because they are resistant to learning about sexuality or have preconceived notions about some aspect of sexuality that get in the way. And the American public, both adults and young people, can be “hard to teach” because they rely on certain linguistic frames and conceptual models that are detrimental but hard to overcome.

The articles and lesson plans we included in this issue touch on each of these different takes on the phrase “hard to teach.”

TRACKING CONTROVERSY

One of my favorite projects each year is the annual review of controversies surrounding sexuality education in communities across the country. On a personal level it may be my favorite because writing this article (for the 1997-98 school year) was my first major project at SIECUS. But my affinity for the piece goes beyond the personal; this review tells the real stories of communities and individuals across the country who are struggling on a personal level with the issues we think about and write about every day. Their stories are at times shocking but often predictable. The debates they engage in are frequently frustrating but occasionally exhilarating. Most importantly, though, I find that these struggles always motivate me to want to work harder for

sexuality education in this country, so that one day people in these communities can stop spending time and resources on debates when such resources would clearly be better spent educating young people.

This year, the review was written by Maxwell Ciardullo, SIECUS’ public policy associate. He tracked over 150 controversies in 38 states that focused on the type of sexuality education young people receive (often abstinence-only-until-marriage vs. comprehensive sexuality education), the role of outside groups such as Planned Parenthood or local crisis pregnancy centers in providing sexuality education, and the topics and information that should or should not be included in books and other classroom materials.

In a supplemental piece, Ciardullo also writes about the disturbing increase in debates involving sexual orientation as a topic as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals. Conservative forces continue to try to completely eradicate any mention of sexual orientation from school materials, curricula, and clubs while at the same time attempting to remove LGBTQ individuals from school communities altogether.

While many of the controversies SIECUS tracked this year ended in greater restrictions on what young people will learn in school, Ciardullo reminds us that advocates and activists across the country are working diligently to protect and promote comprehensive sexuality education and that in many communities they are succeeding.

REFRAMING THE ISSUE

We often discuss how the topic of sexuality has become a crossroads where politics and education intersect. The review of controversies certainly underscores this concept as it tells the stories of advocates working to impact local or state policies in an effort ultimately to impact school-based education. In her article, Deborah Roffman, a sexuality educator in Baltimore, MD, suggests that we need to be more political in how we think about sexuality education and, more importantly, how we talk about it.

Roffman examines the arguments that George Lakoff presented in his popular book, *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. As Roffman clearly explains, Lakoff’s argument is that the political success of the Far Right can be attributed to their use of language that

evokes familiar frames and therefore resonates with many Americans. Roffman begins by examining how this phenomenon is particularly true when it comes to sexuality education, where the Far Right has dictated the language that individuals on both sides of the debate use everyday. She goes on to look at some of the historically embedded frames that are hindering the progress of comprehensive sexuality education and suggests ways in which we can break away from these damaging messages.

In his lesson plan, Al Vernacchio leads students through an entirely different kind of reframing exercise. He suggests that the conceptual frame that generations of adolescents have used to understand and describe sexual behavior—baseball—sets up sexual relationships that are exclusionary, oppositional, goal oriented, and bound to a strict set of rules. Vernacchio's lesson walks young people through the development of a new conceptual framework that likens sex not to the game of baseball but to the simple pleasure of eating pizza.

HARD TO TEACH TOPICS AND AUDIENCES

Finally for this issue, we went back to our original interpretation of “hard to teach” and invited educators across the country to share with us their methods for tackling tough subjects and reaching diverse audiences. We know from our

own experience that any topic and any audience can be difficult due to controversy, lack of agreement on what needs to be taught, and discomfort on the part of the educator or the learner. We chose just a few lessons and concepts to share with our readers in the hopes that you can use some of these in your own work.

A GOODBYE (FOR NOW)

As I explained in the last issue of the *SIECUS Report*, limited resources have forced us to make the difficult decision to discontinue publication of this quarterly journal. I want to assure our loyal readers, however, that SIECUS remains dedicated to providing you with timely information and analysis related to all aspects of sexuality and sexual health. We will continue to publish booklets, reports, and articles (for example, we will still publish our annual review of controversies each summer), and we will continue to update our website with information summaries, policy analysis, curricula reviews, and much more. We are also exploring other avenues, using today's technology, through which we can create and sustain a new regular publication.

In closing, I want to personally thank you for your support of this journal, I have enjoyed working on it immensely and I hope you have enjoyed receiving it.

ADVOCATES ON BOTH SIDES ARE AS
PASSIONATE AS EVER:
SIECUS CONTROVERSY REPORT
2004–05 SCHOOL YEAR

Maxwell Ciardullo

Public Policy Assistant

SIECUS

Washington, DC

The 2004–05 school year brought many of the same issues and players to local debates around sexuality education in our nation’s schools as in previous years. Opponents of comprehensive sexuality education continued their work to shelter young people from information and skills that they believe will encourage sexual activity. Their constant targets are sexuality education curriculum that include information on contraception; programs or materials that mention lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals; books or videos deemed “sexually explicit;” and organizations such as Planned Parenthood that provide medically accurate sexuality education to many school districts across the country.

Despite these ongoing attacks on high quality sexuality education and the current political climate in which the Bush Administration favors and finances the abstinence-only-until-marriage approach, advocates for more inclusive and comprehensive programs continue to fight on the local level. Parents, students, school board members, supportive organizations, and public health professionals have all furthered the cause of comprehensive sexuality education this past school year. They have challenged restrictive abstinence-only programs, presented school officials with public health data and research, and advocated for the rights of students.

SIECUS tracked 153 controversies in 38 states in the 2004–05 school year. This number represents a steady increase over the past three years. Similar to recent years, controversies have centered on the focus of sexuality education curricula; the specific information found in books, textbooks, pamphlets, videos, and other materials; and the appropriate role of outside organizations and educators. Other continuing trends include the disproportionate focus on LGBTQ issues and the increasing role of state policymakers in local sexuality education decisions.

CURRICULUM CONCERNS

The majority of controversies that SIECUS follows each year centers on local disputes about sexuality education curricula. In many cases parents or community members, emboldened by the current administration’s policies, criti-

cize programs that are more inclusive (though often still far short of comprehensive) than the abstinence-only-until-marriage programs they would prefer. While these cases bring about all kinds of compromises, there are still advocates of medically accurate sexuality education across the nation who stand strong against the barrage of complaints.

Montgomery County, MD: A Noteworthy Example

One particular story that unfolded just outside our nation’s capital highlights some of the common themes and most important trends in this debate. SIECUS has been tracking the debate around sexuality education in **Montgomery County, MD** since April 2002. After nearly three years of careful consideration and research, the Montgomery County School Board decided in November 2004 to update its Family Life and Human Development Program to include a video demonstrating proper condom use and revisions allowing teachers to initiate conversations about sexual orientation. The revised curriculum had been developed by a Citizens Advisory Committee, had passed through all of the appropriate channels of approval in the district, and had gained the support of school officials. Nonetheless, the school board quickly began to hear from a small group of parents who were unhappy with the changes to the curriculum. Suddenly, Montgomery County was dealing with two of the very issues that are at the center of so many controversies: contraception (condoms in particular) and sexual orientation.

Like many parents across the country, this small group of parents was concerned that talking to young people about how to protect themselves from pregnancy and STDs negates any message of abstinence in a sexuality education program and may lead to an increase in sexual behavior. Although research has consistently shown that these fears are unfounded, parents’ objections to sexuality education programs often center around the inclusion of information about contraceptives, condom demonstrations, or the availability of condoms in schools.

Over the past few years, SIECUS has also tracked a continual rise in the number of controversies sparked over

LGBTQ issues. These controversies take the form of opposition to student groups, diversity trainings, anti-bullying campaigns that include LGBTQ individuals, and the censoring of materials or curricula that even mention sexual orientation (see box on page 10 for more information on these controversies). In Montgomery County, district officials were accused of presenting a “pro-homosexual” agenda.¹ They responded to the criticism saying, “Historically, we’ve avoided

this issue in not a very educated way. Homosexuality is part of the world we live in. There’s no moral judgment there. But we’ve been pretending it doesn’t exist, sweeping it under the rug, and it’s good we’re going to address it finally.”²

When parents object to curricula, school officials often remind the community that parents can remove their children from any part of class instruction that they object to—this is referred to as an “opt-out” policy. In Montgomery

STATE LEGISLATION IN 2005

As SIECUS has noted in past controversy reports, in recent years state legislators are becoming more and more involved in sexuality education by proposing legislation that could impact what young people learn in both positive and negative ways. In 2005, no state enacted legislation that had a major impact on sexuality education. However, the majority of states saw some type of sexuality education-related legislation introduced.

Potential Positive Impact

Seventeen states had legislation that would have impacted sexuality education in a positive way. Hawaii, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Washington had legislation that would have either mandated medical accuracy and/or sexuality education or would have set up guidelines for more comprehensive sexuality education.

In addition, several states had legislation that would have implemented or funded comprehensive sexuality education programs. Both the New York and Illinois legislatures introduced bills that would have created a dedicated funding stream for sexuality education. Both bills stipulate that this instruction must be medically accurate, age appropriate, and include information about both abstinence and contraception. In Illinois, the State Senate Committee on Health and Human Services supported Senate Bill 457. In New York, Assembly Bill 6619 passed the State Assembly.

Similar bills in Florida and Texas sought to implement sexuality education alongside other unintended pregnancy and STD prevention measures. In Florida, Senate Bill 2276 would have required all school districts to develop a plan to implement comprehensive family life and reproductive education by the 2008–09 school year. The legislation would also guarantee that rape survivors were offered emergency contraception as part of their treatment. In Texas, House Bill 1354 would have set up a grant system for sexuality education and supported additional prevention measures, including funding other teen pregnancy prevention initiatives and requiring insurance plans to cover contraception.

Pushing for Restrictions

Twelve states had legislation that would have negatively impacted sexuality education. Several states had legislation that would have led to the implementation of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in classrooms. In Maine, which currently has one of the most comprehensive sexuality education laws in the country, Senate Bill 605A would allow schools to offer “abstinence education” in grades 7 through 12 in place of, or in addition to, comprehensive family life education. This bill uses the federal government’s 8-point definition of “abstinence education.”

Five states had legislation that would have required parental permission for students to participate in sexuality education classes, commonly known as an opt-in procedure. Advocates of comprehensive sexuality education object to opt-in provisions because they feel that too many students would miss out on much-needed sexuality education for administrative reasons or because they left a permission slip in their locker. In Arizona, H.B. 2430 would have required parental permission for sexuality education, but not for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Several state legislatures also introduced legislation that would restrict the teachers of or subjects in sexuality education. In Alabama, House Bill 30 would ban use of public funds or buildings to “promote homosexuality” and would have prohibited any state agency or public entity from using public funds or facilities to purchase electronic materials or activities that “sanction, recognize, foster, or promote a lifestyle or actions prohibited by the sodomy and sexual misconduct laws of the state.” This ban would have extended to library books and textbooks. Any public employee who violated this law would have been guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

Ultimately, none of these measures, either positive or negative, passed. Nonetheless, tracking this legislation can help us understand how politics and policy can impact what young people will or will not learn in class.

County, school officials went a step further and promised that the new curriculum would only be piloted to students whose parents had signed a permission slip—this is referred to as an “opt-in” policy.³

Still, this was not enough to please parents opposed to the revised curriculum and they chose a tactic growing in popularity amongst local advocates—they enlisted the help of outside advocacy groups. In March 2005 the parents, now organized as a group named Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum (CRC), held a meeting for others in the community. Featured speakers included Robert Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute at Concerned Women for America and Peter Sprigg, senior director of policy studies at the Family Research Council (FRC) and director of FRC’s Center for Marriage and Family Studies. Both Concerned Women for America and FRC are national conservative organizations that adamantly support abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and view homosexuality as a sin. At the meeting Sprigg explained to parents that ideas such as “homosexuals are seriously disadvantaged by discrimination in our society” and that “homosexuality is harmless,” are simply myths. He went on to say that homosexuality is a threat to “public health.”⁴

CRC also enlisted the help of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX), a national organization that supports the practice of “reparative therapy” and encourages gays and lesbians to “leave the homosexual lifestyle.”⁵ PFOX president, Richard Cohen, has close ties to Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church and the conservative organization, Focus on the Family. It is also interesting to note that Cohen has been expelled from the American Counseling Association for exploiting the “trust and dependency of clients,” and for seeking “to meet [his] personal needs at the expense of clients.”⁶

Although many parents enlist the help of outside groups and these groups often threaten litigation, few communities take sexuality education to court. In Montgomery County, however, that is exactly where the debate landed. In May 2005, CRC received pro-bono assistance from The Liberty Counsel, a conservative Florida-based Christian legal group loosely affiliated with Jerry Falwell. They filed a lawsuit against the Montgomery County Public Schools, claiming that allowing discussions about homosexuality to take place in the schools and giving preference to views that are tolerant of homosexuality ignores the views of many students and parents who believe homosexuality is wrong. The lawsuit asked the court to force the school district to include materials from ex-gay groups.⁷

Advocates for comprehensive sexuality education also got organized in Montgomery County. They formed a group called TeachTheFacts.org and launched a website of the same name to reach out to parents, community mem-

bers, and local and national organizations supportive of the revised curriculum.

Despite these efforts, the school system and new curriculum suffered a major defeat in May when a judge issued a temporary order blocking the implementation of the pilot program. The judge explained, “the court is extremely troubled by the willingness of the defendants to venture, or perhaps more correctly, bound, into the crossroads of controversy where religion, morality, and homosexuality converge.”⁸ The ruling also called for a second hearing to determine whether to extend the order.

Soon after the judge’s ruling, the school district pulled the curriculum entirely and decided to start over from scratch by creating a new Citizens Advisory Committee, which will be charged with developing a brand new curriculum. The settlement reached with CRC and PFOX allowed both groups representation on the newly formed committee. New committee members, chosen in October 2005, include representatives from the Montgomery County Council of PTAs; NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland; Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); and TeachTheFacts.org. CRC has refused to nominate an eligible representative, but the committee does include Peter Sprigg of FRC, whom PFOX chose as its representative. SIECUS will continue to document the development of the new Montgomery County sexuality education curriculum.

We will also monitor future debates in other communities across the country to determine if these new tactics of taking school districts to court and arguing that intolerance of homosexuality is protected by freedom of religion become a growing trend.

Parents in Other Communities

Voice

Similar Complaints

Although most communities do not engage in the drawn out legal battle that occurred in Montgomery County, one of the more common challenges teachers and school districts face is objections from parents to the curricula used in their children’s sexuality education classes. These challenges often come from conservative parents who will settle for nothing but a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage approach and are concerned that their school’s program does not sufficiently focus on abstinence. Other times, such challenges are mounted because parents have specific objections to one or more topics included in classroom instruction.

In May 2005, some parents in **Missoula, MT**, worried that the eighth grade sexuality education lessons did not emphasize abstinence enough. During this debate, abstinence-only-until-marriage proponents targeted condom effectiveness in an effort to support their call for a stricter

curriculum.⁹ Despite their concerns, the Board of Education unanimously approved the health curriculum, which stresses abstinence, but also includes a discussion of birth control methods.

In **Bristol, CT**, the Board of Education made several revisions to the health education curriculum after a group of concerned parents complained about portions of the curriculum that discussed abortion. The school's original response to the complaints was to explain that the course in question was not a requirement and that parents could choose to remove their child from the course. The school then notified parents again when the lessons were being taught and reminded them of their right to remove their child.

In October 2004, however, some of the parents consulted with an attorney and argued that lessons about abortion taught in the "life skills" courses were in violation of state law. The school district decided to allow area parents to review and comment on the middle school health curriculum. The district then revised the curriculum accordingly. According to the Director of the Office of Teaching and Learning, "Thirty-one written comments were received... Revisions were made."¹⁰

Although the original complaints revolved around lessons on abortion, one change involved videos that provided information on contraception. Parents complained that this sent a mixed message and undercut other lessons that focused on abstinence. One parent exclaimed, "How are we going to teach abstinence when we show videos showing other options?"¹¹ In response, the Board of Education voted to discontinue the use of the videos.

School Board Officials Take the Lead

Although school board members and school administrators are most often in the role of responding to parents' concerns, over the past year SIECUS has also tracked some instances in which school officials themselves initiate discussion and debate over sexuality education.

In **Berkley, CA**, two members of the Health Advisory Committee, convened by the Berkley School Board, put out a call for support of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in the local paper. The two members of the committee began their opinion piece in the *Daily Oakland Press* with the question, "Berkley parents: Have you had that all-important sex talk with your kids? Do you feel your teen is equipped with the knowledge and personal worth to stand against strong peer pressures to be sexually active?"¹²

These committee members were upset with the newly revised sexuality education curriculum for eighth grade students that covers a range of topics from bullying to pregnancy and the transmission of HIV and other STDs, and discusses both abstinence and contraceptive choices. They also disapproved of a new proposal to allow ninth-grade

students to see a condom demonstration video.

In their opinion piece, the members attempted to convince parents to lobby the school board for stricter abstinence-only programming by misrepresenting statistics and citing opinions from a conservative group, Medical Institute for Sexual Health, as fact. They wrote that "Condoms are never a 'safe' choice—they don't offer protection against sexually transmitted diseases and they certainly don't protect children's hearts."¹³ The members particularly assailed the effectiveness of condoms against human papilloma virus (HPV) and inaccurately stated that condoms are only 85% effective in preventing pregnancy and the spread of HIV. The piece concluded by offering readers information on where they could review the new curriculum materials and the date and time of the next school board meeting.

Despite the publicity, no parents showed up for the presentation of the new curriculum for grades 4 through 9 and small attendance was expected for the second hearing as well.¹⁴

In **Kelso, WA**, the school system is re-examining its abstinence-only policy to the delight of some board members. The curriculum under review was adapted from the state-approved *KNOW HIV/STD Prevention Curriculum*, but includes very limited information about contraception. According to one board member, the abstinence-only approach is out-of-date and "times have changed." She explained, "Basically, I'm hoping we can do a little more in-depth."¹⁵

The district held two workshops on the potential change, at which community members were free to voice their concerns. One former graduate of the high school commented that she "didn't get much out of [the curriculum]" and maintained that "To push abstinence I think is excellent, but to act like there's not more going on is ignorant."¹⁶ The meeting was also attended by the director of the local crisis pregnancy center and volunteers from a Vancouver-based abstinence-only group. Despite testimony from doctors at the local health clinic that the lack of birth control and STD education has caused a "really bad situation," these abstinence-only advocates argued that teaching about contraceptives was "aiming low."¹⁷

This debate comes at the same time that the State Department of Health is reworking its guidelines for sexuality education in the Washington schools. The guidelines focus on abstinence, but also include information on contraception, disease prevention, decision-making skills, and access to health care. Washington state laws do not require schools to teach sexuality education, but do require HIV/AIDS-prevention lessons in grades 5-12. SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation both in Kelso and in Washington State.

In **Sioux Falls, SD**, prospective school board members also took steps to bring the debate around sexuality educa-

tion to the front of parents' minds by making it a campaign issue. While most communities are debating what kind of sexuality education they want in their schools, Sioux Falls is still having conversations about whether the subject should be allowed at all. In a forum held among the six candidates for the Sioux Falls School Board, only two candidates wholeheartedly said it should be part of public education, while one candidate said it should not be taught at all.

Another candidate, John Stratman, argued that if it is taught, abstinence should be an integral part of the lesson. Stratman has heavy ties to the abstinence-only community; he is on the Board of Directors of both the Abstinence Clearinghouse, an international agency that advocates for strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and the Alpha Center, a crisis pregnancy center, both of which are run by abstinence-only leader Leslee Unruh.¹⁸ Unruh and her husband donated money to Stratman's campaign. In addition, the anti-abortion Alpha Center wrote about Stratman in its online newsletter stating, "Mr. Stratman is a strong proponent of parents' rights and traditional values, including abstinence education... His election to the school board would ensure a strong voice for the safety and well-being of our children."¹⁹ One local newspaper suggested that such a mention seemed to blur the lines of election laws as the relevant statute states, "No association or corporation can contribute or attempt to contribute any valuable consideration to any candidate."²⁰

Despite the endorsement, Stratman and the other five challenging candidates lost to incumbent Debbie Hoffman. Hoffman believes sexuality education is important and has said that lessons should include medically accurate information that shows the consequences of choices.²¹

Community Leaders Weigh In

Most sexuality education debates involve parents and school board members or other local officials; occasionally, however, key opinion leaders in the community also become involved.

Holyoke, MA has the highest teen birth rate in the state: 82 births per 1,000 teen girls compared to a statewide rate of 23 births per 1,000 teen girls.²² In an effort to address this problem, the school committee voted to revise its health education curriculum and give sexuality education a higher priority. The school also decided to institute a condom availability program. The program will be piloted in the high schools and will be extended to sixth through eighth grades if it is deemed successful. Students wishing to receive condoms will need to speak to a nurse, who will explain pregnancy, AIDS, abstinence, and that condoms are not 100% effective.

A letter was sent home to parents explaining that they will have the option of preventing their children from

obtaining condoms in school. A school physician and Interim Director of Health Education for the Holyoke schools described the need for the program by saying, "we had to do something to combat what we were seeing."²³

Not everyone agrees with the school's new program, however. The latest opposition comes from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Springfield, who argued that the school system is "an endorser and an enabler of early adolescent sex."²⁴ In a statement he said, "I am profoundly disappointed and disturbed" and suggested that school officials are reducing sex to "meaningless self-gratification."²⁵ Despite the opposition, the school intends to go forward with the program.

MATERIALS QUESTIONED

In addition to sexuality education programs and curricula, books and other materials that may deal with sexuality-related themes are also subject to scrutiny and debate. It is not uncommon for these materials to spark controversies when attempts are made either to use them in sexuality education classes or to ban them from classrooms, school libraries, and public libraries. Such disputes occurred across the country this school year as some parents objected to books and materials they deemed too sexually explicit or graphic and others rallied against censorship.

Revising Textbooks and Pamphlets

One of the decisions that has the most impact on what students will learn in class is the choice of textbooks. Unlike many decisions made at the district level, this choice is often made at the state level, and, not surprisingly, debates frequently ensue. At the end of the 2004 school year the **Texas** State Board of Education began reviewing new health textbooks. The conservative-dominated board chose to review four books, only one of which mentioned condoms in the text.²⁶ A coalition formed to demand more comprehensive materials in the health curriculum, citing Texas' abnormally high rates of teen pregnancy and STDs as proof that Texas teens need more information. Advocates of comprehensive sexuality education argued that the books under consideration did not fulfill the Texas state curriculum standard, *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills*, which requires that students be able to "analyze the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of barrier protection and other contraceptive methods."²⁷ The controversy began to generate national attention however, when board members demanded changes in the books' references to marriage and sexuality before the approval process could proceed.

Social conservatives on the state school board objected to language in the textbooks, claiming certain phrases were used as "stealth" references to gay relationships and attempts to legitimize same-sex unions.²⁸ Board member Terri Leo

led the fight to force textbook publishers to change the term “partners” to “husbands and wives” and to clearly define marriage as a “lifelong union between a husband and a wife.” Two publishers, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, a division of Harcourt, Inc. and Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, a division of the McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., agreed to the board’s demands that marriage be defined as a “lifelong union between a husband and a wife” and that, when referring to relationships, the words “people” and “individuals” be replaced with “a man and a woman.”²⁹

This is not the first time conservatives on the board have complained about textbooks or even edited books to conform to their values. In the past, environmentalism has been attacked as conflicting with free-enterprise ideals, and a passage describing the cruelty of slavery was described as “overkill.” In one instance, advocates of intelligent design rewrote a sentence that explained that the last ice age took place “millions of years ago.” The new version put the last ice age “in the distant past.”³⁰

The new changes in Texas are particularly alarming to parents and educators across the country because the state is the second-largest market for textbooks in the nation, after California. Publishers will rarely alter text or create new editions for smaller states so books approved in Texas end up in classrooms across the country.

Despite criticism from groups like the American Textbook Council, an independent organization that reviews textbooks, the state board approved the edited health textbooks in November of 2004. The books were scheduled to be in middle and high school classrooms during the 2005–06 school year.

Like textbooks, other printed resources used in classrooms are often also at the center of controversy. Parents in **Fairfax County, VA**, for example, were concerned that updated sexuality education materials did not emphasize abstinence enough. The board received hundreds of emails from parents worried that new materials, which did not promote a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage message, would encourage promiscuity. One father even urged the board to “keep the schools out of this area entirely.”³¹

The controversy focused on two pamphlets that were recommended by an advisory committee of community members, teachers, and administrators, and included information on birth control options. Ultimately, one of the pamphlets, “Birth Control Choices,” was discarded because it said abstinence “can range from no sexual touching at all to everything except intercourse.”³² One board member commented, “It sent a mixed message. I think we need to be clear when dealing with kids that abstinence is abstinence.”³³ The board instead substituted the pamphlet, “Abstinence 101.” The remaining pamphlet on birth control options was changed to remove information on emergency contraception. The board

approved these two modified pamphlets in a 10-1 vote.

Reviewing Videos

Like textbooks and materials, videos used in sexuality education are often subject to intense scrutiny. In **Point Pleasant, NJ**, parents objected to a video shown to sixth-graders that includes discussions of masturbation and homosexuality. The video, *What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up*, also covers the topics of anatomy, reproduction, and the emotional and physical changes encountered during puberty.

One parent said, “This film touches on subjects that these children are not even thinking of. I don’t need the school to educate my child as far as sex education is concerned. I can do that at home.”³⁴ Parents also objected to the apparent lack of emphasis on abstinence in the video, though the majority of the complaints revolved around the mentions of masturbation and homosexuality. These sections were referred to as “immoral” and “offensive” during a Board of Education meeting.³⁵

As a result of the complaints, the Board of Education is planning to review the video and decide whether to replace it. The Superintendent assured parents that whatever decision were made, they would be given the opportunity to view the materials for the class and, if necessary, remove their child from some or all sessions. SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation.

In contrast, the **Washoe County, NV** Board of Trustees rejected a new abstinence-only video on the grounds that it is “fear-based” and could be “harmful” to students.³⁶

The video, entitled *The Rules Have Changed: The Teen STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease) Epidemic*, was produced by abstinence-only proponent Meg Meeker. The district’s sexuality education advisory committee rejected the video in an 8–2 vote; however, nearby Carson City schools adopted the video.

In a letter to the Board of Trustees, one of the advisory committee members explained her opposition to the video: “the over-hyped, fear-based tone was felt to be a turnoff for many teens who most needed to head the abstinence message. Examples of the alarmist format including blood dripping into a sink when a link was drawn between teen suicide rates and teen sexuality.”³⁷

The majority of the board members present for the vote agreed, and felt the video was not the right choice for the school, and the board voted 3–1 in January 2005 to reject the video. One board member explained, “In several instances throughout the film, . . . kids could be led to believe that if you’re sexually active, depression can follow and also suicide.” The one trustee who voted in favor of the video said that she felt it would be an improvement over the video currently used in the seventh grade, which was created in the late 1980s. She defended the drama of the film and said, “I think the issue should be as real as possible. I

SILENCING VOICES: WAGING WAR ON LGBTQ TOPICS AND INDIVIDUALS IN SCHOOLS

Over the past few years, SIECUS has noted a steady increase in the number of communities that are debating issues surrounding sexual orientation in their school systems. One of the most obvious trends this past school year continues to be the push by the conservative forces to completely eradicate any mention of sexual orientation from school materials, curriculum, and events. Even more disturbing is the rise in attempts to remove lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals from schools altogether. In addition, conservative groups employed a new tactic this year when they demanded that the views of “ex-gays” be included whenever sexual orientation was discussed.

Censoring Books and Materials

In many communities, books and other materials in public schools that discuss sexual orientation or feature LGBTQ characters have sparked controversy.

The father of a 5-year-old at Joseph Estabrook School in **Lexington, MA** was arrested after he refused to leave the school in protest of a book his son had brought home about diverse families. The book, *Who's In a Family?* by Robert Skutch, depicts different kinds of families, including same-sex couples with children.

The book was part of a bag of books on foreign cultures and traditions that the school sent home for students to read with their families. The co-president of the Estabrook Parent-Teacher Association said that parents received notice about the book bag at the beginning of the year and the bag's contents were displayed at a back-to-school night earlier in the school year. Children are not required to bring home the books.

However, the father said he and his wife were never told about the bag of books. When his son came home with the books, he became concerned and arranged a meeting with the school principal and District Director of Information. At the meeting, the father demanded that the school notify both him and his wife about any classroom discussions involving same-sex marriage and other “adult themes.”¹ He asked that their son be removed from any such discussions, even if they arose spontaneously.² The father voiced concerns that his son could be exposed to more books and lessons about “gay-headed” households.³

When the administration would not concede to his demands, the father refused to leave the school. According to the school superintendent, school officials and the local police urged him to leave, but after several hours, he was arrested for trespassing and spent the night in jail.

After his release, the father explained that, “Because of the same-sex [marriage] law, people are treating it as a mandate to teach the youngest children. It is not a mandate to teach the youngest of children, particularly if parents say, ‘Hold on, I want to be the gatekeeper of the information.’”⁴

The Lexington School Committee Chairman defended the school's policy saying, “We don't view telling a child that there is a family out there with two mommies as teaching about homosexuality, heterosexuality, or any kind of sexuality... We are teaching about the realities of where different children come from.”⁵

In **Fullerton, CA**, the school district was not quite as supportive when a student journalist wrote an article in the school newspaper profiling three gay and bisexual students. When the story ran in December 2004, Ann Long, the editor of the school paper and the story's author was given an ultimatum by the assistant principal: resign or face being fired.

School officials allege that Long violated state laws by asking students about their sexuality without first getting parental approval. Both the Student Press Law Center and the ACLU, which have publicly supported Long, maintain that this section of the State Education Code is meant to apply to faculty and staff rather than students. Other sections of the state code place the responsibility on faculty advisors “to maintain professional standards of English and journalism” in school newspapers.⁶

In researching the article on the decisions of three students to reveal their sexuality to family and friends, Long worked closely with her journalism advisor and received permission from all three students. According to Mark Goodman, Director of the Student Press Law Center, “this is very frustrating because you have a journalist who did her job and made sure she was as responsible in reporting a story as she could be and an administration that didn't like what it saw and went off the deep end.”⁷

Long refused to step down and was subsequently fired from her post. Though she has received support from across the country, she also acknowledged that “A student is always at the mercy of the school, especially for a high school student without a college acceptance letter in hand.”⁸

Gay-Straight Alliances: A Favorite Target of the Right
Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are after-school clubs designed to help LGBTQ students and their supporters promote respect for all students and address the anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying, and harassment that is frequently present in

high schools today. Conservative parents, administrators, and communities, however, often make it difficult for GSAs to form and accuse them of “promoting homosexuality.”

In Cleveland, GA, a town of two traffic lights in the mountains outside of Atlanta, a controversy over a proposed GSA was drawn out over six months and ended in a ban on all extra-curricular clubs at the high school. The story started in January of 2005, when a student approached school administrators about forming the club. When the small group of students and their supportive parents began the formal process of applying for the club, they were already facing some opposition from the district. In February, the school superintendent sent an email to all school employees stating that the administration was opposed to the action, but that the Equal Access Act required the district to allow the club to apply.⁹

The news triggered an uproar in the small community, and the next school board meeting was moved to the school gymnasium to accommodate all the attendees. The board was able to avoid the issue, however, when, just before the meeting, the students decided to change the name of the club to Peers Rising in Diversity Education (PRIDE). The district asserted that the name change required the group to submit a new application for the club.

To add fuel to the fire, the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church traveled to Cleveland to protest the possibility of the club’s formation. The Westboro Baptist Church has an infamous reputation for insulting rhetoric; members often hold signs saying “God Hates Fags” and protest at funerals of LGBTQ individuals. The handful of protesters were met with overwhelming opposition from small town residents, liberal and conservative alike.

Soon after the incident, the district sat down to negotiate with the ACLU of Georgia. The result was that district officials agreed to “drop their attempts to stop” PRIDE from organizing.¹⁰

Not exactly sticking to the school system’s word, the superintendent then announced a proposal to ban all non-curricular clubs. The next board meeting was again packed with community members, none of whom supported the proposed ban on school clubs. Many students and parents were concerned that banning all clubs would put students applying to college at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, the superintendent defended the move, saying that the goal was “to make sure we’re focused on our primary mission, which is academics.”¹¹ And, on June 16th the committee responsible for reviewing the superintendent’s proposal recommended that extracurricular clubs be eliminated.

Based on this ruling, as of the 2005–06 school year, PRIDE, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Students

Against Drunk Driving, Key Club, and a handful of other student groups were told that if they wanted to continue meeting they would have to find off-campus locations.

In June 2005 the Georgia State Board of Education considered a new rule that would have required parents to give permission for students to participate in school clubs. To the relief of many Georgia gay-rights advocates, who felt the rule targeted GSAs specifically, the State Board of Education voted against the proposed rule.¹²

SIECUS also tracked new and ongoing debates over GSAs in **Colorado Springs, CO** and **Boyd County, KY** among other communities.

The Removal of LGBTQ People from Private Schools

SIECUS is very disturbed by what appears to be a new trend of discrimination against LGBTQ students and families in private schools. Private schools do not have to guarantee all students an equal opportunity to education and this has allowed them, in some cases, to prevent LGBTQ people from being part of school activities or attending school at all.

In **Jupiter, FL**, a senior at Jupiter Christian High School was expelled without explanation days after confiding in his school’s chaplain that he was gay.

On the third day of the student’s senior year, the Bible teacher, also the school chaplain, took the student aside and asked if it were true that he was a homosexual. According to the student, the teacher assured him the conversation would be confidential, yet he and his mother were subsequently called in to meet with school officials. At the meeting, they were offered three options: counseling for the student to change his sexual orientation, voluntary withdrawal, or expulsion. The student said, “I was just shocked...I just couldn’t believe what I was hearing.”¹³

In late October 2003, the student and his mother filed a lawsuit against the school, requiring clarification of the school’s policy regarding gay and lesbian students as well as an official explanation for why the student was expelled. His mother said, “I think this school needs to be honest about who they are... If I had known this was their policy, I never would have sent him there this year. That was the most devastating thing I’ve seen him go through.”¹⁴

The student added a claim for negligent infliction of emotional distress to the lawsuit against the school, but in May 2005 that claim was dismissed because Florida law usually prohibits plaintiffs from recovering damages for emotional distress unless physical injuries are sustained as well. The student’s lawyers are appealing the decision.

At a Catholic school in **Costa Mesa, CA**, the focus has been on the gay parents of two young students. A con-

troversy at St. John the Baptist School began in December 2004, when eighteen parents demanded that the school remove from the kindergarten adopted twin children of a same-sex couple, arguing that their parents' "lifestyle" violates church doctrine. Worried that the school would be forced to compromise its Catholic teachings as a result of the boys' presence, the parents threatened to involve the Vatican and remove their children from the school.¹⁵

The issue appeared to be settled in January 2005 after the diocese rejected the parents' demands, but a new school policy has opened this topic up to further debate and discussion. A draft of the new policy to be included in the 2005–06 parent-student handbook stated, "The children adopted by a same-sex couple may enroll on the condition that the same-sex couple agree not to present themselves as a couple at school functions."¹⁶ SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation.

A New Tactic: Demanding the Inclusion of "Ex-gays"

Recently some conservatives have taken a different approach to undermining any diversity education in schools that stresses tolerance of LGBTQ people. Many of these groups are now demanding that any materials presenting homosexuality as "normal" be accompanied by materials touting the existence of "ex-gays." People who identify as "ex-gays" have often undergone "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy"—psychotherapy aimed at changing the client's sexual orientation and eliminating all homosexual desires. Despite being discredited by all major medical and mental health associations, "ex-gay" groups are asserting themselves in public debates on everything from therapy to sexuality education.¹⁷ This tactic has been particularly successful in the debate surrounding the sexuality education curriculum in Montgomery County, MD (see story on page 4).

A similar debate took place in **Maui, HI**, when administrators at the King Kekaulike High School met with some complaints from parents over its plan to show *It's Elementary*, a film that teaches tolerance towards LGBTQ individuals. The parents explained that the film would only present the view that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, with which they disagree.¹⁸ They recommended that the school also show *I Do Exist*, a film featuring a man who claims to have changed his sexual orientation from gay to straight. The film was written and produced by Warren Throckmorton, a "reparative therapist" with a degree from the conservative Grove City College (PA) and connections to the "ex-gay" movement. Despite the complaints, the school decided to show the *It's Elementary* without the accompanying "ex-gay" film.

In **Fairfax, VA**, a similar plea by a county school board member triggered formal action by the school board distancing themselves from the "ex-gay" movement. The board

member sent letters to school principals telling them to invite outside speakers and groups to present the "ex-gay perspective."¹⁹ The letter called homosexuality a "very destructive lifestyle" and suggested schools invite groups like Concerned Women for America to speak about the topic.²⁰

The board reported that it was flooded with emails and phone calls condemning the letter. It acted quickly and issued a statement saying the "letter sent by [the board member] was not authorized by and does not reflect the views of the School Board. The School Board continues to support the family life education curriculum and its treatment of this sensitive topic."²¹

States Move to Keep LGBTQ Issues Out of Schools

Although most relevant decisions are made on the local level, SIECUS continues to note an increase in the number state legislators getting involved in debates over public school sexuality education. Recently, many of these legislators have focused their attention on issues involving sexual orientation in school.

In January, **Virginia** state legislator Glenn Weatherholtz introduced a bill that would bar clubs with a focus on promoting sexual behavior from having access to Virginia public schools. House Bill 2868 amends policies regulating access to public schools and says, "To protect the well-being of students...local school boards shall not allow access or opportunity to use such school facilities or to distribute literature to any club or other group that is focused on supporting, assisting or justifying any lifestyle involving sexual behavior."²² The measure is clearly aimed at preventing GSAs access to public schools.

Weatherholtz was joined by 34 other state legislators in sponsorship of the bill but the measure died the state legislature's 2005 session.

Arkansas, on the other hand, is considering whether to follow Texas' lead (see story on page 8) and ban any mention of LGBTQ families in textbooks. State representative Roy Ragland introduced legislation in January that would force school districts only to buy textbooks that define marriage as between one man and one woman.²³ Ragland has said that the bill is a preemptive measure meant to combat any future promotion of a "gay agenda" in schools and not a response to current textbooks.²⁴

The Arkansas House Education Committee approved the measure in spite of some concerns that the law may restrict information in some social studies or history classes. In February 2005, however, the Arkansas Senate Education Committee fell one vote short of approving the measure, thus killing the bill. The Democratic chairman of the committee commented, "I think [this bill] is an absolute insult

to the educators across this state who by the sponsor's own testimony are doing a great job in selecting appropriate textbooks for our students."²⁵

In **Alabama**, State Representative Gerald Allen (R) proposed a bill that would ban all books with gay characters or themes from public libraries, schools, or universities. Allen also sought to ban gay marriages through an amendment to the state constitution. The proposed bill would prohibit the use of public funds for "the purchase of textbooks or library materials that recognize or promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle."²⁶

In 2003, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which declared all state laws criminalizing homosexual behavior to be unconstitutional.²⁷ Despite this decision, Alabama still has a sodomy and sexual misconduct law outlawing homosexual behavior. In a press conference, Allen referenced this obsolete law as precedent for his new bill. He maintains that all materials that "promote" these formerly illegal acts should also be banned.²⁸

Banned books would include non-fiction books that present homosexuality as genetically influenced or works of fiction that involve gay or lesbian protagonists. At a press conference, Allen was asked about Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," and agreed that under the new law, university theater groups would not be able to perform the play.²⁹ Allen did not specify whether all literature by gay or lesbian authors would also be banned.

Allen originally pre-filed Alabama House Bill 30 in January of 2005 because Alabama's legislature was not in session. The bill has since died in the legislature's 2005 session.

The Future of LGBTQ People in the Public Schools

When a parent or school official challenges a book because of a gay character or takes on a curriculum because of the mention of same-sex couples, they send a clear message to LGBTQ teens that their very existence is inappropriate in the school. Unfortunately, conservative parents and administrators, along with national far right organizations, continue to fight to keep any mention of LGBTQ people from our public schools and send this damaging message to our young people. Over the past few years their efforts have intensified and they have worked on state and local levels, even developing new tactics.

The bright spot in this debate is the amazing work being done by young people in public schools across the country to combat this intolerance. GSAs continue to multiply and, slowly, schools are coming to understand that they can no longer ignore the presence of LGBTQ students in their midst. As a representative for the Montgomery County Public Schools explained, "Homosexuality is part of the

world we live in. There's no moral judgment there. But we've been pretending it doesn't exist, sweeping it under the rug, and it's good we're going to address it finally."³⁰

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don't think you can overly frighten someone if you tell them the truth."³⁸

The board will likely vote on the subject again, however, because a number of board members were absent for the original vote and a four vote majority is needed for any formal action. SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation.

Banning Library Resources

Most debates over materials center around those that are used in the classroom, but some focus on those resources that are available to students in the school library. At a school board meeting in **Fayetteville, AR**, a mother of five voiced complaints about three books in the school library that she felt were too sexually explicit. The books included: *The Teenage Guy's Survival Guide*, by Jeremy Daldry; as well as *It's So Amazing* and *It's Perfectly Normal*, both by Robie Harris. The parent said, "The school district doesn't have the right to circumvent the beliefs I'm giving to my own children."³⁹ She also said, "These children who've checked out these books have been sexually harassed. Putting extreme content into context does not make it unoffensive." She explained that she has banned her children from using the school libraries for the time being.

District officials responded to the criticisms by pointing out that the books are not used in classroom instruction and are only available in the libraries. Still, the concerned parent filed a petition with the school about the book *It's Perfectly Normal*. Interestingly, the book is not available in her own children's library, as it was lost; however, she found out about it from Point of View, a Christian radio group, and later learned it was available elsewhere in the district.

As a result of her complaint, the school district created a seven-member committee to review the book *It's Perfectly*

Normal. Each committee member received a copy of the book to review, in effect forcing the school to order six additional copies. The committee decided that the book should be allowed to remain in the schools' libraries, with some limitations. It will remain in general circulation in junior high libraries (though currently there are no copies there) and will be available in parent libraries in middle schools and elementary schools. In middle schools, a student will be allowed to check out the book only with the approval of both an educator and a counselor or administrator.

The concerned parent was not happy with the decision and vowed, "There will be a next step. I'm not sure exactly what that will be."⁴⁰ No decision has been made on the remaining two books. SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation.

In **Muhlenberg, PA**, the school board made a rushed decision to ban *The Buffalo Tree*, a novel set in a juvenile detention center, and then reinstated the book two months later. At an April school board meeting, in a somewhat dramatic display, an eleventh-grader read a scene from the book set in a communal shower, where an adolescent boy becomes sexually aroused. She followed her reading with the comment, "I am in the eleventh grade and I had to read this junk."⁴¹ In a unanimous vote one hour later, the board pulled the book from the curriculum.

Following the decision, students, teachers, and parents began circulating petitions and publishing letters to the editor in the local paper defending the book. At the next school board meeting 200 people from the 10,000-person town arrived to debate *The Buffalo Tree* and censorship in general. After hearing passionate pleas on both sides, the board president apologized for the hasty decision made the month before.⁴² The board, wary of making another quick decision, waited until June 2005 to formally vote.

Ultimately, the board voted 6–2 to reinstate the book on the eleventh-grade reading list.

School policy in Muhlenberg allows for a student or parent to object to a book on religious or moral grounds and request a substitute. It was suggested that parents be given the book lists, complete with a short synopsis of each, to curb further challenges. One parent also suggested a rating system for the books on the reading lists. Despite the English Department's adamant rejection of this idea, the board has asked that it comply with the parent's request.

SIECUS also tracked efforts to ban books in **Pleasant Valley, IA**,⁴³ **Solon, IA**,⁴⁴ and **Hartland, WI**.⁴⁵ The American Library Association reported that 547 books were challenged in 2004, up from 458 in 2003.⁴⁶

Controversy Preventing Action

Unfortunately, sometimes adults in a community spend so much time arguing about whether materials are appropriate that young people completely miss out on these much-needed resources.

In **Fredrick, MD**, the County Board of Education could not reach a decision about how to distribute teen help cards and eventually decided to drop the issue. The cards were prepared by the County Health Department for the school's ninth grade sexuality education unit and provided phone numbers for a variety of services including al-anon, mental health services, and a suicide hotline. The school board dispute focused on the "confidential services" presented on the card.⁴⁷ The services consisted of phone numbers where students could find out how to access emergency contraception and birth control.

School board members opposed to distributing the cards believed advertising for "confidential services" undermined parental involvement. "We certainly want teens to talk to their parents, but kids don't always go to their parents—even in some of the most open households," said Melinda Malott, Director of Nursing at the Heath Department. She continued, "we don't want kids finding out from their peers and the Internet about some of these issues. Often they go to someone else. If that opportunity arises, we'd like to be that someone else."⁴⁸

The board tried to settle the issue by creating its own help card, but could not agree on what information to include. Ultimately, no new card was created and the existing cards were not distributed. When the Family Life Advisory Committee asked the board to reconsider its inaction on the teen help card, the committee was told that the cards were a "done issue" and that it should not be brought up again for at least a year.⁴⁹

OUTSIDE GROUPS CHALLENGED

Many school districts rely on outside groups to present some

or all of their sexuality education lessons. These groups, which can range from county health departments or local family planning and reproductive health clinics to abstinence-only-until-marriage groups funded by federal grants, are often challenged by parents and community members.

Planned Parenthood Challenged in the Schools

Many school districts have traditionally used Planned Parenthood curricula, materials, or educators to provide some portion of their sexuality education. In recent years, these relationships have been increasingly challenged by parents who object to Planned Parenthood's education and/or politics.

The **Quakertown, PA** school board voted in November 2004 to cut a Planned Parenthood program from the district's health class. The district teaches an abstinence-based lesson that includes some information on contraceptive methods. Since removing Planned Parenthood from the classrooms, the district has indicated that its own health teachers will now be leading instruction on all sexuality education topics. One school board member clearly in favor of the move commented, "If our focus is abstinence, there is no way we should have guests teaching from organizations that are contrary to this."⁵⁰

While the decision came down against Planned Parenthood, there was some support amongst the community for the organization's work in the schools. A senior at one of the high schools in the district commented, "I believe an abstinence-only program is turning a blind eye to that fact that teens are going to have sex whether or not they are taught about contraception."⁵¹

In **Colorado Springs, CO**, Planned Parenthood has been a part of the district's high school sexuality education program for 17 years. In January, the Board of Education reaffirmed that the presentation by Planned Parenthood would stay, despite vocal disapproval by many parents and half the board. One disgruntled citizen called Planned Parenthood a "Trojan Horse in our school system," and others accused the board of condoning abortion and promiscuous sex by allowing the organization to address students.⁵² Colorado Springs, which is also home to the right wing, evangelical organization, Focus on the Family, has an abstinence-only-until-marriage policy in its schools. Planned Parenthood is not allowed to speak about abortion or birth control in health classes. The disputed presentation focuses on the use of contraceptive devices only in their role as disease prevention methods.

When parents in **Sarasota, FL** mounted a challenge to Planned Parenthood in their schools, they faced a contentious debate and a response from the district's teachers. The first complaints were made in May of 2004, and by January 2005 the school board meeting drew 500 people. Before the school

board could make an official decision, three of its members had already publicly stated their support for a ban.

The brewing controversy prompted a letter of protest to the board from 70 teachers at one of the high schools. The teachers saw the possible intervention as a threat to their independence and a move by the board to appease a small group of outspoken parents. “If they are going to start there and let a vocal minority control this whole situation, what is next?” asked one high school teacher. “What speakers are we going to knock off next? It’s going to snowball,” he continued.⁵³ The letter to the board laid out the teachers’ concerns that Planned Parenthood was being opposed on principle, rather than on the content of its course material.

In an effort at compromise, the board ruled that schools would now offer dual sections of the Life Management Skills class to all high school students. One section would include guest speakers such as representatives from Planned Parenthood and the other would not. The board was careful not to single out Planned Parenthood and instead included in the decision any outside speakers.

Restrictive Programs Challenged

In other communities, parents and school board members have worked to remove restrictive, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs from their schools.

Largely as a result of protests from a group of Shamrock Middle School parents, the district superintendent in **DeKalb County, GA** has temporarily shelved the *Choosing the Best* abstinence-only-until-marriage program.

At a January 2005 meeting, the parents—many of whom were scientists, physicians, and researchers from nearby Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—challenged the federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage program and called for more comprehensive information to be taught instead. One Shamrock Middle School parent said, “This should never have gotten past the first person’s desk. It should’ve been seen for what it is...I think it’s political. I think it’s religious. I don’t think it should have come into the school at all.”⁵⁴ The parents asked why the program was accepted without first reviewing its scientific accuracy.

Officials from the school district admitted that the curriculum was never officially approved by the school board, although approval was required. In January 2002, the program was approved by a sex/AIDS education advisory committee after Choosing the Best, Inc. approached the school system. *Choosing the Best* came free to the schools from the publisher, which may have been a factor in its easy approval. According to DeKalb’s Coordinator of Health and Physical Education, it was supposed to go to the board but did not. He explained, “There was a major change in the county. I can’t remember what happened at that point.”⁵⁵

The *Choosing the Best* program was introduced in eighth-grade health classes in 2004 and teachers were scheduled to be trained on the sixth- and seventh-grade programs in early 2005.

The *Choosing the Best* program has been highly criticized because of its strict abstinence-only-until-marriage focus, reliance on fear and shame-based messages, inclusion of misinformation, and biased views of marriage and sexual orientation.⁵⁶ One parent at the meeting, a biologist by trade, exclaimed, “Yes, we would all like our children to be abstinent, if not to marriage, at least darn close to it. But you can’t take this head-in-the-sand approach. You still provide them with the information to protect them.”⁵⁷

Choosing the Best, Inc. is a well-connected organization headed by Bruce Cook. In September 2003, Cook was appointed by the Georgia governor to lead the Board of the Department of Human Resources, but subsequently stepped down in March 2005 amidst some criticism that he was using his position to promote his organization.⁵⁸ Choosing the Best, Inc. is also heavily funded by the federal government; it received a three-year federal grant for almost \$1.5 million in 2001. In 2004, it won another three-year grant, for \$2.4 million, to serve eight Georgia districts, including DeKalb County.

In mid-February 2005, the DeKalb County schools superintendent asked all middle schools in the district to stop teaching *Choosing the Best*. He said, “We are stopping this in the middle of the road until we take it to the board.”⁵⁹ A Shamrock parent said that he was excited about the decision, but “The issue is actually not so much *Choosing the Best* as what’s important for teaching sex education in the schools.”⁶⁰ SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation.

In **Scarborough, ME**, a parent upset with the comprehensive approach of Maine schools began circulating a petition to allow Heritage of Maine to present its abstinence-only program in the schools.

Maine law mandates that sexuality education courses and materials must be comprehensive. The superintendent in Scarborough described the existing class as “abstinence-based,” but explained there are also lessons that demonstrate condom use.⁶¹ After speaking with middle school staff and administration, the parent began questioning the school board during its May meeting. She told reporters that she objected to the condom demonstration and believes “there’s a mixed message” in the current curriculum.⁶² Only a small minority of the board was supportive and the board chairman and superintendent reluctantly added the topic to the August meeting agenda.

Her suggestion to bring in Heritage of Maine, however, was problematic from the beginning. The organization is federally funded through a Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) grant and offers its program to schools for free. At the time of her petition, there was some confusion

about whether abstinence-only-until-marriage programs like the one run by Heritage of Maine were permitted in public schools because of the state law. However, any confusion was cleared up in September when the Maine Department of Education sent a letter to the superintendents of all schools stating that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs do not fulfill the requirements of Maine law. The letter was accompanied by the announcement that Maine would become the third state to reject hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding for abstinence-only programming that it had received in previous years through a separate federal funding stream.⁶³

Soon after the letter was sent, the Scarborough school board made the decision to reject the abstinence-only-until-marriage program. According to the superintendent, the program, “is not appropriate in our minds for use in public school.”⁶⁴

Crisis Pregnancy Centers Removed

Local advocates for comprehensive sexuality education working to challenge restrictive programs often uncover the connection between abstinence-only programs and crisis pregnancy centers. Crisis pregnancy centers typically advertise assistance to women faced with unintended pregnancies who are “at risk” for abortion. At these centers, volunteers use anti-abortion propaganda, misinformation, and fear and shame tactics to preach abstinence as the only method of preventing unintended pregnancies and to dissuade women from exercising their right to choose.

In **Lansing, NY**, the Ithaca Pregnancy Center (IPC) had been making presentations to middle school students. IPC is affiliated with two dozen churches in the area but some parents objected to the moralizing tone of the curriculum and brought their concerns to the school board. The parents pointed to a skit included in the program in which a pair of dirty sneakers was used to symbolize lost virginity. They argued that they would have preferred their eighth graders learn to say no to sex for health reasons and explained that the program’s emphasis on marriage made children of non-traditional families uncomfortable.⁶⁵

As a result of the complaints, the board voted on December 16, 2004 to remove the program from schools.

IPC’s director claims the Board of Education discarded the program because of “Christianophobia.” She maintains that “When people hear about negative consequences that can occur from their choices, they feel judged—and I think you and I know that’s called conviction.”⁶⁶

Groups Take On Each Other

While many controversies during this past school year saw parents challenging the presence of outside groups on each side of the debate in school, one controversy saw these groups take on each other. At an October 2004 school board

meeting in **Palm Beach County, FL**, representatives from the local Planned Parenthood questioned the abstinence-only-until-marriage program, *Be the One*, which was implemented in the school districts’ middle and high schools.

Be the One is run by a local Florida organization of the same name. According to its website, the program started “as a direct response to the rising number of crisis pregnancies seen at local First Care Pregnancy Centers.” The website states that many devastated teenage girls were coming to the centers and “had never heard of abstinence and knew little about preventing pregnancy and STDs” and that the program was created to fill the need.⁶⁷

At the school board meeting, a representative of the Adult Role Model Program at Planned Parenthood explained her opposition to *Be the One*, “Babies are having babies. Our school system needs to have a better program to prevent our teens from getting pregnant and contracting sexually transmitted diseases.”⁶⁸ Planned Parenthood representatives pointed out that 300 high school-aged young women give birth to their second or third child each year in Palm Beach County. Despite teen births dropping across the state of Florida, 41 Palm Beach County girls under the age of 15 became teen mothers last year.⁶⁹

The Youth Education Manager for *Be the One* defended the abstinence program: “Condoms are not 100% effective against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and they are zero percent effective toward the emotional consequences teens suffer after their first time.” He went on to say, “Our program does not try to use scare tactics. People assume it’s a ‘just say no’ message program, but we want to educate adolescents.”⁷⁰ One school board member also defended the program: “Having sex is like playing Russian roulette. The way you protect yourself is like having one chamber or all bullets full.”⁷¹

No change was made at the time and as of the beginning of the 2005–06 school year, *Be the One* was still invited into many Palm Beach County schools. Some local officials, however, have noted the high teen pregnancy rates in the county and become involved in the debate. The Palm Beach County Health Director has been meeting with school district officials to discuss changes she would like to see in the classroom and commented “This can’t stay on the back burner any more.”⁷² SIECUS will continue to monitor the situation in Palm Beach County.

THE FUTURE OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION DEBATES

During the 2004–05 school year, advocates on both sides of the sexuality education divide have displayed the same passion as they have in years past. The current administration’s support for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs may have emboldened some conservative supporters to speak up

in local disputes, but they were consistently met by opponents to their ideologically-driven agenda.

For those of us who wish to see a comprehensive approach to sexuality education be adopted by more and more communities, this school year was filled with both victories and defeats. We must remember, however, that regardless of the outcome, each debate provides important lessons. Advocates on all levels must learn from the examples of local controversies such as the one in Montgomery County, MD; these stories give perspective into the strategies that may be used to prevent comprehensive sexuality education and those that we can use to promote it. And most importantly, they show us that there is hope; students have been gaining access to medically accurate sexuality information one community at a time, and we look forward to reporting on more such stories.

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LAKOFF FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATORS: THE POWER AND MAGIC OF “FRAMING”

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Like a lot of other sexuality educators in recent months, I’ve been reading and synthesizing a new book by Dr. George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. Lakoff is a cognitive scientist, a neurolinguist to be more exact, who specializes in a fascinating field known as “Semantic Framing.”

Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As Lakoff explains, we can’t see or hear frames. They are part of our “cognitive unconscious”—structures in our brains that we cannot consciously access. These structures determine the way we reason and what counts as “common sense” to us. Frames relate directly to language, because all words are defined relative to certain cognitive frames. Whenever we hear a certain word, therefore, *its unique frame is activated in our mind*.

Lakoff asserts that the strategic success of the Far Right, in its quest for absolute political power in the United States, can be explained in large measure by its masterful manipulation of semantic frames. He explains that through the work of thousands of think tank intellectuals, language professionals, writers, agents, and media specialists—funded by billions of dollars in donations and grants over the last thirty years—conservatives have worked a “revolution of thought and language.” They have successfully managed to brand liberals, long thought of as populists in our country, as “effete, elitist, unpatriotic spendthrifts” and a threat to American culture and values. At the same time they have successfully re-branded conservatives, whose policies favor the economic elite, as the “real” populists.

For many of us in the sexuality field, Lakoff is salve for a burn that won’t heal. He *really* gets it—the why and the how of the relentless attacks by the Far Right on our field, and on many of us personally, over the past three and a half decades.¹ We sexuality professionals, Lakoff infers, like other progressives, have been targeted because we are perceived as threatening to the Far Right’s “strict father mentality”—an essentially patriarchal world view shared by the political and religious right wing in this country—and to its decades-long mission to impose this mentality on the rest of the nation.

To the Far Right, Lakoff explains, government should exist as a vehicle for preserving and serving *their values* (e.g., self reliance; strict discipline; the accumulation of unbridled wealth and power; obedience; punishment as a means of

controlling behavior; the literal word of the Bible; premarital chastity); *their self interest* (tight control over schools, particularly in the area of values or “character” education; public financing of sectarian schools; deregulation of big business; concentrated governmental power and one-way, top down communication from government officials; control over sex and reproduction); and *their world view* (welfare and entitlement programs are immoral, because they sap self reliance; power should belong to the wealthy, because they have earned it; the environment belongs to human beings who may use it as they see fit as a means of increasing their prosperity; gays and lesbians threaten the established order of the patriarchy and must receive no “special” rights; “Christian” values should provide the core values of government; the U.S. has the moral authority to act as it wishes in the larger world; God trumps science).

THEY CONTROL THE LANGUAGE

The remarkable success of the Far Right in winning the debate in this country over major social, moral, economic, religious, and even scientific issues of our times is due, Lakoff contends, to its uncanny ability to *control the language of the debate*. “It has long been a right wing strategy,” he writes, “to repeat over and over phrases that evoke *their* frames and define issues *their* way. Such repetition makes their language normal, everyday language and their frames normal, everyday ways to think about issues.”²

Who among us in the field has not marveled, while at the same time bristled with disgust and anger, at the way the Far Right has co-opted the language used to talk about *our* issues. Let’s start with “pro-life” and “culture of life,” terms that relegate those who favor the availability of safe, legal abortion to being, what, pro-death? How about “partial birth abortion,” a concocted term (which most Americans probably think is the actual scientific term) for a rarely used procedure that was designed specifically to connect abortion, *all* abortions, to a horrific mental frame. Or, phrases like “the gay agenda,” meant to evoke images of sick “homosexual pedophiles” hiding behind “fake” concerns for school safety issues so they can get into our schools and “recruit” our children.

The pro-abstinence-only lobby devises increasingly polarizing and demonizing language to describe anyone—

including not only sexuality educators but also nationally respected researchers, physicians, and medical organizations—who rejects its approach, whether on the basis of available scientific evidence, clear developmental need, and/or genuine concern for public health. Typical are the cunning and pejorative terms used to describe sexuality educators such as “condom pushers” (note the *drug* pusher connotation) and “promiscuity promoters.” This language is clearly intended to imply that if you’re not for abstinence-only-until-marriage, then, quite logically, you favor immorality and telling children that absolutely *anything* goes.

We must be attentive as well to the more subtle forms of linguistic manipulation being used. I once attended a workshop given by one of the Far Right’s gurus of the “character education” movement. At the beginning of his talk he listed many of the problems that plague young people in today’s society. One of the given examples was “premature sexual behavior.” By the end of the day, however, through a subtle but steady shift in his use of language, the phrase *premature* sexual behavior had been replaced with the phrase *premarital* sexual behavior, and the word “chastity” had found its way onto a list of “core” human values. I looked around in horror to see the nodding heads of the very eclectic group of smart, open-minded educators—teachers both in secular and non-evangelical parochial settings—in the room. Not one had detected the frame shift.

Preventing teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and eliminating premarital sexual behavior are two separate (though in some ways indirectly related) goals or end points. While both are legitimate endeavors depending on the setting and context, they derive from a very different set of motivations and values, and they require two wholly different strategy sets. Nonetheless, the Religious Right has played a calculated and very effective shell game with the American public by successfully merging two vastly different concepts or frames—*abstinence*, one of many behavioral choices that can serve to enhance sexual health, and *chastity*, a state of being in the service of religious, spiritual, or moral purity.

TAKING BACK THE LANGUAGE OF THE DEBATE

What Lakoff has to say about what has happened in our country is frightening and distressing, yet his core message is one of hope and strength. He reminds us that the core values of progressives are the *true American values*: nurture and compassion; taking care of the less fortunate; freedom and liberty; equal opportunity and prosperity for all; fairness and equity; honesty; trust; open, two-way communication; cooperation; community building; diversity and shared political power; governance that favors core ethical principles over the personal values of powerful individuals.

The problem is that progressives suffer massively from what he calls “hypocognition,” or the inability to frame clearly and strategically their messages in terms of the specific values they, and most other Americans, hold dear. (I have wondered for decades, for example, where on the political spectrum the nation might be today on the issue of legalized abortion had we in the field from the very beginning defined and explained ourselves as *Pro Conscience*—which is really the point—rather than *Pro Choice*.) What we must do now—and can do—is work collectively to develop the skills we need to craft artful, accurate, and resonant “sexuality frames.” And, we can learn to do so without sacrificing our integrity, as the Far Right has done to itself by crafting their frames purely for political gain and thereby deliberately deceiving and manipulating the American public.

The First Step: Stop Using *their* Frames

We, too, in the sexuality field often suffer from “hypocognition.” While admittedly lacking the funds, organization, and political clout to stand toe to toe with the “organized opposition” (I prefer to call them the “organized *imposition*”), we have seriously undermined our own work by failing to uniformly and assertively frame the sexuality debate *in our own terms*.

For example, a vital yet rarely acknowledged—even by sexuality educators—concern about the national focus on abstinence-only education is how it informs and reinforces a narrow, genitally based understanding, or frame, of human sexuality and, therefore, sexuality education. Human sexuality as a construct and sexuality education as a discipline are infinitely more complex than issues concerning genital behavior. The notion of sexuality as a fundamental component of identity and human life—deserving of ongoing, comprehensive, and sophisticated educational programming—has been near-totally dwarfed by the push for abstinence-only education over the past two decades. This reductionistic frame has only further handicapped an already miseducated general public.

Equally, if not more alarming, has been the direct, negative impact on the sexuality field itself. Even in our own professional literature, sexuality curricula are most commonly categorized *by us* either as *comprehensive* (i.e., containing information about abstinence and contraception) or *abstinence-only*, thereby giving the narrowest possible meaning to the word *comprehensive*. In fact, and we should know better, neither of these approaches constitutes sexuality education at all, but rather much more limited “sex” (or “no-sex”) education.

Ironically, by falling into the trap of defining ourselves and our goals around the rhetoric of the pro-abstinence-only lobby, we have in effect lent it major credibility. And, by default, we’ve also abdicated our role as a field in actively

educating the public about the vast differences between “sex” and “sexuality” education—this to our children’s great detriment. Until individuals, families, and communities truly understand the totality of human sexuality, adults will not be able to appreciate and support children’s healthy sexual development in the full and real meaning of the term.

It’s More Complicated than We Think

While Lakoff’s progressive and conservative “frames” provide a wonderful lens for helping us to understand and deal more effectively with the organized imposition (Gotcha. I just reinforced a new frame!), we may have even bigger linguistic challenges in defining ourselves as a profession.

As we are very aware, for generations, a majority of families and schools have neglected and/or abdicated their roles as the primary sexuality educators in children’s lives. The enduring effects of this educational vacuum are cumulative, if not synergistic, across generations: We are a nation of adults who by and large do not know *how to converse or even think* about the subject of sexuality in the mature and sophisticated ways we have learned to think and converse about other complex topics. Most adults, even today, were denied opportunities—just as their parents and their parents before them—to engage in the kinds of ongoing, age-appropriate spiral of learning and dialogue that create the foundation for clear rational thought and able communication. In short, a case can be made that around issues of sexuality, the United States, almost as an entire nation, is developmentally and learning disabled.

These individual and broad cultural deficits mean that the general public is tragically vulnerable to the fear-mongering, reductionistic logic, and politically clever rhetoric offered up by the Religious Right. Truth be told, however, the human sexuality field has itself inadvertently contributed to this vulnerability by not recognizing and addressing it directly, or helping the public become better informed and able to “deconstruct” the Far Right’s simplistic logic.

Said another way, helping the public understand the true purpose and nature of human sexuality education is not simply a matter of its advocates speaking out boldly and articulately. Discomfort, misperceptions, and misplaced anxieties regarding sex and sexual education—some so deep-rooted they have remained unchallenged throughout literally centuries of history—pervade U.S. culture. The construct “sex education” itself evokes a number of powerful and deeply embedded frames—many of which are contrary to the foundational principles of human sexuality education. To allow for the possibility and acceptance of a more comprehensive and holistic model, the public will need opportunities to identify and reconsider these historically embedded “sex education” frames.

In my experience, working in the field since 1971, the staying power of these traditional frames, over time and across broad socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic boundaries, is remarkable. Some of the most common, most influential, and most deeply embedded include:

- Sexuality refers only to those things in life having to do with “sex” and reproduction.
- The word “sex” is a synonym for heterosexual “sexual intercourse.”
- “Sexuality education,” “sex education,” and “intercourse education” are equivalent concepts (though “sexuality education” is sometimes understood as including the developmental, social, emotional, relational, and moral issues connected to “sex,” and/or issues related to sexual orientation).
- Sexual education is primarily a one-way, adult-to-child teaching process that adults can and should control. As a practical matter, then, either schools or families can complete this task. (While some parents charge that their parental roles are usurped by programs in schools, others are relieved that the school is “doing it;” the embedded frame in each instance carries the assumption that the roles of families and schools constitute an *either/or proposition*, rather than a *both/and partnership*.)
- Knowledge about sex is *inherently* powerful, perhaps even inherently dangerous; knowing “too much information too soon” may be especially harmful. Therefore, there is a right time, right age, right person, and/or right way to deliver sexuality information, and the pace, content, and context in which this information is given should be carefully controlled by select adults.
- Learning about sex at the wrong time or in the wrong way may lead directly to “having sex.” Giving certain facts, especially, such as information about pregnancy or disease prevention, is tantamount to “giving permission” to “have sex.” Moreover, talking about topics like contraception sends a *hopelessly mixed message*: “We don’t want you to have intercourse, but if you do, use protection.”
- Showing adequate respect for deeply held religious, personal, or family values requires that schools refrain from teaching any topics, ideas, or values which may be offensive to individual parents or groups of parents.

These ways of understanding or framing sexuality education are obviously in stark contrast to the characteristics of truly comprehensive sexuality education. It’s evident as well, and by no means an accident, that the rhetoric of the “abstinence-only” movement aligns closely with most of these frames. As Lakoff argues so convincingly, the Far Right excels at framing issues in ways that resonate with the ordinary beliefs of ordinary people.

Human sexuality professionals, then, are faced with a triple challenge: highlighting and discrediting a number of widely held, historically embedded frames regarding the sexual learning process; articulating accurate, understandable, and convincing alternative frames; and skillfully contrasting these alternative frames with those of the abstinence-only-until-marriage approach.

REMEDIATING HISTORICALLY EMBEDDED FRAMES

While certainly not all American-born adults have internalized *all* of these embedded frames, or to the same extent, very few hold to none of them. In my experience, the first three examples—which frame sex, sexuality, and sexuality education in such narrow and literal terms—are the most universally held and the most intellectually disabling of all, given that they essentially preclude the public’s ability to grasp the nature of a truly comprehensive approach.

It is vital that sexuality educators everywhere learn how to recognize, highlight, and deliberately reframe these historically embedded ideas in their encounters with the public as *often as possible*. Otherwise, no matter how articulately we learn to speak about who we are and what we do, we cannot and will not be heard by many, many people—who might otherwise be our staunchest supporters if only they understood. In neurolinguistic terms, *our frames* simply won’t make sense to them because *their already deeply embedded historical frames* will prohibit it.

In this section, I am going to look at four existing frames that interfere with efforts to implement comprehensive sexuality education and suggest several ways that we can start the process of reframing these issues.

The Equation of Sex with Intercourse

Even today, several years post the Clinton/Lewinsky debacle, whenever Americans hear, read, write, or say the word “sex,” it is almost universally taken to mean “sexual intercourse.” This linguistic equation of sexual behavior with vaginal intercourse is hugely problematic in a variety of ways:

- It embodies the heterosexist assumption that all people are, or should be, heterosexual.
- As a point of basic logic, it confuses a *category* of behavior, i.e., sexual activity, with an *example* within the category, i.e., vaginal intercourse. (That way of thinking is like confusing a whole produce department with the carrot section.) Therefore, it precludes a complete and complex understanding of the breadth of possibilities open to people as sexual beings. (Suppose people always brought carrots to a potluck dinner when they were asked to bring “a vegetable.”)

- It implies that the only “real” form of sexual behavior is vaginal intercourse, giving the impression, especially to youth, that other forms of sexual behavior really “don’t count,” i.e., they do not require serious thought, relationships, or sense of responsibility.
- It reduces the nature of sexual activity to the juxtaposition of (two particular) body parts, thereby reinforcing the mechanistic idea that “having sex” is about people rubbing their bodies together, rather than bringing their whole selves to an intimate sharing with another person. It also encourages a “goal oriented” approach to love making, a mind set that often becomes a set up for diminishing emotional intimacy and long range sexual satisfaction.
- It encourages a narrow penetrative and procreative view of sexual behavior, which may reinforce an outdated, patriarchal model for understanding and shaping relationships.
- It has worked to sabotage effective HIV/STD education. Since adults typically mean and imply intercourse when they say things like “sex can spread disease,” youth often identify oral sex and anal sex as “safe sex” and even “abstinent” behaviors.
- It implies for those whose bodies are not capable of intercourse due to physical incapacity that their “sex life” is over. Again, were people to think of physical “sex” as *any behavior* leading to, or intending to lead to, erotic arousal—a definition not dependent on any particular body parts or functions—such tragic conclusions could be avoided.

If ever there were an example of the power of “framing” to profoundly impact beliefs and behaviors, the equation of sex with intercourse would be it. And yet, even sexuality educators do not universally define nor consistently use the word sex in ways that communicate a comprehensive meaning, and thereby inadvertently reinforce limiting and even disabling patterns of thought and speech.

If all people, beginning with all people in the field, were to insist on proactively defining “sex” in broad, humanistic ways, on using the word “intercourse” rather than the word sex when that is what they mean to communicate, and on encouraging others to do the same whenever sexual behavior is being discussed, the impact would indeed be profound and in many instances, life altering.

Sexual Learning as a One-Way Verbal Process Controlled by Adults

The common notion of sexual learning, as a one-way communication process in which adults pass on sexual knowledge in the times and ways of *their* choosing fits, of course, neither the way children naturally grow and develop as sexual and gendered beings nor the reality of today’s sexually provocative culture.

Too often, as we well know, children's honestly expressed needs and interests are ignored or suppressed by what adults decide—based on irrational fears and scientifically refuted myths about sexual knowledge—young people should know and not know. Tragically, these kinds of decisions virtually guarantee that someone other than the immediate adults in children's lives will become their primary educators.

We need to reframe this issue to explain that children and the immediate adults in their lives are best thought of as partners in ongoing give and take conversations, to which children bring their unique, developmentally based timetable of questions and concerns, and adults bring their knowledge, caring, guidance, values, and adult perspective.

Confusion of Personal Values with Universal Values

Americans often have difficulty thinking and articulating clearly about “values” in general, and most certainly about sexual values. In debates over values, individuals frequently do not sufficiently differentiate deeply held, but idiosyncratic “personal values” (often religiously based but certainly not always) from those moral values that are nearly universally defined and shared. These abstract values—including honesty, equity, responsibility, respect, human dignity, caring, compassion, etc.—form the basis of ethical decision-making and behavior. (If you look closely, they also happen to be core progressive values.)

Unless these two distinct *types of values* are clearly delineated, the process of reaching a comfortable agreement around the unique and proper roles for families and schools in regard to values education—particularly within public and non-sectarian private school settings—becomes muddled and, frequently, extremely contentious.

It is certainly the family's rightful role to promote and reinforce its unique constellation of personal, faith-based, and other cherished values. The school's responsibility, on the other hand, is to demonstrate respectfulness in word and action toward the diverse personal, family, and faith-based values represented inevitably within any school community, *but not to the point of deference to any particular one*. Individual parents who insist that *their* particular point of view become *the* point of view need to be educated about the basis on which schools can and cannot reach curricular decisions.

In my experience, consensus often becomes possible when schools and families come to the mutual understanding that while their roles in clarifying and reinforcing core ethical values overlap in significant ways, their roles in the domain of personal and family values differ.

Either/Or Roles for Families and Schools

Understanding and framing sexuality education broadly also changes the perception of who participates in it, and where and when it unfolds. When defined solely as the giving of

information and/or guidance, there is only one adult role to consider: who will do the giving and when. The only discussion—and in the United States, often the argument—is over who best to fulfill that role, families or schools, and precisely when it should happen. However, when its course is understood within a broad developmental framework, the “when” and the “who,” in many respects, become moot concerns. And the real question emerges: Since all significant adults in children's lives, especially parents and teachers, have important roles in promoting healthy sexual development, what are the most logical and appropriate roles for each, and how can they best work together to lend each other ongoing support and reinforcement?

Many communities continue to have difficulty sorting out the answers to this question, and, sadly, families and schools too often end up feeling at odds with one another or understanding their job as having to make up for perceived gaps and deficiencies created by the other. By reframing the process as *everyone's* job, the focuses rightly become the unique characteristics of families and schools as institutions and the most appropriate roles and responsibilities for each.

Families, on the one hand, are small and homogeneous and ideally provide intimacy, security, and consistency. They are, or certainly should be, the ever-present safety net in a child's life, always available for support, guidance, and backup. Families, obviously, also provide parents or parental figures, who offer constant role-modeling and ongoing attention and know the child and his or her unique needs better than anyone else in the world. They also have access to countless teachable moments, in which informal learning can take place.

Parents also have the critical role, which they alone can assume, of making clear to their children their own particular set of values and beliefs about sexuality. This information is crucial to children as they become aware of alternative values and value systems and try to sort out the vastly conflicting ideas to which they are exposed in this highly pluralistic society. Later, as children struggle in adolescence to separate their own from their parents' values, knowing clearly what their parents think and value is central and crucial to the process.

Schools, on the other hand, are large and diverse and provide endless opportunities to confront a bigger, more heterogeneous, and less personal world. They are a microcosm of the larger society and an important intermediary in preparing children for their future. Schools have teachers, who are trained to do the formal instruction in a child's life and who have access to curricula and other important education resources. Also, as communities of caring, competent adults with an ongoing presence in the child's world, schools can provide an additional support system, with the

advantage of having somewhat greater emotional distance than do parents.

Finally, schools, unlike families, have groups of students, who can be engaged, through skilled teaching, in constructive conversation with one another about critically relevant developmental issues. As only peers can, they provide for one another an accurate mirror of their own hidden feelings, experiences, and reactions. Extraordinary opportunities for feedback, validation, and normalization can result.

Clearly, schools and families have complementary but unique and non-interchangeable roles; as a practical matter *neither can act as a substitute or replacement for the other*. With the process reframed—as a “both/and” proposition rather than an “either/or” dichotomy—families and schools are freed to work supportively and creatively together.

DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT

As Lakoff explains, the title of his book is intentionally provocative. He uses it to point out that when we see an elephant, our neuron-embedded “elephant frames” are activated, and we are unable to think of the elephant in any other way. That works very well, of course, when what we’re looking at is actually an elephant. But, when it’s not, we have to undergo a re-framing process, or we won’t be able to make real sense of what we’re looking at.

A couple of years ago, I had an experience that pleased me immensely. I was being introduced on one of the TV morning shows, where I was to speak about the sexualization of even young children in our culture by advertisers and merchandisers. To my surprise, the interviewer—who certainly knew my work credentials and background—described me not as a sexuality educator, but as a “child advocate.”

Yes! That’s who we are, I thought. If I’d read Lakoff by then, I would also have thought, now *that’s* the embedded frame I wish would immediately come to mind when all Americans hear the words, “sexuality educator.”

We live and work in a society where what sexuality educators do, how we do it, and why we do it feels at least vaguely nervous-making to average Americans, because of their unconscious, inaccurate, and deeply embedded historical frames. At the same time, we are up against a powerful and shameless lobby, fiercely determined to frame who we are and what we do as *fundamentally dangerous* to the very groups we hope to serve.

Our best hope may lie in the power and magic of framing our message. After all, we are educators. Words are what we do for a living.

As for me, I now frame myself as a child advocate *and* part-time neurologist.

References

George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004.)

Deborah Roffman, *Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense about Sex* (Boston: Perseus Publishing, 2001.)

Notes

1. In fact, I firmly believe, the sexuality field is exactly where the Far Right originally cut its eye teeth: Having successfully used the tactics of fear-mongering, distortion, name-calling, false polarization, and demonstration against a field made especially vulnerable by the general public’s ignorance and anxiety about the subject matter, they now brazenly apply these same disingenuous strategies across the board, from issues like “Intelligent Design” to the “War on Terror.” Had a few brave school boards and superintendents stood up firmly against these tactics in the 1960s, I doubt the Far Right would today hold near the power and influence it has amassed today.
2. Lakoff, p. 50.

LESSON PLAN: CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY: BASEBALL IS OUT; PIZZA IS IN

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Conceptual models are powerful because they set forth the “rules” for a given situation. If these models go unexamined, the “rules” by which one operates may also go unexamined. This may lead to unintended actions or unintended consequences of actions.

The idea for this lesson sprang from my reading of “The Power of Language: Baseball as a Sexual Metaphor in American Culture” by Deborah M. Roffman. (*SIECUS Report*, Volume 19, Number 5, June/July 1991). Roffman prompted readers to “Chang[e] the way we think and act by changing the way we speak.” This started me on a journey to develop a new language and then a new conceptual model for sexual activity. I am indebted to her for providing the inspiration for this new idea.

Specifically, this lesson examines baseball’s use as a conceptual model for sexual activity in the United States. It explores the messages about sexual activity set forth by this commonly used model and asks participants to consider these messages and their reactions to them. It then introduces an alternate conceptual model for sexual activity based on pizza. Participants examine the messages about sexual activity set forth by this alternate model and are asked to consider these messages and their reactions to them. In comparing the baseball and pizza models, participants are prodded to think about the “rules” they carry with them about sexual activity and whether those rules will lead them to positive or negative experiences of sexual activity.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Examine baseball-related words and phrase used to describe sexual activity.
- Understand the differences between the baseball and pizza conceptual models of sexual activity.
- Listen to and discuss the merits and drawbacks of the messages about sexual activity offered by the baseball and pizza conceptual models of sexual activity.
- If they chose to do so, express their feelings about the messages conveyed by the baseball and pizza conceptual models of sexual activity.

MATERIALS

- Newsprint and markers or Chalkboard and chalk.

PROCEDURE

I. Introduction:

- 1) Ask the participants if they’ve heard these phrases (or phrases like these) before:
 - “Did you score?”
 - “I got to second base last night.”
 - “I hear she plays for the other team.”
- 2) Ask the participants what these phrases have in common. Possible answers include:
 - They are about baseball.
 - They are ways to talk about sexual activity.
- 3) Tell the participants that in the United States, baseball is used as a conceptual model to think about and talk about sexual activity. If participants do not understand the term conceptual model, tell them a conceptual model is a concept (an idea) used to tell us what something else is like. In the United States, baseball is used to explain what sexual activity is or should be like.
 - a) Tell the group that baseball is a problematic model to use for sexual activity because it sets up activity and relationships that are unfulfilling, restrictive, and inequitable.
- 4) Tell participants that in this lesson we will explore the baseball model and also a new model that may lead to more satisfying, healthy, diverse, and equitable sexual activity and relationships.

II. Examining the Baseball Model:

- 5) Ask the participants to list all of the baseball-related words and phrases they have heard applied to sexual activity, and what those words or phrases mean in that context. Tell them they cannot invent new terms for this part of the activity but should only share words and phrases that they know are actually used.
 - a) Remind the participants that sharing a word or phrase does not carry the assumption that they use that word or phrase in their own conversations. There is no judg-

ment involved in this piece of the activity. The goal is simply to generate as many baseball-related terms for sexual activity as possible.

b) Record the responses from the participants on the newsprint or chalkboard. Possible answers may include:

- “pitcher” = the active (penetrative) partner in sexual activity
- “catcher” = the passive (receptive) partner in sexual activity
- “first base” = kissing or “making out”
- “second base” = “feeling up the shirt”/fondling the breasts
- “third base” = “feeling inside the pants”/fondling the genitals
- “sloppy second base” = stimulating the breasts with the mouth
- “sloppy third base” = stimulating the genitals with the mouth/oral sex
- “score” or “hit a home run” = to have vaginal intercourse
- “strike out” = fail to get as far in sexual activity as one hoped
- “bench warmer” = someone who isn’t involved in sexual activity (with the implication that they are not “good enough” to do so)/can also be a term for a virgin, whether by choice or inexperience
- “bat” = penis
- “nappy dugout” = a vagina
- “a glove or catcher’s mitt” = condom
- “if there’s grass on the field, play ball” = if a woman has pubic hair she’s old enough for sexual activity
- “switch-hitter” = a bisexual person
- “plays for the other team” = a gay/lesbian person

NOTE: language, especially slang, is regional and cultural. The meanings of terms or the terms themselves may be different from what is presented above. For example, what constitutes “first base” may differ from one community to the next. Participants should be the authority for the language used in their school, area, or culture.

6) Looking at the terms generated, ask the participants what messages about gender and sexual orientation are conveyed by the terms.

a) Possible answers may include:

- The terms are sexist. They imply that men are the active partner in sexual activity and women are the passive partner.

- Men play the game and women are the field upon which the game is played. Good example of this is that the term “second base” only refers to touching female breasts and not male breasts.

- The terms are heterosexist. They assume that sexual activity is a male-female activity. Further, the terms for bisexuals, gays, and lesbians place them outside the “home team.”

b) Tell the participants that this language reveals some of the problems with using baseball as a conceptual model for sexual activity, but to explore the issue further we will need to strip baseball down to its essential elements.

7) Ask the participants to imagine that aliens have come down to earth from a far away planet. These aliens have heard of baseball but know nothing about it at all. They have come to ask for the basic ideas of baseball, not the rules, but the basic concepts (ideas) behind the game. What would you tell them are the basic concepts behind baseball? Record the responses from the participants on the newsprint or chalkboard. Answers will vary. Direct the conversation so that the following seven concepts are generated. (This can be done by offering the ideas yourself, leading the participants to these ideas, or helping participants shape or re-shape their ideas to closely fit with one of the following concepts). Other concepts may be included, but these seven are important to the lesson and should be included.

a) Baseball requires two opposing teams:

- The nature of baseball is competitive; teams play against each other.

b) Baseball involves a series of offensive and defensive maneuvers:

- Offensive maneuvers involve getting onto the field and then returning home.
- Defensive maneuvers involve keeping the offensive players off the field.

c) Baseball has a strict order of play:

- Bases can only be rounded in a specified order.
- Each player has a set position which focuses on a limited part of the field.
- There is a strict batting order for offensive players.
- Umpires are employed to make sure all rules are followed.

d) Baseball has a specific goal to be achieved within a designated length of time. (Baseball is a goal-directed activity):

- The goal is to score more runs than the opposing team during the time of play.
- No ties are permitted; one team must win and the other must lose.

- e) Baseball requires specified equipment and a specified skill set:
 - Materials are needed to play baseball properly (bases, gloves, balls, bats, etc.).
 - Specific skills are necessary to play baseball well (throwing, catching, running, hitting, etc.). Players whose skills are weak may find themselves in the position of “bench warmers,” sitting on the sidelines and never getting to play at all.
 - f) Baseball is a team sport:
 - It is difficult, if not impossible, to play baseball by yourself.
 - g) Baseball is seasonal:
 - “Real” baseball (the games that count) are played during a specific season.
- 8) Ask the participants to remove the word “baseball” from each the seven ideas above and replace it with the phrase “sexual activity.” The facilitator should then explain the resulting messages to the group, making clear what is being suggested about sexual activity by the baseball model.

NOTE: These messages may be written on newsprint or chalkboard as they are discussed, or a prepared list of the messages can be shown at this time.

- a) Sexual activity requires two opposing teams:
 - Sexual activity is a competitive, oppositional activity.
 - The participants are playing against each other; they are not on the same team.
- b) Sexual activity involves a series of offensive and defensive maneuvers:
 - One partner (gender scripts would suggest the man) tries to move the sexual activity forward through a series of offensive moves.
 - The other partner (gender scripts would suggest the woman) resists or tries to slow the sexual activity with a series of defensive moves.
- c) Sexual activity has a strict order of play:
 - Sexual activity should take place in a particular order (the bases): kissing, fondling, oral sex, finally vaginal intercourse.
 - This sets up a hierarchy of behavior where vaginal intercourse has the highest importance. Stopping sexual activity before engaging in vaginal intercourse would be to leave the game unfinished.
 - Each player has a specified role that must not be violated. This is most obvious when gender scripts are applied to sexual activity.

- d) Sexual activity has a specific goal to be achieved within a designated length of time:
 - Achieving orgasm through vaginal intercourse (“getting to home plate”) is often seen as the goal of sexual activity.
 - This point may also encourage the elusive goal of the simultaneous orgasm so that the game ends at the same time for both teams.
 - Although a strict time frame for sexual activity may not exist, the end of the game is often seen as the completion of vaginal intercourse through orgasm.
- e) Sexual activity requires specified equipment and a specified skill set:
 - Having proper equipment may be a positive message if applied to safer sex practices or contraception.
 - The equipment message, however, is often related to body size or shape (especially penis size as men brag about who has a bigger, more powerful “bat”).
 - This may lead to body shame and insecurity about one’s ability to satisfy his/her partner if s/he thinks his/her equipment doesn’t measure up.
 - Note again the inherent sexism in this, as vaginal size does not usually enter into this discussion, and when it does it is not in a positive way.
 - The idea that a specified skill set is necessary for “proper” sexual activity can lead to further insecurity as people wonder whether they know the “right” way to pleasure their partner.
 - Once one’s skill set or equipment is seen as deficient, one should “get out of the game.”
 - This can lead to the denial of sexual activity among seniors, the disabled, those with chronic diseases, or anyone who is not at the top of his/her game.
- f) Sexual activity is a team sport:
 - It is not a solo activity; thus, masturbation is not considered “real” sexual activity and self-exploration as a form of sexual activity doesn’t put one “in the game.”
 - Another aspect of the team sport concept, especially for men, is that of sharing stories of one’s prowess on the field with other team members.
 - Men get to offer a play-by-play for their “fans” and fellow teammates.
 - When sexual activity becomes a spectator sport intimacy and privacy between the partners are not valued and may be lost.

g) Sexual activity is seasonal:

- There are certain times and events when sexual activity is “expected” to occur (e.g. prom night, the wedding night, after a big date, when parents are not home, etc.).

9) After reviewing these messages about sexual activity, ask the participants whether they see sexual activity being talked about and thought about according to the seven concepts just reviewed. It is important to note that even if people are not using specific baseball-related language, they may still think sexual activity works according to the “rules” the baseball model suggests.

10) Invite the participants to discuss briefly (5 minutes) the merits and drawbacks of the messages about sexual activity offered by the baseball model. Tell the participants that opportunities for more discussion will come after the new model is presented.

11) Ask the participants, if they want, briefly (5 minutes) to share their feelings about the messages put forth by the baseball model.

NOTE: Sometimes students have feelings of anger, frustration, or other negative emotions after going through the messages about sexual activity offered by the baseball model. Releasing some of those feelings may be helpful in their moving onto the next part of the lesson. Some students will want to defend the messages put forth by the baseball model. This is also fine at this point.

III. Examining a New Model:

12) Tell the participants that in searching for an alternative conceptual model for sexual activity, it is important to find something that is as universally understood in our culture and as accessible as baseball (or even more accessible). It should also be based upon something that people usually associate with a positive and satisfying experience.

a) Suggest that a possible replacement conceptual model can be built around pizza.

13) As done previously with baseball, ask the participants to imagine that aliens have come down to earth from a far away planet. These aliens have heard of pizza but know nothing about it at all. They have come to ask for the basic ideas of pizza. What would you tell them are the basic concepts behind pizza? Record the responses from the participants on the newsprint or chalkboard. Answers will vary. Direct the conversation so that the following seven concepts are generated. (This can be done by offering the ideas yourself, leading the participants to these ideas, or helping participants shape or re-shape their ideas to closely fit with one of the following con-

cepts). Other concepts may be included, but these seven are important to the lesson and should be included.

a) Pizza is a food used to satisfy hunger:

- We have pizza because we *want* to have pizza. It is what we think will best satisfy our present hunger/desire.

b) Pizza offers many choices; discussion or dialogue is important before ordering/making it:

- Debate or negotiation may be necessary beforehand to make sure that everyone will get a pizza that fits what s/he wants.
- Sometimes people have a “usual,” but even that often involves both parties agreeing to get the “same old thing” or the “old favorite.”

c) Pizza comes in a variety of shapes, sizes, and styles and may be eaten in a variety of ways:

- Some styles and varieties of pizza may be more popular than others, but there is no established hierarchy of pizza. Choice is based on personal likes and dislikes.
- Pizza can be eaten in a variety of ways. While people may have their favorite ways to eat pizza, there is no right or wrong way to do it.
- There is no specific equipment or skill set needed to enjoy pizza.

d) At its best, pizza arrives appealing to the senses:

- All of the senses are engaged, stimulated, and can ultimately be satisfied with pizza.

e) If there is any “goal” to eating pizza, it is simply satisfaction:

- The amount of pizza that will satisfy varies from person to person and experience to experience. Overeating often leads to feeling bloated rather than satisfied.

f) Eating pizza can be a solo, shared, or group activity:

- It is OK to eat pizza by yourself, but it is also OK to share it with others.

g) Pizza is readily available and not bound by any season:

- There is no “right” time to eat pizza. People enjoy at all times of the day and in all seasons.

14) Ask the participants to remove the word “pizza” from each the seven ideas above and replace it with the phrase “sexual activity.” Note that this may involve a slight alteration of the statement, as the messages do not translate exactly as the baseball ones do. However, the intent of the message should not be changed with any

alteration in wording. The facilitator should then explain the resulting messages to the group, making clear what is being suggested about sexual activity by the baseball model.

NOTE: These messages may be written on newsprint or chalkboard as they are discussed, or a prepared list of the messages can be shown at this time.

a) Sexual activity is used to satisfy hunger:

- Sexual activity should spring from desire to satisfy some need (hunger) we experience. This may be the need for pleasure, intimacy, relationship, or something else.
- Sexual activity should not be something entered into out of obligation, or worse, coercion.
- Engaging in sexual activity should be a conscious choice based on one's values and morals, and guided by sound decision-making. Just because we are feeling sexual desire does not necessarily mean that we *should* engage in sexual activity. Each experience of desire should be noted, considered, and evaluated.

b) Sexual activity offers many choices; discussion or dialogue is important before any activity takes place:

- Sexual activity requires communication and negotiation before any activity takes place. Couples who are able to set parameters, negotiate behavior, and discuss their sexual activity before the activity takes place will experience greater intimacy, enhanced communication in their relationship, and more enjoyable sexual activity together.
- Discussion may also result in a decision not to engage in sexual activity. This may result from a number of reasons. The decision to refrain from or limit sexual activity at this stage in the process could be a very healthy decision.
- Even agreeing to the "same old thing" in terms of sexual activity is important before the activity takes place.
- This communication can limit the chance of negative consequences such as sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, or emotional upset that can result from different expectations about what sexual activity might mean.
- This conversation is not about who will ultimately "win," but rather a way to ensure that everyone's needs are met. This removes the oppositional component of the baseball model.

c) Sexual activity comes in a variety of shapes, sizes, and styles and may be performed in a variety of ways:

- Sexual activity contains a wide range of options, all of which are acceptable and equally valid. This removes the hierarchical system of sexual activity in the baseball model. People select their activity based on their individual preferences and goals not on a set of preordained rules.
- Sexual activity is valid no matter the gender or sexual orientation of the participants.
- There is no required equipment or skill set so sexual activity becomes open to all, regardless of age, ability, body type, or any other factor.

d) At its best, sexual activity is appealing to the senses:

- Sexual activity is a whole body experience. All of the senses should be engaged; sights, smells, touches, tastes, and sounds all contribute to a satisfying sexual experience. There is no hierarchy of senses to be found here and no priority is given to the genitals.

e) If there is any "goal" to sexual activity, it is simply satisfaction:

- With satisfaction as the main focus, participants are free to create sexual activity that involves as many or as few sexual behaviors as they wish.
- Participants define for themselves what amount of pleasure makes them feel satisfied and what is considered their own appropriate ending point. The end point of sexual activity may fluctuate from experience to experience.
- Sexual activity becomes directed not by a set of external rules but rather by the needs, desires, and decisions of the people engaged in it.

f) Sexual activity can be a solo, shared, or group activity:

- Masturbation and sexual self-exploration is sexual activity. This allows those for whom partnered sexual activity is unwanted or unavailable to be included
 - No one is forced to be a "bench warmer" in the pizza model.

g) Sexual activity is readily available and not bound by any season:

- Sexual activity should not be ruled by set seasons or schedules. No event (a date, the prom, or even the wedding night) can dictate when sexual activity should take place.

15) After reviewing these messages about sexual activity, ask the participants whether they see sexual activity being

talked about and thought about according to the seven concepts just reviewed.

- 16) Invite the participants to discuss briefly (5 minutes) the merits and drawbacks of the messages about sexual activity offered by the pizza model. It is natural at this point for students to compare the pizza and baseball messages. It is fine to entertain that discussion or to keep it strictly to the pizza model's messages.
- 17) Ask the participants, if they want, briefly (5 minutes) to share their feelings about the messages put forth by the pizza model.

NOTE: It is common for participants to want to invent pizza-related words and phrases to talk about sexual activity. This may be a fun activity; however, make sure to remind students that the language generated should convey the values of the pizza-model. Often the language created sets up the same hierarchies, uses the prejudices about gender or orientation, or otherwise conforms to the values of the baseball model.

IV. Closure:

- 18) Remind the participants that sexual activity can be used to bring out the best in us. It can help us to create pleasurable, intimate, constructive, and fulfilling interactions and relationships. In order for sexual activity to do this, it must be based upon a model that is open, equitable, and respectful of differences. An examination of the conceptual model that drives our personal idea of sexual activity can be an important first step in making sure sexual activity brings positive results.
- 19) Thank the group for their attention and their participation in this lesson.

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LESSON PLAN: YOUR GENDER—BEYOND BLACK & WHITE

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Ithaca, NY

Purpose: This activity explores gender and gender role expectations. Participants explore ways they may and may not conform to societal expectations, as well as investigate ways in which gender may not be as dichotomous as is frequently assumed. Discussion also explores ways one's internal sense of gender is not always in agreement with natal sex.

This activity works best as an opening exercise to explore ideas of gender and gender identity. It can also be used in sessions exploring intersections of sexual orientation, homophobia, gender roles, and genderphobia in society.

Activity:

1. Create and distribute a worksheet for each participant. To create the worksheet, hold an 8" by 11" paper horizontally and draw a vertical line down the middle. On the left-hand side write "Perceived Gender Expectation" and on the right-hand side write "Actual Gender Experience." Distribute a worksheet as well as crayons or markers to each participant.
2. Invite participants to use creativity in drawing pictures or writing words under each of the two categories on the page. Representations can be concrete or abstract, and no one will be asked to share their creations unless they wish to.
Ask participants to draw pictures or write words that illustrate their "Perceived Gender Expectation"—what others expect of them based on their natal sex. In other words, in what ways do/have others interacted with them—perhaps either reinforcing stereotypic assumptions, or, in more challenging ways, based on their biological sex? Participants can include examples of both recent and childhood experiences.
4. On the other side of the paper, ask participants to illustrate their *actual* experience as a gendered person—representations of their individual and unique internal sense of gender. Again, this may be similar to societal expectations and norms, or challenging to them, or both.

Note: It is sometimes helpful to give a few examples of the types of things people may draw, in case participants (especially adults) are hesitant to begin. For example, the facilitator may say "you might draw some separate pictures of instances in your life where you learned about your gender and how you were "supposed" to be or behave as a boy or a girl, or when others reacted to you as a gendered person. What things were you expected to like, dislike, do, or not do? Or, a more abstract idea might be more of what speaks to your experience—for example, different colors that represent this for you, or shapes or designs (rectangle, spiral, etc), or something different altogether."

It is also helpful to have some background music while the participants are engaged in the activity. Creating a "Greatest Gender Hits" compilation of popular songs having to do with men, women, gender roles, etc., usually helps participants unleash their creativity and suspend their disbelief.

5. Make sure to leave ample time for participants to illustrate their worksheets.
6. After participants have completed their drawings, ask them to pair up and discuss only what they wish about the activity. They may decide to actually share their drawings with their partner, to talk about general themes that informed their drawing, or to merely talk about the experience of having participated in the activity without going into specifics about their personal sense of gender.
7. After dyad discussions, invite the pairs to turn their attention once again to the larger group. Some process questions for the entire group include:
 - What emerged from your small group discussions? Any themes, ideas, or feelings in common? What was it like to discuss your thoughts on this with your partner? In what other situations have you had opportunities to explore issues of gender identity and societal gender expectations?

- In what ways might one's Perceived Gender Expectation be similar to their actual Gender Experience? Is there any tension between the two? How about for people for whom the two sides of their worksheet are actually very similar—is that as easy as it appears, or might that be a source of some stress as well? (For example, some participants say that although they like engaging in some activities or behaviors that are viewed as stereotypic, they sometimes feel outside pressure both to conform and not to conform, both from members of the same or another sex).
- In what ways does this discussion intersect with ideas of sexual orientation? (This usually comes up on its own; in fact, some participants have written some of

the epithets that others have called them as part of their drawings, based on their gender presentation.) In what ways might people who are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual experience these things in similar ways? In dissimilar ways?

- What was it like to participate in this activity overall? Was it easy? Challenging?
8. Invite participants to share individual aspects of their drawings if they wish. If the group is agreeable, a gender art gallery can also be displayed by having participants who wish to post their worksheets on the wall with tape or tacks. (Again, the right for participants to pass should be stressed).

BRIEF ACTIVITY: MOST COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT HETEROSEXUALITY

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Since there is the assumption in our society that everyone is heterosexual, see how easy or difficult it is for you to answer each of the following questions as specifically as you can.

1. What is heterosexuality?
2. How do you know if someone is a heterosexual?
3. What percentage of people in the U.S. are heterosexual?
4. What causes heterosexuality?
5. How and when does one choose to become heterosexual?
6. What is the heterosexual lifestyle?
7. Since there is such a high rate of divorce (almost 50%) among heterosexual marriages, why is it so difficult for heterosexuals to stay in committed relationships?
8. Since the rate of child abuse is so high, why are heterosexuals such bad parents?
9. How do heterosexuals have sex?
10. With the high rate of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, and rape among heterosexuals, is heterosexuality unhealthy? Why or why not?
11. Can heterosexuality be changed or cured? How?
12. What are your reactions to answering these questions? Why?
13. Would your answers and reactions be different if these questions had focused on homosexuality? Bisexuality? In what ways?

ACTIVITY: HARM REDUCTION AND SEXUAL HEALTH

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“How might your feelings about your own sexual history influence how you react to discussing sex and sexuality with the young people you work with?”

This is one of the questions on which participants are asked to reflect during Health Initiatives for Youth’s (HIFY) *Positive Sexuality and Youth*, a two day training for adult providers who work with youth. As difficult as it sometimes is for adults to support positive sexual health in their own lives, we have found it even more difficult for adults to support positive sexuality among the youth with whom they work.

We find that adults often approach teen sexual health with apprehension. When they think about teens and sexuality, they tend not to focus on pleasure or safe experimentation or information sharing. Rather, we often hear them talk about disease, unintended pregnancy, or abuse. While these latter topics are a crucial part of any discussion with youth about sexual health, the persistent attention to these topics as the primary focus of discussion with teens can hinder young people’s development into adults with healthy attitudes toward sex and sexuality.

In our *Positive Sexuality and Youth* training we combine presentation and analysis of basic theoretical concepts such as “adultism” and deficit-based approaches with interactive, kinesthetic activities through which participants may explore their own assumptions and boundaries around the subject of youth sexual health.

One such activity, “Harm Reduction and Sexual Health” challenges participants to think of at least one affirming statement and at least one harm reduction strategy to apply to a range of sexual acts in which the youth they work with might engage. Within the broader context of the two-day training, this activity helps participants think broadly about what constitutes risk and encourages them to be proactive in supporting youth practice of harm reduction

strategies, regardless of what acts the youth may choose to engage in.

ACTIVITY

Purpose:

Putting positive sexuality (and harm reduction) into practice.

Introduction to Harm Reduction and Sexual Health:

Ask participants: “What is Harm Reduction?”

Ask participants: “How does Harm Reduction (HR) relate to sexual acts and risks?”

Explain to participants: “Harm Reduction is an approach that aims to support healthy sexuality and reduce sex-related harm experienced by individuals and communities without necessarily changing or reducing the sexual activity itself.”

Exercise:

In this exercise participants get a chance to role play, having conversations with youth about the youth’s sexual behaviors.

- The facilitator places a piece of paper with a different sexual act on each person’s back.
- The participants then circulate around the room talking to each other for a few minutes each, taking turns acting the part of the youth (regarding the sexual behavior) and the adult (in their role as educator or counselor).
- Judging from the statements the “adult” makes to each “youth,” the “youth” should begin to guess which sexual act is taped on his or her back.
- Each interaction between the “adult” and the “youth” should include two elements: an affirming, sex positive statement that relates to the sexual act and a harm reduction suggestion.

Debrief:

Have participants place Harm Reduction strategies on a list. Ask participants to reflect on this list and their experiences with the activity. Some questions to ask include:

- Does the list explore ideas beyond barrier use?
 - Did you ask “youth” you spoke to for options?
 - Were you creative in imagining strategies that can reduce risk?
 - Does the list reflect the fact that HR does not have to be disease prevention focused?
- Did you work with the “youth” you spoke with to enhance negotiation skills? How could this have helped?
 - Did you discuss sexual anatomy and the physiology of pleasure? Why would this be important?
 - Did anything you say to the “youth” you spoke with to empower him or her to make decisions? How did you/ could you have done this?
 - Did you explore the sexual likes and dislikes of the “youth you spoke with”? Why would this be important?

SUMMARY:
ENCOURAGING SELF-AWARENESS AND RESPECT
FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLINICAL SETTING

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Medical students must be prepared to discuss intricate details of sexuality with a diverse range of patients. Issues of sexual activity and function significantly impact patients' physical, mental, and emotional health. A special challenge is that students need to both learn a set of interviewing skill and develop sensitivity to the vast array of personal attitudes and beliefs about sexuality present in the United States. Thus students must consider their own attitudes towards sexual issues and reflect on how they might respond in unexpected clinical scenarios.

In previous years, students were encouraged to watch sexual explicit excerpts from educational videos. Some American medical schools have used sexually explicit videos to prepare students for sexual history-taking since the 1970's. At UCSF, this exercise was switched from an optional "movie night" to a required session with small group discussion in 2001. This change provoked fierce criticism from both students and faculty members. Some felt the material was offensive and/or alienating. Many questioned how watching sexual activity prepared students to talk clinically about sexuality. Thus, we decided to create material that would help students reflect on their values and attitudes towards sexuality as it might arise *in a clinical setting*.

ASSESSING THE NEEDS

The first obstacle was the lack of consensus on what type of clinical situations require a clinician to be aware of their personal values and attitudes. Although there is a great deal of literature on patient-clinician interaction, none we could find surveyed the range of challenges that arise when taking sexual histories. Therefore we interviewed 23 community clinicians, purposively sampled to include varied religiosity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and type of practice.

These participants informed us about when sexuality was discussed in their practices, what challenges they have perceived, and how effective care has been provided to patients whose values and attitudes were perceived to be different from their own. A thematic analysis was performed on this data.

CREATING THE RESOURCE

The next step was to create a video tape for small group teaching. We wrote four vignettes of patient-clinician interaction, based on actual situations described in the interview data. In each vignette, two challenges arise. The scripts were designed to allow a pause for small group discussion after each dilemma emerged. After the pause, the clinical encounter resumed with the clinician demonstrating one possible response to the challenge.

For example, in one vignette about evaluating decreased libido, a physician becomes embarrassed when a patient demonstrates a sexual position. The tape stops for discussion after the patient asks the doctor whether he is embarrassed. When the encounter resumes, the clinician apologizes for his discomfort and emphasizes his wish to continue to learn the details of the patient's problem.

As the story unfolds, the patient casually asks the doctor about a sexual topic the physician knows nothing about. After a pause for discussion, the doctor admits his lack of knowledge, and asks the patient to explain the topic to him, so he can continue to gather an appropriate history. At the end of the tape, the clinician provides medical information while respecting the patient's knowledge. The patient and clinician collaborate to form a plan appropriate for her concerns.

The vignettes were designed to cover diverse patients

and clinicians. For example, in one vignette, a clinician faces a conservative mother who does not wish her adolescent son to be interviewed by himself. In another, a medical student neglects to take a sexual history with an elderly patient.

USING THE VIDEOTAPE

The videotape of the vignettes was used in small groups of six students and one faculty member. We created a facilitator guide created to suggest major discussion points for each vignette. It also includes advice for respecting the diverse

backgrounds of students and faculty. Finally, it emphasizes that discussion must recognize that each situation could be handled in many appropriate ways, often based on the individual background of the clinician.

The videos were used last fall with second year medical students. We look forward to evaluating this tool in the current academic year. Currently, we are grateful to have a teaching modality that anecdotally is described as thought-provoking but, unlike sexually explicit educational material, does not generate student complaints to our deans.

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M i s s i o n

SIECUS affirms that sexuality is a fundamental part of being human, one that is worthy of dignity and respect. We advocate for the right of all people to accurate information, comprehensive education about sexuality, and sexual health services. SIECUS works to create a world that ensures social justice and sexual rights.

