

7-1-2012

Transcending Traditional Approaches to Sexuality Education: A Case Study in Communicating, Constructing, and Defining Sex-Positive Sexuality Education

Jessica A. Nodulman

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**TRANSCENDING TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO
SEXUALITY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN
COMMUNICATING, CONSTRUCTING, AND DEFINING SEX-
POSITIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

by

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M.A., Communication Studies, Eastern Illinois University, 2006

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Karen Foss: *She changes everything she touches. And everything she touches, changes.* – Starhawk

Dr. Janice Schuetz: *What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches.* – Søren Kierkegaard

Dr. Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik: *Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.* – Unknown

Dr. Keri Bolton-Oetzel: *The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.* – Ralph Waldo Emerson



Barbara A. Nodulman: *You are my sunshine.*

Dennis Nodulman: *It's my life, and it's now or never.*

Carly Z. Nodulman: *She's a port in the storm.*



To my loved ones and friends: *Bring on the sunshine, bring on the good times. Thank you for all your love and support.*

**TRANSCENDING TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO SEXUALITY
EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNICATING, CONSTRUCTING,
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ABSTRACT

Guided by a social-ecological approach to health, this study explored a new approach to sex education—sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE). A collective case study was completed on three organizations that utilize a sex-positive approach to sexuality education—Good Vibrations, Scarleteen.com, and The National Sexuality Resource Center’s Summer Institute. Good Vibrations is an adult sex toy retailer, Scarleteen.com is an adolescent sexual health website, and the Summer Institute is an academic institute for scholars and practitioners of sexuality studies. Using qualitative methods of observations, interviews, and textual analysis, this study explains how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed, communicated, and defined.

Despite studying three disparate organizations in regards to their context and audience, all three organizations enacted sex-positive sexuality education in similar ways. A three-tiered definition was constructed to understand this approach. The first tier consists of a three-element model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education. This model explains the three elements—core values, physical environment, and communication strategies—that were seen across the dataset as necessary for enacting

sex-positive sexuality education. The second tier is composed of relational pairs. These relational pairs—inclusivity and normalization, pleasure and health and safety, accessibility and a critical approach, open environment and agency, and clarity and comfort—highlight how within a sex-positive approach to sexuality education, similarities and differences work in tandem. Finally, these pairs inform the third level, a dynamic that sets sex-positive sexuality education apart from other approaches to sexuality education.

The model of SPSE is unique from other approaches to sex education—abstinence-only and comprehensive—because those approaches stay muddled in tensions over appropriate values, contexts, content, and communication strategies. SPSE however, embraces the natural tensions inherent in sexuality education. This dynamic co-existence of multiple concepts forms a holistic approach to sexuality education. Thus, SPSE transcends approaches that enforce an either/or or wrong/right dichotomy and instead brings together divergent perspectives in an all-inclusive approach to sexuality education.

This study contributes to academic scholarship and public health initiatives because it offers a definition of sex-positive sexuality education and concrete examples of this approach in practice. Also, it benefits sexual health communication scholarship because it suggests the centrality of communication to what SPSE is and how it functions. Finally, this study provides research on a new approach to teaching sex education that may be able to help improve our nation's sexual health.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Messages about sexuality are everywhere; at the local shopping mall, window displays at Victoria's Secret feature size-zero mannequins dressed in pink leopard-print negligees alongside signs that urge women to "be wild, be a tease, be *that* girl." Top songs from country to hip-hop charts are filled with lyrics about "needing you tonight" and "making your bed rock." Merchandise for children is infused with sexual messages such as baby T-shirts that read, "Does this diaper make my butt look big?" or "Flirt."

Although United States society is inundated with messages about the appeal of sex and sexuality from popular culture, formal sex-education materials in schools more often than not represent sex as shameful, frightening, necessary only for reproduction, and/or romanticized (Fields, 2008). Fields's (2008) ethnographic work in middle-school sex education classrooms found that formal sex-education classes often are separated into "girls" and "boys" classes because talking openly about menstruation or erections to both girls and boys is considered too embarrassing. Girls are taught that one in four women will be raped and thus are covertly trained to fear men and men's sexuality. The definition of a clitoris often is not given during sex education, and in one case, the clitoris was deleted from a diagram of female sex organs in a middle-school text book (Fields 2008; Moore & Clarke, 1995). The implicit message here is that female orgasm is not necessary for sex since it does not aid in reproduction. Lastly, sex education often teaches students to wait until marriage for sex because the "best" sex is between a loving, heterosexual, married couple (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Fields 2008). Pop-culture messages of hypersexuality confront us constantly; formal sex education,

however, teaches us that sexuality has dangerous strings attached and is a problematic force in our lives.

With this study, I examine three organizations that transform traditional approaches to sex education. Perhaps the most important reason for investigating how organizations effectively communicate sexuality education is because the majority of citizens in the U.S. physically experience consequences from having poor sexual health. Statistics on unplanned pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) suggest that people have not learned how to effectively manage their sexual health. Effective sexuality education—for all ages—offers an opportunity to rectify these sobering statistics.

For example, unplanned pregnancies are a common occurrence of risky sexual behavior. At least half of women in the U.S. will experience an unintended pregnancy by the time they are 45, with nearly three in ten teenage girls becoming pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Furthermore, almost three-quarters of unplanned pregnancies occur to single women. Unplanned pregnancies have serious repercussions, such as missing the opportunity to engage in preconception and prenatal care and a decreased chance that the baby will be breastfed, all of which has been shown to benefit mothers and babies (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy [TNC], 2008, 2010b). There are also large disparities in pregnancies by education and race. For example, only 26% of women who have graduated college have an unplanned pregnancy compared to 50% of women who have only graduated high school. Racially, 69% of black women have unplanned pregnancies versus 54% for Hispanic women and 40% for white women. Hispanic teenagers are 22% more likely to get pregnant than their white or

black counterparts even though black students report being more likely than Hispanic or white teens to have sex (TNC, 2008, 2010a, 2011).

About one-third of women who experience an unintended pregnancy will have an abortion. Women in their 20s account for more than 50% of all abortions, teenagers account for nearly 20% of abortions, and women 30 and older account for the remaining 25%. Abortions are not inexpensive, are not covered by government funding, and are not easily accessible for many women across the country, especially for minors (Guttmacher Institute [GI], 2011). Perhaps the most disheartening statistic concerning abortions is that 54% of women who have abortions used a contraceptive method during the month they became pregnant. However, of those women, 76% of birth-control pill users and 49% of condom users reported using the method inconsistently (GI, 2011). This statistic serves as a reminder of the need for sexuality education to instill in learners that contraception practices such as birth control must be taken every day without fail, condoms must be used properly during *every* sexual encounter, and there are options for emergency contraception.

Not surprising is that 49% of women stated inconsistent condom use as a reason for pregnancy-termination services, because only half of Americans report consistently using a condom during sexual activity (TNC, 2009). Among unmarried men (between the ages of 15 and 44) who had sex within the past 12 months, less than half (48%) reported using a condom during the last time they had sex. Furthermore, 78% of unmarried young adults have had sex within the past year; however, 19% use no contraception at all, and 24% use contraception inconsistently. In other words, only about 50% of sexually active young adults consistently use protection (Kaye, Suellentrap, & Sloup, 2009). There may

be reasons why young people do not use condoms, including that they are told not to trust their effectiveness. It is the law and/or common practices within some state sponsored abstinence-only sex-education programs to provide information on the failure rates of condoms to convince students that no sexual behavior is safe and that they should abstain from all sexual activity (Fields, 2008).

Not using a condom leads to serious risks for contracting STIs. There are more than 25 diseases that are spread primarily by sexual activity. One in five Americans has an STI, and 80% do not know it. That people do not know their STI status is not surprising because less than half of adults between 18 and 44 have ever been tested for an STI other than HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 65 million people live with an incurable STI (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010; GI, 2009). As with pregnancy statistics, there are race and age disparities among STI rates as well. White Americans acquire STIs through high-risk sexual behaviors, whereas black Americans are more likely to acquire them through both high- and low-risk behaviors since the black population suffers from a higher STI rate. Black and Hispanic women also account for more cases of HIV/AIDS than white women (CDC, 2010; GI, 2009). Although half of STI cases occur among young people 15 to 44 years of age, older adults' rates of STIs are climbing. From 1996 to 2003, cases of chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, and genital warts among people age 45 and older increased 127%. Sharples (2008) explains that a lack of sex-education communication by physicians towards their older patients "perpetuates ignorance," and "the most critical reason [for the rise of STIs among the older generation] is older generations' lack of sex ed[ucation]. Many older adults may have an outdated view of safe sex, believing that condoms are unnecessary

after menopause or with partners they already know” (para. 3, 5). According to the Guttmacher Institute (2009), the three most effective ways to avoid an STI are to abstain from all sexual activity, be in a faithful monogamous relationship, and use condoms correctly and consistently. However, all three of these strategies “rely on the knowledge, behavior and interpersonal skills of adolescents and adults;” therefore, it is imperative that sexuality education is offered to adolescents and adults so that they are equipped with this knowledge and skill sets (GI, 2009, para. 51).

Although adolescents and young adults are more likely to have more sexual partners than people ages 25 and above, it is not just young adults who have troublesome sexual health (TNC, 2008). A 1990 study published by the Kinsey Institute suggests that life-long sexuality education is needed. This survey found that most adults in the United States are “sexually illiterate” and do not have comprehensive knowledge about sexuality and sexual health issues. In fact, when their scores were “graded,” 55% failed an 18-question test on basic sexual knowledge (Angier, 1990).

There is growing awareness of the importance of providing sexual health education to middle-aged individuals and those who have started dating again after years of marriage (Sharples, 2008). In 2005, people ages 50 and over accounted for 15% of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses (CDC, 2008). Providers may not be educating their adult patients on sexual health, and/or patients may be disregarding this information—despite concerns that this population faces over STIs, sexual problems/dysfunction, and sexual satisfaction. Tessler Lindau, Schumm, Laumann, Levinson, O’Muirheartaigh, and Waite (2007) found that although men and women aged 57 to 85 reported having at least one sexual problem, only 38% of men and 22% of women discussed sex with their doctors.

Furthermore, there is a gender discrepancy in terms of mature patient-provider conversations. According to Noland (2010), “doctors seem to be much more likely to discuss sexual matters with mature men” than women (p. 202). Politi, Clark, Armstrong, McGarry, and Sciamanna’s (2009) study on women’s conversations about sexual health with their providers found that providers sometimes assume that “unmarried, older women are asexual, sexually inactive, or in exclusively heterosexual, monogamous relationships” (p. 514). Instead, Politi et al. found that women would like their physician to initiate discussions about sexual health with them. Furthermore, in one study of 1,150 OB-GYNs, the majority reported not discussing sexual problems or satisfaction with their patients (Sobecki, Curlin, Rasinski, & Tessler Lindau, 2012). Thus, poor sexual communication and inadequate sex education are a problem for both young and older adults.

Government and non-profit organizations understand the importance of educating the public about sex and have thus developed Public Service Announcements (PSA) and media campaigns on a range of sexual communication topics. These campaigns urge parents to talk with their children about sex, embolden adult children to talk to their parents or grandparents about condoms, remind young people to ask their sexual partners about their STI status and/or get tested, support survivors speaking out about sexual assault and abuse, and remind women and men that they have the right to say “no” to someone who wants them to electronically send a revealing photo (otherwise known as a sext) (4Parents.gov, 2010; A Thin Line, 2011; Get Yourself Talking, Get Yourself Tested, 2011; James, 2011; Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 2009).

Clearly, discussing sex and sexuality is difficult and at times complicated; a quick Google search of the phrase “talking about sex” produces 450,000,000 unique hits (Google, 2012). The need to talk about sex needs to be combined with an understanding of how that talking can be done effectively. The study of sexual health communication as a scholarly area needs to offer actual communicative strategies for people of all ages to use to talk about sex. It is vital to our population’s health and well-being that communication experts arm educators with sexual communication strategies because traditional formal sex-education messages typically teach that sex should be something that should not happen between young adults and should not be discussed among older adults.

Formal Approaches to Sexuality Education

History of Sexuality Education

Sexuality education¹ in the United States has a complicated history. Although a detailed history of sexuality education is beyond the scope of this study, there are some key turning points in U.S. sexuality education since the 1900s that provide context for this study. The early 1900s were informed by Christian values linking sexuality with sinfulness. Therefore, sexuality education was restricted to males and was conceptualized as an unfortunate necessity. Males were characterized as being overpowered by their hormones; therefore, education focused on suppressing sexual desire by conflating sex with diseases and punishment (Cornblatt, 2009; Sears, 1992). During the 1930s and 1940s, sexuality education became available for males and females and focused less on

¹ I would like to note that choosing the term *sexuality education* over *sex education* is a conscious decision. As Joan Helmich (2009) states in her excellent commentary on what real sexuality education should entail, “in the words of my friend Gabriel, when he was eight, ‘Sex is something you do... sexuality is who you are’— which is why I deliberately talk about sexuality education, not sex education’ ”(p.7).

values and more on “sexual hygiene” and the prevention of venereal diseases. The outbreak of STIs from soldiers returning from World Wars I and II prompted the government to become involved in the sexual education of the military. These efforts eventually led to sexuality education classes in public schools. In the 1950s, Family Life Education (FLE) programs began (Cornblatt, 2009; Planned Parenthood of Indiana, 2011; Sears, 1992). Due in part to the publication of the Kinsey Reports, sexuality education within FLE began to include topics such as respect for partners and sexuality. As cultural and political trends changed in the 1960s and 1970s, so did sexuality education. Women and minority groups challenged traditional sexuality education that often prevented universal access to information and services. Although informal sexuality education centers began to develop during this time, sexuality education in schools encountered a backlash from facets of society that thought sexuality education contributed to the free-love movement and the decline of morals in young people (Cornblatt, 2009; Planned Parenthood of Indiana, 2011; Sears, 1992).

In reaction to the liberal sexuality movement of the 1970s and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, sexuality education in the 1980s saw the beginning of the conservative Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage (AOUM) movement to HIV/AIDS education (Patton, 1996). In an interview conducted with *Frontline* (2006), Don Francis, an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during the first reports of AIDS developed in the 1980s, recalled that the CDC’s “mission was undermined” by the Reagan administration because public health was “thrown to the wind” (para. 21). Francis claimed that AIDS prevention plans created by the CDC were rejected by officials in Washington because the officials wanted the CDC to “look pretty and do as little as you

can” (Frontline, 2006, para. 26). Francis stated that the Reagan administration’s approach to AIDS was “tragic, dangerous, and set a precedent that is still reverberating around the world” (Frontline, 2006, para. 53).

Furthermore, Patton (1996) explains that in the early 1980s, there was a “national AIDS pedagogy” that was taught to the American public to guide their beliefs about who was at risk for infection and how to not get infected. This pedagogy, however, created two sets of people that, according to the ideology, deserved different educational strategies. The first group of people was the general population, which consisted of heterosexuals who were not believed to be at any risk for AIDS. The government believed heterosexuals simply needed to learn that it was nearly impossible to contract HIV through casual contact and thus should become “compassionate citizens” towards those with the disease. The second group consisted of gay men who were considered at risk for infection. Of course, these separate spheres of the population obviously were not separate when it came to the risk of being infected with HIV, and having different educational strategies for each population proved to be an incorrect strategy with deadly consequences. For example, President Reagan waited until 1987, six years after AIDS was named, to give his first speech about AIDS. By then 500,000 people of varying sexes, races, and sexual orientations had been infected by the virus (Frontline, 2006).

Following the national AIDS pedagogy of the 1980s, the 1990s and 2000s were marked by debates over sexuality-education curricula. Currently, two approaches to formal sexuality education are in favor within the U.S.: Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage (referred to as abstinence only or as AOUM) and comprehensive sexuality education. Since these approaches are widely accepted, I provide a more nuanced discussion of them

in the following section. Important to note, however, is that while it is natural to assume the differences between these programs are about content, Kristen Luker, in *When Sex Goes to School* (2006), offers a different explanation.

Luker's main argument is that the debate about sexuality education in this country is really a debate about sex and marriage, and intertwined within that debate are debates about gender and how men and women should relate to one another. Luker's position is that sexually conservative people do not believe that sex is wrong per se, but they believe that a healthy society is built upon heterosexual marriages. Therefore, they expect their children to marry relatively young and experience the positive consequences of sex only within marriage. Sexually liberal people would rather their children explore the world before marriage and thus believe it is unrealistic for young people to remain abstinent until marriage—which could easily be delayed until they are in their thirties. These conflicting worldviews of sex and marriage covertly come out during debates on sex education within the classroom.

Additionally, Luker suggests that in order to understand the debate over sexuality education, it is important to understand the different ideas the two camps hold about gender and how men and women relate to one another. Sexual conservatives believe that the sexual revolution of the 1960s was not helpful, and that women and men are not inherently equal. Sexual liberals believe that genders should be treated equally and often cite double standards that praise men for but shame women for promiscuity. This different way of thinking about “proper” gender roles also contributes to the debate about sex education because sexual conservatives want to protect the innocence of their children, especially the girls, by withholding information about sex. Sexual liberals, on

the other hand, believe that the more young people know, the better they will be able to make decisions. These different gender ideologies contribute to debates about how to teach sexuality education—abstinence-only or comprehensive approaches. I will now briefly discuss the key components to these strategies below.

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Sexuality Education

In 1996, President Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which included an 11th hour amendment that mandated that if school sex-education programs were to receive government funding, they must teach sexuality-education programs in alignment with the guidelines of abstinence-only until marriage (AOUM) (Fields, 2008). Although this version of the PRWORA, commonly referred to as “welfare reform,” was more conservative than Clinton wanted, he approved this legislation because it would have been a political risk to veto another welfare-reform bill during a campaign season (Gillon, 2008). This AOUM mandate established the Federal A-H Definition of Abstinence Education, an eight-point definition of abstinence education that schools and educators were required to follow. These guidelines, commonly referred to as *A-H*, restricted the information that could be provided to students about contraception or safe sex practices; some of the information provided was clearly ideological rather than accurate, such as the notion that sex outside of marriage will result in psychological harm. Furthermore, educators following AOUM guidelines had to adhere to the federal policy’s definition for sexual activity that stated that sexual activity is the expected standard *only* in a faithful and monogamous marriage. While the PRWORA became federal policy, then, it did so without having any empirical evidence of effectiveness (Kirby, 2001).

In addition, AOUM became policy despite the majority of parents supporting a more comprehensive approach to sexuality education in school. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)(2007), a non-partisan organization for healthy sexuality, 93% of parents approved of sex education for their adolescents and claimed it should include even more information than just about condoms and contraceptives. Despite what parents wish, AOUM became the overriding policy taught in schools. In 1998, all fifty states accepted monies to teach sex education with the promise they would adhere to the AOUM guidelines. In addition, Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) funds were created during the Bush administration; these imposed even stronger demands for adherence to the principles of AOUM in order for states to be allocated funding. In 2002, over 102 million dollars were allocated through a combination of those three funds to schools in the United States to teach AOUM supported programs (Collins, Alagiri, & Summers, 2002). Ultimately, however, policy decisions about sex education are usually in the hands of the state and local school boards (Fields, 2008). With the majority of the United States requiring that some sex education be taught in school, some school boards simply write into policy the minimum that schools should do is to promote abstinence instead of defining and discussing exactly what the best approach to sex education would be for their schools (Collins et al., 2002).

Although proponents of AOUM state that empirical studies prove this policy does in fact work, that argument is simply not supported by the data. Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty (2008) state that not enough abstinence-only programs follow standardized guidelines; therefore these programs cannot be empirically tested and thus cannot be

assumed effective. Furthermore, Collins et al. (2002) found that some safe-sex programs that highlight religion can be effective for people already interested in that life course; however, because religion cannot be taught in schools, those programs cannot produce widespread success. Collins et al. compared abstinence-only with comprehensive programs and found that studies that are heralded by abstinence-only advocates are not in fact peer-reviewed scholarly articles; rather these reports appeared in newspapers or were commissioned by proponents of the policy. The only two peer reviewed studies that lend some credibility to using an AOUM approach are Bearman and Bruckner (2001) and Denny and Young (2006). Bearman and Bruckner (2001) investigated virginity pledges taken by adolescents and found that pledgers did wait to have sex on average of eighteen months longer than students who did not. The pledgers generally did not wait until marriage, and when they did participate in sexual activities, they were less likely than their non-pledge counterparts to use safe sex practices. Denny and Young's evaluation of abstinence-only education also found that one program for middle school students had a success rate at postponing sexual activity an average of eighteen months.

Douglas Kirby's 2007 report for the National Center to End Teenage Pregnancy is the most comprehensive empirical study on sex-education programs designed to prevent teenage pregnancy. This report conducted over 600 statistical tests to evaluate the statistical significance of 56 (eight abstinence-only, 48 comprehensive) sex and STI/HIV education programs that met report-inclusion criteria, such as a significant sample size and random assignment. Kirby found that abstinence-only programs do not have any effect on preventing teen pregnancy. In fact, he found that programs that use a comprehensive approach that encourages abstinence while also giving accurate

information about making safe choices are not at odds with the message of abstinence. Instead there is evidence that comprehensive programs delay sexual behavior and increase the use of contraceptives and condoms among the students in these programs. In sum, there is little if any data, that proves that AOUM is effective; therefore, some schools have adopted a comprehensive approach to sex education in which abstinence is encouraged but safe sex methods are taught as well.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive sexuality education is an approach that “emphasizes the benefits of abstinence while also teaching about contraception and disease-prevention methods, including condom and contraceptive use” (Collins et al., 2002, p.1). According to SIECUS (n.d.), comprehensive sexuality-education programs provide accurate information about sexuality, offer an opportunity for young people to develop and understand their attitudes and values about sex, and help them develop relationships and interpersonal and decision-making skills in regard to abstinence and using protection (para. 7).

Empirical evidence does support a comprehensive approach to sex education. Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty (2008) found that teaching about sex and safer sex does not increase young adults’ participation in sex. Kirby and Laris (2009) also concluded that there is no evidence that comprehensive programs increase sexual activity. Instead, they found that comprehensive programs delay sexual activity, reduce the number of partners students have, and encourage the use of safe sex practices. Kirby and Laris found that effective comprehensive programs have similar guidelines, such as clear goals, diversity in the planning process, and proficient educators. However, although a

comprehensive approach to sexuality education has had success, as I will discuss further in the literature review, it is often exclusionary because of its sexist, racist, and homophobic undertones. However, a new movement for teaching sex education—sex-positive sexuality education—is emerging within the U.S. Sex-positive sexuality education transcends Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage programs and reconceptualizes most comprehensive sexuality-education programs.

Sex-Positive Sexuality Education

Sex-positive sexuality education offers an alternative to abstinence-only and comprehensive sexuality education. Sex-positive sexuality education is an approach to sexuality education that eliminates ineffective fear appeals and racist and sexist misconceptions about sex and ultimately teaches that sexuality and sex can and should be a positive force in one's life (Corrina, 2009; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Helmich, 2009; Kulwicki, 2008). Sex-positive sexuality scholars reframe the representations of sexuality found in formal sex education and within popular culture to help create a healthier culture of sexuality (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Kulwicki, 2008; Patton, 1996; Perry, 2008).

Some scholars (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008) suggest that the high rates of pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) may have to do with the current negative and/or hypersexualized representations of sexuality. For example, formal sex education often teaches students not to have sex until they are married, but popular culture messages (and hormones) tell adolescents and young adults to have sex now. These conflicting messages may prevent people from discussing contraceptive options

and current and past STIs with their partners because they may have been formally taught that it is shameful to discuss sex openly.

Furthermore, sex-positive sexuality scholars, such as Fields (2008), believe that if formal sex education would teach students about specific pleasurable behaviors in which partners can participate, such as manual and oral stimulation, people might decide to engage in those lower risk behaviors rather than the behaviors that carry the most risk for pregnancy and STIs. Additionally, sex-positive sexuality scholars promote teaching people to enjoy the benefits of masturbation because if people are encouraged to individually express their own sexuality and pleasure, they may not feel the need to have sex with a partner and thus lessen their chance for unintended negative consequences of sexual activity. In sum, sex-positive sexuality education scholars believe that unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and STIs can be decreased if sex education is reframed into a more positive and agentic experience.

Although sex-positive sexuality scholars investigate and theorize the benefits of teaching sex education in a new paradigm (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006), little to no research exists on how to effectively *teach* and *communicate* about sex and sexuality using a sex-positive approach. Understanding how sex-positive sexuality education should be taught is essential because a new method for teaching about sexuality provides hope for revolutionizing and correcting confusion about sexuality education.

In this study, I hope to fill in the gap of knowledge about how to teach about sexuality using a sex-positive framework by understanding how sex-positive sexuality education can be defined and taught. As part of this effort, I generate a clear definition of

sex-positive education, since it is a term that is used loosely and broadly. I contribute theoretically, then, to our understanding of health communication, sexual health communication strategies and contexts, social ecological models of health, grounded practical theory, and sexuality education. In order to accomplish these objectives, I complete a case study of three contextually different organizations to investigate how a culture of sex-positive sexuality education is constructed at these organizations: Good Vibrations, The National Center for Sexuality Research Summer Institute (SI), and Scarleteen.com.²

Good Vibrations exemplifies sex-positive communication for the general adult public. I selected this site because it “is the premier retailer trusted for over three decades to provide high quality products, education, and information that promotes sexual health, pleasure, and empowerment” to its customers in San Francisco, California, and one location in Brookline, Massachusetts (“Our Mission,” n.d., para. 1). This company embodies the philosophy of sex-positive sexuality education in its mission, promotes education and career opportunities for women, accepts sexual diversity, provides sexual health resources, and participates in social activism and community building—all of which are important to sex-positive sexuality education.

The National Sexuality Resource Center’s Summer Institute (referred to as the SI) exemplifies sex-positive sexuality education for an academic, professional audience. The SI was founded in 2001 at San Francisco State University with the mission to gather

² Although the majority of sex-education research investigates formalized, school-based sex education for adolescents and young adults, and a large part of my rationale for this study is that young adults need better sexuality education, this study will not investigate school-based sites for young adults because currently no schools have implemented a sex-positive sexuality education approach. The three organizations I investigate do implement this approach in their work; therefore, this study is an opportunity to learn from their example. Furthermore, it is consistent with a sex-positive approach that this study investigates sites for adults because sexuality education is a life-long process.

“leading voices on sexuality issues to prepare advocates, students and researchers to embed the concepts of sexual literacy and lifelong sexual well-being into the work they do” (“Our Projects,” n.d., para. 3). This two- or four-week institute offers participants the opportunity for college-course credit; it costs between \$1,500.00 and \$2,225.00 in course fees for attendance. I included this site for several reasons, including the opportunity to meet and interview leading scholars in the field of sex-positive sexuality education; observe the classes these scholars teach at the institute; gain insight into what issues about sexuality education are on the agenda of this nationally and academically renowned organization; and understand how the participants of the SI, all of who aim to be working in the sexuality field, communicate and construct the philosophy of sex-positive sexuality education.

Scarleteen.com (referred to as Scarleteen) exemplifies a web based sex-positive sexuality-education organization that is geared towards adolescents and young adults. Scarleteen, the highest-ranked website for sex education and sexuality, provides “comprehensive, inclusive and sex-positive advice, help and accurate information about teen and young adult sexuality” (Alexa, 2011, para. 1). Founded in 1999 to meet the need for online sex and sexuality information targeted specifically for young adults, this site remains a model organization for successful sex-positive sexuality communication. This site is valuable because the site creator and current director, Heather Corinna, is a leading voice in the revolution to re-conceptualize sexuality education to include a sex-positive approach. This website provides insight into how best to communicate the difficult but necessary conversations about sex and sexuality with teens, offers an example of how sex-positive communication can be transmitted completely through computer-mediated

communication (CMC) channels, and offers the opportunity to investigate the sustainability of a grassroots organization. Despite having a budget lower than the median-annual household income in the U.S. and not using *any* federal, state or local funding but instead depending on public support, Scarleteen manages not only to stay operational but to be a relevant leader in the field of sexuality education (“Help Lift Sex,” 2011, para. 6).

The mission of sex-positive sexuality education is lofty. For centuries, shame, guilt, silence, and fear have been intertwined with sex and sexuality education. Through a thorough examination and understanding of Good Vibrations, the SI, and Scarleteen, I offer concrete examples of sex-positive sexuality education that can provide a foundation for a better understanding of sex-positive sexuality education. In order to help construct a healthier sexual culture within the United States where people feel comfortable talking about issues regarding sex and sexuality and value sex for the positive benefits it can bring to life, sexuality education needs to be overhauled. This study is an important first step in explaining a new approach for how to re-envision and ultimately potentially revolutionize sexuality education into an agentic and positive experience.

In the following chapter, I review the scholarly literature on health communication in which my study is grounded, identify approaches to communicating sexual health, examine evaluations of sexuality-education programs and scholarship on sex-positive sexuality education, and explain the specific contexts of sexuality education that will be the focus of my study. These areas of literature inform my study, provide context on current practices, and demonstrate why sexuality education needs to be re-

conceptualized using a sex-positive approach. The following research questions guide my study:

RQ 1: How is the process of sex-positive sexuality education enacted at Good Vibrations, National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.com?

RQ2: What communication strategies are used by sex-positive sexuality education organizations to communicate sex-positive sexuality education?

RQ3: How is sex-positive sexuality education defined?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As I discussed in Chapter One, the current study examines a new approach to teaching sexuality education—sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE). In this chapter, I review the five areas of scholarship relevant to my study. I begin by grounding my approach to this research in health communication. Next, I discuss current literature on communicating about sexual health and evaluations of sexuality education programs. Finally, I review the literature on sex-positive sexuality education and conclude with an overview of innovative contexts for disseminating this approach.

While at first these five topics may seem disjointed, the tie that binds them together is communication. The study of health communication provides a foundation for this study. As Hemingway (2006) explains, sex education “invites multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary debates along with pragmatic partnerships” from areas of study such as biology, sociology, political science, and psychology (p. 6). But even though the study of sex education is multi- and inter-disciplinary, it is impractical unless it can be communicated effectively to learners. And since sex education is fundamentally an endeavor to explain, maintain, or improve learners’ sexual health and well-being, sex education ultimately is a health issue. Thus, health communication is the best area of scholarship to ground this study. Clearly, the communication field is essential to understanding how sexual health is discussed by educators and the general public alike. It is only through evaluations of the verbal and nonverbal practices used at sexuality education programs and examining some distinctive contexts of sexuality education that I can make sense of these programs.

Art Bochner (2009) wrote that modern medicine “needs a new storyline;” one that would give medicine more heart but also “a different plot structure; fresh metaphors;

distinctive characters; modified scenes, a new moral to the story” (p. 160). I propose that sexuality education needs a new story line as well. There are many benefits to changing the way we communicate about sexuality education in this nation. One only has to look at our STI, pregnancy, abortion, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence rates to understand the need to change how we communicate about sex and sexuality. A shift to a sex-positive approach may be the critical factor in creating a new, healthier, approach to sexual health for our nation. The literature review I present in this chapter will explain how communication research informs this study’s literature on sexual health, evaluations and contexts of sexuality education, and sex-positive sexuality education.

Health Communication

In this study, I aim to provide knowledge about how three organizations implement a sex-positive approach to sexuality education. I am grounding this study in the field of health communication. Kreps and Thornton (1992) define health communication as “the way we seek, process and share health information” (p. 7). Furthermore, health communication is defined as an interdisciplinary area of study concerned with the roles performed by human and computer-mediated communication in health-care delivery and promotion efforts (Kreps, Bonaguro, & Query, 1998).

Health communication is a complex phenomenon because not only do people seek, process and share health information, they “mingle what they hear and see with their own ideas and experiences” (du Pré, 1996, p. 4). This complexity is only intensified in research on sexual health because sex and sexuality can be an intensively private at the same time that it is a culturally negotiated issue. Health communication, however, embraces complexities and seeks ways to help scholars theoretically understand those

complexities, for practitioners to teach about them, and for the general public to manage them, and this is why it is so useful to ground this study in health communication. As Hummert (2009) explains, health communication is an area of scholarship within our discipline that easily lends itself to “making a difference” because often times health communication research projects are interdisciplinary in their approach to theory and methods, and the results can be easily moved from the academy to the community. Health communication research often is different from “the esoteric manner in which most research studies are written,” because research implications are very often practical; more of an effort is made in much health communication research to make results accessible to practitioners and the public (Frey, 2009, p. 209). Improving sexuality education is a complex issue, but it is an issue that is best grounded in health communication because this field not only appreciates difficult issues but seeks to apply the results to better our overall health and well-being.

Communicating Sexual Health

In studying sexuality education, I am contributing to health communication by studying sexual health, which has not been widely studied by communication scholars. The term *sexual health* first was defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1975 but came into popular acceptance after the advent of the HIV and AIDS epidemic (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000). In 2002, the WHO updated its definition of the term *sexual health*:

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality

and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. (p. 4)

The definition of sexual health must stress the importance of sexual health as an affirmative concept, distinguish between reproductive health and sexual health, understand sexual health as an expression of individual and collective needs in conjunction with meeting basic human rights, and provide an opportunity for pleasure without repression (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000) Also, sexual health should not be confused with sexual performance. Sexual performance is “more related to cultural contexts,” whereas sexual health focuses on quality of life issues (Martin-Morales, 2004, p. 26).

Lastly, scholarly research stresses the importance of defining sexual health as culturally contingent (Beck, Majumdar, Estcourt, & Petrak, 2004; Martin-Morales, 2004; Pearson & Makadzange, 2008; Regmi, 2009; Roberts, Oyun, Batnasan, & Laing, 2004; Robinson, Scheltema, & Cherry, 2005; Sinha, Curtis, Jayakody, Viner, & Roberts, 2007; Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba, & Stones, 2010). In many societies, cultural values define who is entitled to sexual and reproductive health services, influence sexual attitudes and norms, and regulate risk-taking behaviors (Regmi, 2009). Since cultural values have a serious impact on sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, sexual health communication must be culturally competent, and sexual health services “need to reflect the prevailing cultural norms of the populations they serve” (Beck et al., 2004, p. 161).

In this study, I investigate three organizations whose approaches to sexuality education are aligned with current definitions of and research on sexual health that consider it a human right. Working with new understandings of sexual health, my study helps refine how sexual health is communicated, an area of research that is understudied. In the next section, I review the literature that has investigated sexual health communication practices. Research investigating openness and comfort; communication-based curricula; valuing the experience and lifespan of learners; incorporating democracy, power, agency, and feminism; and appreciating and utilizing the physical environment will be discussed.

First, many studies have investigated the importance of comfort and/or openness in episodes of sexual health communication. Research examining how to improve health-care providers' interactions with patients about sexual communication suggests that providers need to increase their comfort level regarding sex and sexuality (Higgins, Barker, & Begley, 2008; Magnan, Reynolds, & Gavin, 2006; Yudkowsky, Downing, & Ommert, 2006). In part to meet this need, interpersonal communication skills have become policy in medical education, and some medical schools offer training on sexuality and sexuality issues (Noland, 2010). Research shows that comfort training is important. Fischer et al.'s (2010) community based participatory research (CBPR) project investigated the use of comfort, confidence, skills, and knowledge (CCSK) of youth-development professionals (YDP) in community-based organizations in Indiana. This study found that YDPs could attain successful sexual health communication interactions with adolescents if YDPs had more training that focused on comforting communication.

Similarly, Kneer and Philpott (2006) demonstrated that sexual health among young adults in Cambodia could be improved with comfortable communication. In this health intervention, many of the participants initially felt ashamed about discussing sex and therefore followed community and cultural pressures to refrain from doing so in a mixed-sex group. The participants, however, were able to overcome these feelings after they underwent peer-educator led sexuality communication and education training. The ability to have comfortable communication about sex, especially with a person of the opposite sex, positively can impact sexual health. This research demonstrates that comfortable/open sexual communication can be taught to adults; a significant amount of research, however, highlights the importance of open and comfortable communication starting from childhood.

Parent-child sexuality communication research (Ballard & Gross, 2009; Jordan, Price, & Fitzgerald, 2000; Pluhar, DiIorio, & McCarty, 2008) also has highlighted the importance of comfort strategies in familial interactions about sexuality. For example, Guzman et al.'s (2003) research on family sexual communication found that comfortable communication about sex within the family can lead to children's use of safer sexual behaviors. Additionally, Horgarth and Ingham's (2009) research on the attitudes of women from the United Kingdom toward masturbation found that women reported more positive feelings about masturbation when they had experienced "open and relaxed communication with their parents about sexual matters" (p. 566). Kirkman, Rosenthal, and Feldman's (2005) interviews with adolescents and their parents about communication about sexuality revealed that respondents overwhelmingly described "good" sexual communication within a family as being "open." However, Kirkman et al. (2005) posit

that even though “open” communication is considered optimal and often is cited as something to strive for in multiple contexts of sexual communication, the term is complex and ambiguous (p. 64). Therefore, due to the ambiguity with this term, Kirkman et al. suggest that research must investigate and define the components of “open” communication.

In sum, comfort and openness have been widely cited as important elements in communicating sexual health; what constitutes openness, however, has not been extensively investigated. Since all three organizations I am studying practice “open” communication related to sexuality, I will be able to fill the gap in literature surrounding the definition of open communication. As I investigate how the educators, practitioners, participants, and customers use open communication, I define what specific verbal and nonverbal actions relate to this practice.

Although researchers from a variety of fields have studied the importance of communicating sexual health in an open and comfortable environment, most research on sexual health has been investigated from within sexuality-education programs. This is useful for my study since I am interested in how the organizations I research communicate about sexual health in an educational setting as well. I now discuss the relevant literature on how sexuality-education programs communicate about sexual health.

Research has shown the importance of guiding sexuality education from a communication based curriculum (Baber & Murray, 2001; Banim & Tasker, 1999; DeJong et al., 1996; Lewis, 1994; Witte & Morrison, 1995). Curricula that incorporate interpersonal communication skills such as self-disclosure; individual, relational, and

content goals; relational complexity; face-saving techniques; and strategies for improving self-concept are suggested ways of improving sexual-education programs. Furthermore, research highlights the practicality of teaching communicative techniques such as recalibrating a situation in sexuality-education programs. This technique refers to reframing a situation and providing different ways to look at things (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). For example, Banim and Tasker (1999) and Witte and Morrison (1995) explain that risk needs to be discussed differently with students. Banim and Tasker suggest that a broader understanding of risk is needed. Rather than a focus on and discussions of the negative consequences of risk-related actions, they advocate that sexuality-education programs include discussions of risks that arise when users cannot communicate effectively or are unable to access information. Witte and Morrison similarly call for a different approach to risk, suggesting that educators should communicate substitutions for risky behaviors rather than just focusing on the risky behaviors themselves. While these studies are beneficial because they explain the importance of communication skills within sexuality-education programs, no extensive investigation exist about what communication skills are taught in various sexuality-education programs outside of the classroom. My study recognizes the importance of a communication based curriculum but goes one step further by outlining the communication concepts that are currently being taught in innovative sexuality programs beyond programs taught in schools.

Sexual health communication within sexuality-education programs also must value the experiences of the learners. Baber and Murray (2001) and Farrelly, O'Brien, & Prain (2007) agree that a sexuality-education program works best if programs value

diversity among the learners, and diversity is encouraged by the facilitator. McKay, Fisher, Maticka-Tyndale, and Barrett (2001) also point out that programs will be most successful if they are developed using elicitation research, such as focus groups and surveys, to pinpoint student needs for specific information, motivations, and skill deficiencies. Farrelly et al. and Baber and Murray agree that learning outcomes that value users' current and developmental needs, experiences, and life circumstances will better serve the learner.

Similarly, Aggleton and Campbell (2000) believe that sexual health should be communicated in ways that build users' confidence levels by teaching them transferable life skills. Goldman (2008) and Lewis (1994) agree that sexuality-education programs offer a unique place to provide life-skills education to users that can prepare them for the future and therefore enhance their lives. Aggleton and Campbell (2000) mention that health education could offer an opportunity for networking with community, business, and political leaders, which could positively impact users' future opportunities for employment and civic engagement.

In addition to research that suggests the value of sexual health education that appreciates learners' life experiences, other literature calls for sexual health to be communicated across the lifespan. Helmich (2009) believes that sexuality education needs to promote life-long learning rather than stopping after high school. This is a rare example in the literature on sexuality education where a scholar promotes sexuality education beyond formalized education. Paiva (2005) argues that sexuality education that targets only for adolescents "presumes that problems with irresponsible and risky behaviors automatically will be resolved when young people reach adulthood" (p. 356).

Research, however, has demonstrated that adults often have difficulty following through on their intentions for safer-sex behaviors.

Some research thus has begun to utilize programs that recognize that sexual health communication and education are important and necessary for all ages. Surprisingly, research has found that some “progressive” churches are one source for supportive sexuality education for adults. Richard’s (2000) investigation of a program, entitled “Our Whole Lives,” or OWL, developed jointly by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ, provides a program reflecting positive sexuality. This program aims to teach values such as self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice, and inclusivity for all age groups and people of diverse backgrounds. OWL declared itself abstinence based rather than abstinence only. This program is an example of a site of sexual health communication being enacted for the entire community. However, the only research available on OWL is an overview of the program; to date, no in-depth ethnographic work was conducted to help researchers and educators understand how this program or others like it communicate sexual health.

The realization that sexuality does not stop after high school and, in fact, tends to get far more complicated, means that adults need to be life-long learners of sexuality. My decision to investigate Good Vibrations, an adult sex retail store, addresses the importance of sexuality education across the lifespan. My decision to study the Scarleteen.com website allows me to take into account the adolescent demographic, and studying the Summer Institute at San Francisco State allows me to see how academics approach the issue by working to incorporate the unique life situations of its participants into the sexual health communication it provides.

Goldman (2008), Trimble (2009), and Ellison (2001) discuss that communicating sexual health also should be a democratic endeavor. Their research argues that sexuality education provides a chance to educate students on the value of citizenship. Goldman (2008) argues that ideal sexuality education could provide users an opportunity to learn how to be “participatory, responsible citizens in our democracies” (p. 434). For example, because the curricula of sexuality programs already includes content about values, such as the importance of self-esteem and self-respect, they also could include content on fairness, equality, freedom, tolerance, and justice for all citizens. Implementing these ideals, which are supported by democratic societies, within a sexuality-education program could train students on the elements of a participatory democracy (Goldman, 2008). Although shaping students into better citizens is not a traditional goal of sexuality education, it aligns well with scholars’ calls to incorporate critical cultural values in sexuality-education programs.

In addition to communicating sexual health from a democratic perspective, scholarship also shows that sexuality-education programs provide a useful opportunity to discuss the role of power and agency within sexual health (Epstein et al., 2003; Farrelly et al., 2007; Hayden, 2001; Trimble, 2009; Welles, 2005). This is important because it helps to correct the missing element of power within comprehensive and abstinence-only programs. Hayden (2001) suggests that operations of power and resistance must be included in sexuality-education programs. If sexual health were taught as acknowledging and valuing forms of power, users would be able to learn about and begin to understand the capacity and constraints on agency they face (Farrelly et al., 2007). Welles (2005) agrees that a curriculum that addresses agency would be especially helpful for females as

it could allow a space for females to investigate how sexuality can positively and negatively affect their health, well-being, and development. Furthermore, Sumara and Davis (1999) argue that one can challenge heteronormativity by using teaching methods that question stereotypical assumptions of power dynamics within relationships. Lastly, Epstein et al. (2003) argue that sexuality-education programs in schools should be taught from social science and humanities perspectives rather than a health-and-biology perspective. This change would allow for a focus on valuing the historical and sociological implications of sexuality and take the focus off of reproduction. Thus, students could develop their own critical approaches to the historical and cultural factors they deem as significant for understanding sexuality and sexual health and choose to define sexuality for themselves.

Another set of values that is recommended for communicating sexual health within sexuality education—and that builds on the critical framework discussed above—is feminist values. According to Askew (2007) and Baber and Murray (2001), a feminist informed sexuality-education program can be used to help young women develop confidence in their sexuality, contribute to their sense of empowerment, understand human sexualities in a way that can benefit themselves and their partners, allow them to realize they have multiple subjectivities, and encourage them to develop their sexual desires (Fine, 2005). Baber and Murray (2001) suggest that a feminist approach to sexuality education is characterized by four themes: mastery, voice, authority, and positionality. These themes encourage critically examining a variety of topics, expressing different viewpoints, listening to others, and being agents of change for the community.

Communicating sexual health in a sexuality-education program framed in feminist themes can have a positive impact on students. Askew (2007) implemented a feminist approach to a college level human-sexuality course and found that after the course, the students (all female) reported having increased levels of comfort talking about sexual issues, admitting their sexual desires and pleasures, challenging messages of guilt and fear related to sex, and vocalizing the need for improving sexuality-education programs. Students also had an improved body image and increased self-confidence. Furthermore, being exposed to information about sexuality did not encourage promiscuity; instead, students stated they were more discerning about their sexual choices because they no longer felt they needed to “settle” (p. 261). Important to note, however, is that even though a sexuality-education program says it is “feminist,” it may, in fact, not be implementing the above criteria. Bay-Cheng and Lewis’s (2006) research on a feminist-mentorship program for adolescent girls uncovered an approach to female sexuality that was problem focused and relied upon traditional gender stereotypes and age-based norms. Thus, it is important for programs that claim to use a feminist framework to evaluate what that framework entails.

The above literature on sexuality-education programs suggests that it is useful to communicate sexual health through a lens of democracy, power, agency, and feminism. Such scholarship moves away from communicating sexual health within confining methods such as abstinence-only or comprehensive approaches. My study heeds this call and investigates three organizations that approach sexuality education from a sex-positive approach that will contribute knowledge about progressive methods within sexuality education.

Although most of the research on communicating sexual health investigated verbal strategies, some scholarship also stressed the importance of nonverbal communication within sexual health by examining the physical environment of sexuality programs. Literature suggests that sexuality-education programs that respect and utilize users' environmental surroundings will likely be more successful than those that do not (Baber & Murray, 2007; McKay et al., 2001). In order for users to feel comfortable and therefore want to explore new, difficult, embarrassing, or exciting sexual health topics, a safe and comfortable learning environment must be created. Scholars investigated different ways of influencing the environment during sexuality-education programs. Roberto, Zimmerman, Carlyle, and Abner (2007) state that sexuality-education interventions for adolescents that normally are done during school hours should consider scheduling them outside of school time. He argues that after school, teachers have more free time and may be more willing to participate in and work to ensure the success of the program.

The facilitator also may impact the environment of the program. For example, Kim and Free (2008) investigated how peer facilitation can impact sexual health interventions. Although they did not find conclusive evidence that programs led by peers are more effective than those led by a single facilitator, they argued that this approach should not be abandoned. Rather, it should be fine tuned, because working with peers is a successful way of learning. In addition to peer facilitation, research also showed that a community approach may be helpful in communicating sexual health effectively. Hilton's (2007) study on what information boys want from sexuality-education programs included the finding that boys wanted their parents to be educated about sex. Similarly,

Aggleton and Campbell (2000) suggest that sexuality-education programs will work best if the entire community is involved. Securing support from health-care workers, educators, community members, and parents has been shown to increase the effectiveness of programs targeted at adolescents. Weiss, Dwanch-Schoen, Howard-Barr, and Panella's (2010) CBPR approach to lowering the STI and AIDS rate in a Florida community supports this claim; their project implemented community and parental involvement in a successful sexual health intervention.

Likewise, Aggleton and Campbell (2000) support the use of non-traditional settings for sexual health programs. The importance of examining non-traditional and "informal" places as contexts to teach and talk about sexuality education also is evident in the literature. Gudelunas (2005) investigated how syndicated advice columnist Ann Landers handled questions about masturbation and the subsequent positive and negative feedback to her responses. Gudelunas's discourse analysis of columns on masturbation found that Landers was a champion of sex-positive sexuality education because she encouraged masturbation as healthy and non-shameful when this idea was not seen as socially polite to discuss. Gudelunas argues that Landers was a conduit for informal sexuality education. I agree with his claim because before the Internet, newspaper-advice columns were one of the few places where sex could be discussed for adults outside of a formal setting like a school. Gudelunas calls for more research on these informal safe spaces of sexual health communication and education, and my study also responds to that call.

This study adds to the growing literature on how to nonverbally communicate about sexual health through the use of physical environments. My sites of study have

very disparate physical environments—adult retail store, academic institute, and web-based; therefore this study will provide knowledge on the importance of multiple unique physical environments in communicating sexual health. In addition, these sites offer examples of what makes one physical environment more or less conducive for communicating about sexual health. This research then offers scholars, practitioners, and the general public insights about how to best design physical environments advantageous for complex communication scenarios such as those necessary for discussions of sexual health.

Overall, scholarship on sexual health and sexual health communication offered suggestions for how to better communicate about sexual health. Many different areas of study, including family communication and patient-provider communication, acknowledged the importance of an open and comfortable environment while communicating about sexual health. The remaining literature concentrated on sexuality-education programs and the methods they use such as privileging communication skills, being learner-centered, supporting life-long sexuality education, appreciating democratic and feminist ideals, and recognizing the importance of the physical environment to communicating sexual health. While this literature examined how best to communicate about sexual health, commonly within the context of sexuality education programs, also necessary is to review the literature that has evaluated sexuality-education programs. By understanding the possibilities and problems within these programs, it will become clear why a new approach to sexuality education is necessary.

Evaluation of Sexuality-Education Programs

Sexual health education programs include teaching resources such as curriculum books and sexuality-education programs guides, classes, and interventions—or a combination of these resources as demonstrated in the work of Good Vibrations, the Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.com. Research has investigated sexuality programs using a variety of methods, including textual analysis, focus groups, interviews, observations, and surveys, and suggests what makes such programs successful. For example, Wackett and Evans (2000) discuss the success of a sexuality-education program guide, *Choices and Changes*, that was requested by parents in the Canadian Yukon territory to promote sexual health and sexually healthy relationships using a sex-positive frame. Kirby (2007) completed the most extensive review of sexual health programs that focused on teen pregnancy and identified 17 characteristics of effective curriculum-based programs:

- Involved multiple designers familiar with theory and research
- Assessed relevant needs
- Used a logic-model approach
- Designed activities consistent with community values and available resources
- Pilot tested the program
- Focused on clear health goals
- Focused narrowly on specific types of behavior leading to health goals
- Addressed sexual psychosocial risk and protective risk factors
- Created a safe social environment
- Included multiple activities

- Employed instructionally sound teaching methods
- Used culturally appropriate activities and instructional methods
- Covered material in a logical sequence
- Secured minimal support from community organizations
- Used qualified educators
- Implemented incentives when necessary
- Implemented activities with reasonable reliability

Understanding the characteristics that make for an effective sexuality-education program, however, does not guarantee success. One only has to review sexual health statistics within the U.S. to understand that the majority of sexuality-education programs are inadequate. Scholarship evaluating sexuality-education programs also has shown numerous micro- and macro-level problems within these programs.

First, many programs, from both an abstinence-only or comprehensive approach, are riddled with basic, small-scale problems that have large implications. For example, research (Fields, 2008; Marquardt, 2006; Mayo, 2004) shows that programs have textual inconsistencies, teach misinformation such as downplaying the effectiveness of condoms, contain biased information such as listing religious organizations as resource centers for information about AIDS, and/or exclude or omit information about key topics such as the female condom or abortion. Programs geared towards adolescents often discourage and suppress sexuality, and if sexuality is mentioned, it is focused solely on teaching about reproduction. Although these micro-level issues are problematic, research also has shown that sexuality programs also contribute to prejudiced, stereotypic, and exclusionary environments riddled with heteronormativity, sexism, and silencing.

A Heteronormative Curriculum

Most of the curricula in sexuality-education programs focus on reproductive education. Because of mandates from school boards and fear of administrative or parental backlash, these programs implicitly and explicitly teach and enforce a heteronormative curriculum. For example, Epstein et al. (2003) investigated sexuality education in primary through higher education schools in the U.K. using multiple methods such as interviews, observations of sexuality-education classrooms, and analysis of texts; they found that heteronormativity is constructed and policed predominately within sexuality-education classes. Furthermore, research demonstrates students retain these problematic messages. In addition, Epstein et al. (2003) discuss how individuals who do not fit into traditional gender roles and/or heterosexual sexualities are simply excluded from the curriculum on sex education. In their research, even though schools had policies against bullying homosexual students, homosexuality never was mentioned within the sexuality-education classroom. Furthermore, Fields (2008) discusses that in classrooms that follow abstinence-only-until- marriage (AOUM) guidelines, homosexuality is only brought up in conjunction with discussions of HIV/AIDS. Epstein et al. and Fields thus posit that this limited or lack of information on homosexuality is an oppressive outcome of sexuality-education programs, because during adolescence, one in ten students report questioning their sexuality. This silencing and shaming of the GLBTQ community can leave students feeling extremely isolated and put them at risk for bullying, mental distress, or dropping out of school (“Bullying,” 2012).

A Sexist Curriculum

Along with promoting heteronormativity, scholarship has found that sexuality-education programs enforce traditional gender roles (Bay-Cheng & Lewis, 2006; Hayden, 2001; Fields, 2008; Fine, 2005). For example, the portrayal of males as sexual aggressors and females as victims of men's sexuality are naturalized in programs, and students are not taught to critique these stereotypes. Scholarship emphasizes a missing and/or silenced discourse in sexuality-education programs in regards to female sexuality. First, a growing body of literature (Farrelly et al., 2007, Fields, 2008; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Hayden, 2001; Helmich, 2009, Trimble, 2009; Welles, 2005) finds that discussions related to young women's sexual pleasure and desires are missing in most sexuality-education programs. Prohibiting females from addressing their sexuality and desires, much less learning about how to meet their sexual desires, is a key component that scholarship deems missing from sexuality-education programs.

Likewise, scholarship has questioned why gender politics are not included in sexuality-education programs (Hayden, 2001; Trimble, 2009; Welles, 2005). Welles explains that the impact of double standards regarding different sexual expectations for males and females and the impact of mixed messages boys and girls receive from popular culture and the media about their sexuality, must be addressed in sexuality-education programs. For example, Askew (2007) found that college-aged women recall messages from their adolescent sexuality education that included content of guilt and fear, double standards for women, suppression of desire, lack of information, a reliance on male partners, and simply to stay abstinent until marriage. Overall, even though students may lack the advanced vocabulary to articulate what they are feeling, students in sexuality-

education programs are aware of gender politics; scholars posit it is time to introduce those concepts of subjectivity, power, oppression, and emancipation within programs.

Silenced Educators

Lastly, important to mention is that some sexuality-education programs are excluded from curricula, and others are prohibited from using innovative strategies. Educators may encounter resistance if they try to even introduce sexuality education in classes. Blinn-Pike's (2008) research on rural sex-education teachers found that rural educators described themselves as more politically constrained than urban teachers in terms of what they can teach their students due to conservative parents, religious organizations, and school board pressure. However, if educators are successful in implementing sexuality education, attempts at introducing non-traditional curriculum can create resistance. Askew (2007) discusses a senior colleague who warned her about teaching a college sexuality-education class from a feminist lens "so as not to place her university's funding in similar jeopardy." Indeed, institutions such as the University of Kansas, had its funding threatened in 2003 because of an investigation into the curriculum of one of its sexuality-education classes (p. 262). Jensen (2008) concedes that "those who are most straightforward when talking about sexual education may suffer the most censure and have the least success in getting their programs into the classroom" (p. 410).

This review of sexuality-education programs demonstrates the numerous problems and aspects missing within sexuality-education programs. The negative consequences of poor sexual health are far too grave to accept educational approaches that are incorrect, harmful, and exclusionary. For these reasons, it is vital that a new

approach to communicating and constructing sexuality education—sex-positive sexuality education—be investigated. Since there is a lack of scholarship investigating this approach, my study not only refines knowledge on what this approach entails, but also explains how to transcend traditional approaches to sexuality education.

Sex-Positive Sexuality Education

A sex-positive approach shares many characteristics with the above mentioned feminist ways of conceptualizing sexuality education because sex-positive education is a critical and feminist approach to education. However, there are differences, starting with the history of the term *sex-positive*. Sex-positive first was used in the 1970s in conjunction with sex-positive feminism. Sex-positive feminism's origin is associated with sex-industry workers and their supporters who felt women should have the same sexual opportunities as men and have total control over their bodies (Queen, 1997). Perhaps due to broader discourses from conservative Christian organizations as well as politicians, the term *sex-positive* fell out of favor for mainstream usage until the late 1990s and early 2000s when it was re-branded as a type of lifestyle- and sexuality-education philosophy.

Carol Queen, a sex educator, author, and feminist activist, defined sex-positive as the:

simple yet radical affirmation that we each grow our own passions on a different medium, [and] that instead of having two or three or even half a dozen sexual orientations, we should be thinking in terms of millions. Sex-positive respects each of our unique sexual profiles, even as we acknowledge that some of us have

been damaged by a culture that tries to eradicate sexual difference and possibility.
(1997, p. xvii)

In Queen's later collaboration with Comella (2008), they add that sex-positive can be defined as:

the cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a *potentially* positive force in one's life, and it can, of course, be contrasted with sex-negativity, which sees sex as problematic, disruptive, dangerous. Sex-positivity allows for and in fact celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent. (p. 278)

As Queen and Comella (2008) mention, it is helpful to contrast the definition of sex-positive with the definition of sex-negative.

I posit that while sex-positive sexuality education is an apt term, it may suffer from Derrida's concept of "the trace," as certain people may want to link the term to its origins of sex work from the 1970s. According to Queen (1997) sex-positive feminism was a movement in the 1970s that conceptualized sex work to be a positive experience. Since sex-work—stripping and prostitution—generally is not seen by society as a positive experience, *sex-positive* carries the negative stigma from the term's origin. Furthermore, many experiences labeled sex-positive are considered fringe, such as the Foundation for Sex Positive Culture, in Seattle, which offers members workshops on topics such as sexual slavery and provides members with opportunities for afternoon sexual activity meet-ups (About the Center, 2012).

Clearly, the term *sex-positive* has many connotations; so, too, does the phrase *sex-positive sexuality education*. It has emerged as a philosophy developed from the work of

many health educators, health practitioners, feminist writers, and sexuality experts, and there are key themes that set it apart from other approaches to teaching sexuality (Corinna, 2009; “Declaration,” 1999; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Helmich, 2009; Hogwarth, 2009; Kulwicki, 2008; Perry, 2008; & Queen & Comella, 2008). Today, sex-positive sexuality education also is known as *real sex education*, *sexuality education*, *thick desire*, *healthy sexuality*, or even *feminist sex education* (Corinna, 2009; Helmich, 2009; Fine & McClelland; Kulwicki, 2008; & Maltz, 2011). In my study, I examine how these themes of sex-positivity intersect at my sites of study and thus offer a concrete definition of sex-positive sexuality education.

Recent scholarship reports the benefits of a sex-positive approach in multiple contexts of sexual health education. According to Welles (2005), “the importance of expanding the dialogue between adults and young women to include sex-positive messages about female sexual desire cannot be overstated” (p.44). Braun-Harvey and de Miranda (2009) explain that a sex-positive environment should be used for clients in treatment for drug/alcohol abuse that have a sex/drug linked behavior. Friedman and Valenti’s edited book, *Yes Means Yes!* (2008), calls for sex-positive education as a way to prevent rape. The authors who contributed to this volume believe that since U.S. society traditionally has not valued female sexual pleasure, this leads men to look out only for themselves in regards to obtaining pleasure, by any means possible. They propose that society reevaluate how it constructs female sexual pleasure and consequently change the way we talk, think, portray, value, and have sex. Since they argue that our current culture supports rape, they propose that a sex-positive framework for talking, teaching, and depicting sex could stop ideologies regarding rape within society. Knerr and Philpott

(2006) report that 30 international sexual health programs in countries such as South Africa, Australia, Bengal, Delhi, and Cambodia are successfully using a sex-positive approach. Innovative programs, such as “pleasure-focused couples counseling,” interactive videogames, education on how to use the Kama Sutra safety, and workshops on eroticizing female condoms, are all approached from a sex-positive framework. Knerr and Philpott state that this kind of approach can go “beyond improving sexual health, to enabling women and men to experience healthier, happier lives” (p. 108). Helmich (2009) states that although “nobody has ‘proven’ a broader, more comprehensive, positive sexuality education through peer-reviewed research,” research has provided tools for what works. In particular she states that a positive framework is important because:

We must focus on potential good, not just the potential bad, undesirable or harmful aspects of sexuality. We must focus on personal assets of young people, their strengths, joys, and abilities. Sexuality education should respect and empower youth. We should celebrate sexuality, life, and even pleasure! And not just pleasure in sex, but more importantly, in relationships. Whether a relationship includes sex or not, we all seek rewarding, mutual intimacy. And we are all sexual. Our young people know this, feel this, and long to understand themselves and others. And in order for sexuality education to be positive, it needs to be taught by trained, comfortable, positive teachers and leaders. (pp. 14-15)

Although scholarship has supported a sex-positive approach to sexuality education, to date there are no studies that have examined what sex-positive sexuality education looks like in practice. Knerr and Philpott’s (2006) review of programs using a sex-positive approach is the closest scholarship there is, but this research did not

investigate what it fact makes these programs sex-positive or how sex-positive sexuality education is communicated. As I will discuss in the following section, scholarship has theorized about key components that distinguish a sex-positive approach from abstinence-only or comprehensive approaches to teaching sexuality education; however, research has not yet fully investigated sex-positive approaches in action.

The first aspect that sets sex-positive sexuality education apart from others is its focus on sex as a positive part of a person's life. Consistently, empirical evidence shows that a healthy sex life leads to better physical, mental, and emotional health. While sex-positive sexuality education would not encourage students to have sex for the any of these benefits, it would not lie to them or use ineffective scare techniques. Instead of scaring students about the terrible consequences of sex, it would be honest about both its positive and negative aspects. Sex, in other words, would be presented as something that can be extremely positive if it is treated with respect and occurs when the parties are mutually ready for the responsibilities that come along with being sexually active. Sexual activities that are engaged in consensually should not be subject to sanctions or judgments because sex is conceptualized as normal and something that should not be cloaked in fear or shame. For instance, sex-positive sexuality education believes framing sex in fear and teaching only about risk will not transform human behavior; rather, it only leads people to feel guilty while they still pursue and engage in sex (Banim & Tasker, 1999). Sex-positive sexuality education, then, moves past teaching just about the negatives of sex to building an understanding that when a student is physically, emotionally, and mentally ready, sex can be positive (Corinna, 2009; "Declaration," 1999; Kulwicki, 2008).

Furthermore, sex-positive sexuality education stresses that sex is about more than just reproduction, and that sex is not just a heterosexual act involving penetration from a penis to a vagina (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Kulwicki, 2008). This philosophy stresses that sexual activities never should be confined to those of a certain sex, age, race, or relationship status, but instead sexual activities should be mutually agreed upon by the interactants (Corinna, 2009). Although sex-positive education appreciates sexual activity and expressing one's sexuality, scholars who support this framework believe that sex is something that students should do when they are ready; therefore, abstinence is an important option to discuss in the classroom, but it cannot be the only message sent. Furthermore, regardless of students' identity positionalities, they do not have to partake in any sexual activity with which they feel uncomfortable. In Fields's (2008) ethnographic work, she found that even in comprehensive sexuality-education classrooms, students of color were taught using a "hidden curriculum" that insinuated that they may need sexuality lessons more so than their white peers. Although there are important sexual health discrepancies among races and/or sexual identities, it never is acceptable for an educator to assume anything about students' sexualities. Sex-positive sexuality education encourages students to fight such stereotypes in their own relationships. For example, even if a couple has dated for three months, and many expect them to become sexually active, sex-positive sexuality education teaches students that the sexual decisions they make are theirs alone.

Sex-positive sexuality education supports the need for advanced communication skills. A sex-positive sexuality education approach could teach such communication skills as perception checking, nonverbal communication, communicating respect for likes

and dislikes, and how to build positive climates. These important lifelong communication skills can help students navigate sexuality more efficiently. Sex-positive sexuality education also could acknowledge that people desperately want to have conversations with caring and supportive adults regarding sex (Hilton, 2007). Fields's (2008) work demonstrates that students are desperate for knowledge regarding sex and sexuality but do not know accurate places to find this information. Furthermore, teachers even remark that they want to teach sex education better but lack skills for doing so. A sex-positive approach trains willing teachers and strategizes with students about how to implement conversations and find resources about sexuality. Finally, sex-positive sexuality education strives to teach about the necessity for sexual partners to communicate enthusiastic consent. According to Perry (2008) consent is more than a partner saying "yes" to sexual activity; both partners also need to enjoy themselves as well. If there is any sense of hesitancy or displeasure, the partner would stop because those negative feelings do not support a positive sexual climate.

Unlike many sexuality-education programs that are only implemented for two days or two weeks, sex-positive sexuality education believes there must be a commitment between educators and students to build a longer standing program. A parachute approach to sex education, where an educator "drops in" and leaves the next day, does not allow for the necessary time and relationship opportunities. Sex-positive sexuality education appreciates that students of all ages need life-long sexuality mentors that they can look up to and confide in. Prolonged sexuality education in schools or centers for sexuality education are a way to ensure people receive better sex education and build trusting relationships with sexual health experts (Fields, 2008).

Perhaps the key element that sex-positive sexuality education teaches is the appreciation of the inherent pleasure of sex and sexuality (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Kulwicki, 2008). The attention paid by this philosophy to the typically silenced concepts in sex education of female sexual pleasure, desire, and sexualities makes it distinctive (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Helmich, 2009; Kulwicki, 2008). Realistically, people already know that sex is pleasurable and thus appreciate when educators are honest with them. Aggleton and Campbell's (2000) study of what young people want in sex education supports this claim; participants stated they wanted to know "non-sexual ways of showing affection, and the pleasurable, emotional and complex aspects of sexuality" (p. 290). Sex-positive sexuality education in schools could promote behaviors like masturbation that even some comprehensive programs do not like to talk about and/or challenge the students to come up with ways that sexual pleasure can be achieved but that are low risk—deep kissing or dancing very close. Adult centers of sex-positive sexuality education also aid women in this respect because these centers focus on helping women achieve sexual pleasure. Overall, a sex-positive approach to sexuality education embraces feminine sexual pleasure and equips both women and men with knowledge, respect, and an understanding of the female body and communication skills and autonomy to be sexually healthy. However, although scholarship on sex-positive sexuality education sounds promising, there has been little to no research specifically looking at and comparing how sex-positive organizations define and construct this approach.

Important to note is that positive sexuality education is *not* pornography education for students in schools (Kulwicki, 2008). Pornography is defined here as graphic videos

that demonstrate coital positions and/or sexual techniques. Research shows that the largest viewers of porn are adolescent males. If porn is where these young men are learning about sex, they will not be equipped to handle real relationships and will have poor expectations for sexual behavior. However, sex-positive sexuality education for adults may incorporate the use of sex-positive pornography as it is an encouraged practice by sex therapists for adults who are struggling with sexual problems.

Although there is an emerging understanding of what sex-positive sexuality education is, currently research does not investigate how organizations and schools are enacting it. Many scholars have supported a sex-positive approach to sexuality education, but I have found no research that confirms any formal school based sexuality-education programs that currently are enacting this approach, which is most likely due to the constraints of school boards, state mandates, and fear of losing governmental funds or grants. Therefore, I examine three organizations outside of the school setting that have implemented this approach and the strategies they use to construct and communicate it. My study heeds the call from past researchers to showcase ways to teach sexuality education, incorporates the importance of educating adults, and appreciates the importance of non-traditional settings on sexuality education.

Innovative Contexts of Sexuality Education

Since sex-positive sexuality education is a revolutionary approach to sexuality education, the organizations using this approach are not traditional either. Although Good Vibrations serves many functions, it is ultimately an adult retail sex store. Despite suffering from a bad reputation, and in some cases justifiably so, adult retail sex stores are contexts that show support for as important arenas of sexual health communication.

Scarleteen.com is a website, so its context is one of computer-mediated communication. As I will outline, CMC provides a flexible and innovative context for sexuality education. Lastly, institutes on sexuality, such as the Summer Institute, offer an innovative context for gathering practitioners and scholars together to discuss sexuality and how to teach it. However, no research has investigated this important context; therefore, this review of literature on innovative contexts where sexuality education is occurring will be limited to adult retail stores and computer-mediated communication.

Adult Retail Stores

While the bulk of research on sexuality education focuses on sex education for adolescents and thus formalized school-based practices, adults want and need spaces where they can learn more about sex and sexuality. Besides researching on the Internet, consulting with a sex therapist, or visiting a health organization like Planned Parenthood, the only other place an adult may be able to locate personalized education within their community is an adult toy retailer. Some current scholarly research takes note of the importance of highlighting the work and many functions of adult sexual retail stores. Richard (2001) interviewed Claire Cavanah, the founder of Toys in Babeland, a sex-positive sexuality education adult toy store in Seattle, Washington. Although Richard did not use ethnographic research methods, she used an adult retail sex store as a site for scholarly research. The only other studies in scholarly literature to investigate adult sexual retail stores from a sexual health perspective were those by Reece, Herbenick, and Sherwood (2004) and Herbenick and Reece (2006). Reece et al. (2004) investigated the adult retail industry (e.g. adult bookstores, sex shops, adult video, and retail outlets) as a venue of sexual health information. They argue:

Given the magnitude of the adult retail industry and the fact that a significant percentage of the U.S. population looks to it for products related to safer sex, sexual pleasure, or alleviating sexual dysfunction, it is logical to consider whether its retail establishments might be able to serve as resources that could simultaneously promote sexual health and sexual pleasure while retaining, and perhaps expanding, a profitable consumer base. (p. 177)

Reece et al. show that these sites promote sexual health for the community; therefore, future scholarly research should assess the role these stores play in the intervention, evaluation, and dissemination of sexual health information because adult retail stores are “potential and important partners” in increasing the sexual health of communities (p. 180). In addition, Herbenick and Reece (2006) found that employees of adult retail stores frequently disseminated sexual health information. The research by Richard (2001), Reece et al. (2004) and Herbenick and Reece (2006) explain the importance of adult retail stores and underscore the need to investigate how these organizations actually accomplish sex-positive sexual health communication education. My study will begin to fill this gap in the literature. Although Good Vibrations serves as a sexual health and wellness resource for the community in numerous ways, fundamentally, it is an adult sex retail store that approaches sexuality education from a sex-positive approach.

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) increasingly is being used to innovatively disseminate sexual health information, and CMC is an especially important source of sexual health communication for adolescents (Oden & Brown, 2010). Due to

factors influencing access to sources of health information such as confidentiality concerns and sexual communication anxiety, it follows that people's use of CMC as a sexual health source is increasing (Beck et al., 2004; Sprecher et al., 2008). These technological advancements have proven particularly useful for connecting with younger generations (Sprecher et al., 2008). With the influx of sexual health information through mediated sources, there has been an increasing number of studies of mediated contexts for the dissemination of health education.

The Internet is a particularly useful source for communicating sexual health information because it provides instantaneous information, connects difficult to reach or generally inaccessible geographic populations, can be tailored for specific audiences, and offers a forum for social support. However, although the Internet has the capability to provide valuable pieces of sexual health communication, research has demonstrated limitations to the Internet's usefulness, including transmitting inaccurate information, violating users' privacy, and accessibility problems such as firewalls at public institutions and/or overall insufficient universal Internet access. For example, Keller, Labelle, Karimi, and Gupta's (2002) research on sex information websites for teens highlighted these limitations. Their results indicate that the majority of sex-information websites targeted for young adults lack clear content and/or have design flaws, such as requiring an above average reading level. Keller et al.'s findings consequently found that "health educators need to do a better job of presenting online information in formats and styles appealing to young people" (p. 345).

Perhaps in response to Keller et al.'s call, scholars now investigate innovations in mediated technologies targeted at young people. For example, Kamel Boulos and Toth-

Cohen (2009) designed an SIM (strategic life simulation) computer game, “Sexual Health Land,” which offers users “opportunities for independent learning, exploration, and discovery through its various interactive objects and special experiences” (p. 285). Besides computer games, sexual health researchers also have explored delivering messages via handheld mobile devices. Knopper (2010) chronicled a nurse who developed sexual health promotion soap operas available via streaming video on phones with 3G and 4G network service. These soap operas included messages of safe sex and healthy relationship behaviors that clients were encouraged to view between clinic visits in the confidential and private confines of their homes.

Finally, research demonstrates how text messaging is a promising new source of health information. One study highlights the success of SEXINFO, a text-messaging system developed in San Francisco that is targeted specifically to lower-income youths (Levine, McCright, Dobkin, Woodruff, & Klausner, 2008). Text messaging is beneficial because it is a financially efficient way for organizations to provide instant sexual health information and referrals to clients and groups, such as adolescents and young adults, who find texting a culturally acceptable way of interacting with sexual health practitioners. However, as informal sources of sexual health information become easier to access, research (Guzman et al., 2003; Oden & Brown, 2010) shows the important role that health educators must play to ensure that not only is correct information being conveyed, but these communicative episodes take place in as safe, open, and comfortable a space as possible given the constraints of computer-mediated communication.

My research on Scarleteen.com adds to the literature on innovative ways computer-mediated communication serves as a source of sexual health communication

for adolescents. Scarleteen's website incorporates multiple methods of distributing messages including interactive message boards, blogs, text messages, and social networking features such as status updates and tweets to communicate messages of sexual health information.

By choosing to examine three distinct sites in which sex-positive sexuality education is offered, my research extends our knowledge of the strategies employed in and possibilities in retail, on a website, and at an educational institute. These contexts have not been extensively studied in the literature; nor have they been studied specifically through the lens of sex-positive sex education. Good Vibrations, Scarelteen.com, and the Summer Institute are excellent sites to study because of the opportunity they provide to intervene into scholarship of multiple innovative organizational contexts of sexual health and provide insight into academic and community resources.

Summary

The previous literature review provided an account of current knowledge about sexual health communication and sexuality education. I explained how health communication is foundational to this study; discussed the importance of sexual health, and reviewed ways that sexual health is communicated predominately within sexuality-education programs; reviewed scholarly evaluations of sexuality education programs in order to better understand the benefits of a sex-positive approach to sexuality education; and described innovative contexts, such as adult retail stores and computer-mediated communication, in which sexual health communication and education occurs.

This account also examined areas that currently need to be examined by scholarly research in order to fill gaps in the communication discipline's knowledge about

innovative ways to communicate about sexual health within sex-positive sexuality education. By conducting interviews, observations, and textual analyses of organizations that are using this approach, my study will broaden our knowledge of what sex-positive sexuality education means and how sexuality education can better be constructed and communicated. Based on the lack of research investigating how sexuality education is communicated using a sex-positive approach, the following research questions are posed:

RQ 1: How is the process of sex-positive sexuality education enacted at Good Vibrations, National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.com?

RQ2: What communication strategies are used by sex-positive sexuality education organizations to communicate sex-positive sexuality education?

RQ3: How is sex-positive sexuality education defined?

Chapter Three: Method

The review of literature on sexual health communication, sexuality-education programs and contexts, and sex-positive sexuality education exposed a gap in research and scholarship about how a new approach to sexuality education—sex-positive sexuality education—is defined, constructed, and communicated. My study investigates three contextually diverse organizations that are using a sex-positive approach to sexuality education. My methodological approach to this study is informed by the goals to understand how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed and communicated for the academy and community while also considering the tensions and complexities within this approach from a feminist perspective. In this chapter, I explain my methodological choices. First, I discuss the paradigms in which my work is framed and explain the theoretical grounding and research design of this study. Then, I explain each of my sites of study and review my data collection and analysis methods. At the end of the chapter, I introduce a model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education, constructed from my data, that I will use in the following chapters to partially answer my three research questions:

RQ 1: How is the process of sex-positive sexuality education enacted at Good Vibrations, National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.com?

RQ2: What communication strategies are used by sex-positive sexuality education organizations to communicate sex-positive sexuality education?

RQ3: How is sex-positive sexuality education defined?

Paradigms

I believe there is value in using multiple approaches to methodology. Because choices in method are always secondary to the paradigmatic placement of the researcher, I explain my paradigmatic assumptions and how they inform my study's methodological choices (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). To investigate how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed, communicated, and defined, I draw on the assumptions from the interpretive, critical, and feminist paradigms. I conceptualize these paradigms to be on a continuum and not a binary; therefore, together they provide different yet useful ways of investigating my study.

First, I guide this study from an interpretive paradigm, which holds that knowledge and reality are co-constructed based on shared experiences and shared communicative practices within a community: "findings are *literally created* as investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 207). An interpretive researcher aims to produce consensus about a topic and provide descriptions and analysis of this topic to further knowledge about it. I believe sex-positive sexuality education is constructed and defined by the participants using it. My job as a researcher within the interpretive paradigm is to go into the field and analyze the individual and collective construction of this approach, including the patterns of conduct, norms, codes, and interpretations of sex-positive sexuality education enacted by the participants at these organizations. One way I will be able to do this is by using grounded practical theory.

Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory (GPT) is an interpretive approach to methodology because it privileges the "hermeneutical/dialectical" approach to interacting with participants and data (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Grounded practical theory consists of three steps: specifying a practice, collecting data, and performing a

qualitative analysis, and theoretically reconstructing the communication problem. Using this method, a practice, such as sex-positive sexuality education communication, is reconstructed on three interrelated levels. First, the technical level assesses specific communication strategies. Second, during the problem level, a repertoire of strategies is brought forth for reflection. Lastly, the practice is reconstructed in the form of overarching principles that govern the use of this practice and/or provide a rationale for this practice. As an interpretive method guiding my study, GPT helps to illuminate the communicative situation of sex-positive sexuality education, suggest specific techniques that participants use during this practice, and offer situated ideals and judgments of the practice (Craig & Tracy, 1995).

Secondly, this study also is informed by assumptions within the critical paradigm. A critical approach investigates issues such as power, ideology, hegemony, and emancipation, with discourse often studied as a site of control. The critical paradigm moves beyond an interpretivist perspective, that reality is co-created, and instead looks at the larger structures that contribute to forming our ideas about reality. The assumptions of the critical paradigm are useful in my research because social, political, cultural, or economic structures may inform or constrain sex-positive sexuality education at my sites of study.

Lastly, my work is informed by the feminist paradigm, which privileges ontological and epistemological assumptions of valuing lived experience, bringing marginalized concepts from the margin to the center, and seeking to help improve women's lives (as well as men's and children's). A feminist approach to methodology includes a commitment to self-reflexivity—being conscious of one's position and how

that position influences perspective and interpretations; a valuing of collaboration; and finding ways to make research accessible to stakeholders (Dallimore, 2000; Foss & Foss, 1994; hooks, 2000a, 2000b; Jarviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkö, 2003; Letherby, 2003).

While all of the above mentioned feminist paradigmatic assumptions inform my study, the feminist paradigm seeks to better the lives of women and thus strongly influences my research. A lack of sexuality education or sexuality education that is done poorly harms women at a higher rate than it harms men. Women are more likely to contract STIs than men, to be subject to maternal death or complications from pregnancies, to be more likely to support unplanned babies, and are more likely to drop out of high school or college than males to support children. Furthermore, women's pleasure often is ignored or discounted in traditional sexuality-education programs. The goal of my study is to investigate a new method of sexuality education in order to help improve women's lives as well as men's and children's. In addition, the feminist value of self-reflectivity guides my research in the field, data analysis, and the way I write my findings. Self-reflexivity encourages me to consciously reflect on how my identity standpoint directs and influences my research. Lastly, feminist methodology's support for disseminating findings in accessible ways to a smaller public again supports my goals to make this research available to scholars and to the community.

I undertook this particular study to learn about and make more available an approach to sexuality education that is constructed and defined by the participants using it within larger social structures. I also hope, with this study, to better the lives of women, men, and children—in line with feminist frameworks—and to offer a way to

revolutionize sexuality education to improve the health and well-being of our communities.

Social Ecological Perspective

The three paradigms that ground this study—interpretive, critical, and feminist—coalesce in a social ecological perspective in terms of this study. Ecological models as applied to health behavior and promotion are comprised of multiple levels of influence, most usually intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy (Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008). These levels of influence help scholars and practitioners understand the multiple determinants that affect an individual’s health and promote healthy behaviors (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey & Rinderle, 2006). Many social-ecological models explain health behaviors; however, the most useful models provide “comprehensive intervention approaches that systematically target mechanisms of change at each level of influence” (Sallis et al., 2008, p. 466).

The social ecological model offered by McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, and Glanz (1988)—the Ecological Model of Health Promotion Programs—provides a comprehensive frame for my study that brings the interpretive, critical, and feminist paradigms together in a model focused specifically on health and health promotion. Although my study does not investigate targeted health promotion interventions per se, this model guides my study on sex-positive sexuality education because it provides a useful theoretical basis for understanding how sexuality education is affected and determined by environmental causes. I briefly explain how sexuality education is affected at each level within this model and explain how my paradigms of study also inform these levels of analysis.

The first level of analysis, intrapersonal factors, explains how an individual's knowledge, behavior, attitudes, values, or beliefs can affect his or her health. Sexuality-education programs offer the opportunity to present an individual with new knowledge, attitudes, and skills; therefore, these programs can be very influential to an individual. Second, interpersonal processes such as family, friends, and coworkers affect an individual's health. Data show the influence of interpersonal relationships on sexual health. Adolescents whose parents discuss sexuality with them are more likely to postpone sexual debut, children of teen mothers are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers themselves, and peer and parental factors can influence an individual's likelihood of using protection during sexual activity. Clearly, interpersonal relationships are an important context of sexuality education and can influence an individual's sexual health decisions. Third, organizational factors can support or hinder an individual's health. A health-care system that encourages nurses and doctors to use a sex-positive approach to educating patients about sexuality instead of ignoring or silencing questions or concerns may find that the health of their patients and subsequently community increases. Similarly, a community level of analysis supports a social-ecological approach to health behavior in which "community is power" and in which the "power structures in cities, counties, and states often play a critical role in defining community health problems and allocating resources" (McLeroy et al., 1988, p. 364). Generally, community members who are the most at-risk for the negative consequences of sex—HIV/AIDS, STIs, sexual assault, or unplanned pregnancies—are the members of the community with the least community power—sex workers, the homeless, the young, the undocumented. However, a social-ecological approach realizes that the sexual health of these members

can affect all community members and the community at-large; therefore, sexuality education from an ecological approach would be an inclusive endeavor. Lastly, a social-ecological approach incorporates the importance of policy on protecting the health of the community. Public policies on sexuality education can affect all levels within this model from individual behavioral incentives like free contraception for women who visit a public health office, institutionalizing a certain kind of sexuality-education program within high schools, or not allowing an adult retail store to open in certain parts of a neighborhood.

A social-ecological model is an important theoretical grounding for my study because it explains how sexuality education is an issue that affects the entire environment of a community, and it aligns with my paradigmatic assumptions. For example, within the interpretive approach, grounded practical theory understands the importance of providing techniques and situated ideals to help communicate difficult situations. Perhaps if romantic partners, parents and children, patients and providers, or teachers and students could use sex-positive communication strategies, these conversations would be less difficult, and more positive health behaviors such as using condoms or getting tested for STIs could occur. The social-ecological approach also allows for a critical approach to research by recognizing the importance of providing sex-positive sexuality education to marginalized members of the community. In my study, I analyze who has access to sex-positive sexuality education. Finally, the feminist paradigm recognizes both the importance of intrapersonal sexuality education issues, such as teaching people about agency, and also policy-level decisions. For example, does sex-positive sexuality education inform women of all of their options during a health emergency, like an

unplanned pregnancy, or are these issues ignored, as is the case in many approaches to sexuality education. And what are the environmental ramifications for decisions such as these?

In sum, my study is guided by an ecological approach to health behavior. As I investigate my three sites of study, I pay attention to how the five levels within the environment—intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy—affect sex-positive sexuality education. However, I am not only interested on how these factors affect sex-positive sexuality education; I am also interested in how sex-positive sexuality education can benefit the health and well-being of the community. Social ecological models, and specifically McLeroy et al.'s (1988) Ecological Model of Health Promotion Programs, are a useful framework for this study. A social-ecological approach offers a theoretical grounding for issues that my study addresses, including the complex relationship a person has in regards to sexual health; the necessity for lifelong, accessible, and inclusive sexuality educational efforts; and how effective sexuality education can have implications beyond simply improving someone's sex life—it can improve the community's public health. In addition to providing these theoretical underpinnings, the social-ecological approach fits my methodological approach to this study by bringing together three paradigms—interpretive, critical, and feminist—and collectively providing insight about how to gather, analyze, and present my data.

Research Design

To review, this study investigates how three organizations—Good Vibrations, Scarleteen.com, and the Summer Institute—construct and communicate sex-positive sexuality education. In this study, I provide a definition of sex-positive sexuality

education, utilize a case-study approach, and produce a collection of information on the general condition of sex-positive sexuality education while providing in-depth understanding about what makes each organization unique.

Case Study

I chose to use a case-study approach because case studies privilege observation and reflection from time spent at a site. For a case study, the researcher spends substantial time on site, involved in the activities of the site, talking with participants, and generally becoming as familiar as possible with the site (Stake, 2006). Reflection occurs both during and after the observation phase, which means the researcher constantly is making sense of and revising the meaning of what is going on. The goal is for the researcher to come away with patterns and themes that ultimately are crafted into a narrative of the site—a way of understanding it that can be shared with others and can serve as the basis for theorizing (Mason, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2006).

I chose to use a case-study approach, then, for three primary reasons. First, I can observe what happens with sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE) in practice. By spending time in three disparate organizations that claim to disseminate SPSE, I can gain a more comprehensive understanding than if I only conducted interviews. An increased understanding of how sex-positive sexuality education is enacted at an academic location, public location, and a virtual location for adolescents clarifies knowledge about sex-positive sexuality education communication, provides an opportunity to define this approach, and suggests possibilities for future research. Furthermore, a case study that involves extensive observation and time spent at a site means the researcher is less likely to simply impose expectations and biases on a site. There is more time for insight and

reflection, more opportunity to check and confirm interpretations with those at the site, and the researcher is less likely to simply bring initial expectations to the work.

In addition, the decision to use three case studies of quite different organizations offers a comparison that helps enhance my understanding of SPSE and its different forms across organizations. By comparing these organizations in a case-study format, I can refine our knowledge about sex-positive sexuality education and understand how it is communicated and constructed at different organizations. In-depth case studies combined with comparison, then, are important because little research exists about organizations that employ a sex-positive approach. I generate a well-developed analysis of multiple organizations that use SPSE and a comprehensive understanding of how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed, communicated, and defined.

Cases

I used purposeful sampling to choose the cases for this study. This sampling strategy allowed me to strategically pick cases relevant to sex-positive sexuality education. Stake (1995) argues that atypical sites give the researcher the best opportunity to learn because they offer unique and original experiences. The sites I chose serve as the leading organizations for communicating sex-positive sexuality education—Good Vibrations was the first feminist owned adult sex toy retailer; the Summer Institute is the only one of its kind in the country; and Scarleteen is the most popular website for adolescents devoted to sex-positive sexual health. In addition to selecting sites that are unique, I also chose to use a range of contexts (academic, general public, online adolescent) in order to understand “how things work differently or similarly” and be able to perform a “strategic comparison of sensitive and rich understandings of specific

contexts, whose significance in relation to a wider universe we can demonstrate” (Mason, 2002, p. 125). In the following sections, I describe why I choose each site and explain the data-collection procedures and methods of analysis. In February, 2011, this study was approved by the University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Case One: Good Vibrations

Good Vibrations (GV) is a pioneer in the field of sex-positive sexuality education for a community audience. In 1977, Joani Blank opened the first Good Vibrations store in San Francisco because she was dismayed by the “lack of resources for women seeking accurate sex information and good quality sex toys.” So she decided to open a friendly, clean, well lit alternative to traditional “adult” bookstores (“Our Mission,” n.d., para. 2). This store was met with so much enthusiasm from the community that Good Vibrations has since opened four more stores in San Francisco and one in Brookline, Massachusetts, and has a successful online presence. The mission of Good Vibrations is as follows:

A diverse, woman-focused retailer providing high-quality, sex-positive products and non-judgmental, accurate sex information through our clean and comfortable stores, catalog, website, wholesale division, product and movie production lines in order to enhance our customers’ sex lives and promote healthy attitudes about sex. (“Our Mission,” n.d., para. 6)

This mission corresponds with the values statement of Good Vibrations. This statement, which begins with the heading, “Sex-Positivity,” emphasizes the retailer’s commitment to sexual pleasure as a human right. It also highlights GV’s commitment to removing shame from sexual activity, accepting sexual preferences and choices, providing ongoing

education, and enacting a supportive sex-positive environment and sex-positive communication at all times (“Our Mission,” n.d., para. 6).

In addition to being a long-time, influential trendsetter in the community, Good Vibrations is also a relevant site to study because the staff includes some of the founders and pioneers of sex-positive sexuality education. This includes Carol Queen, an award winning author, activist, and originator of the sex-positive movement (“Greetings From,” 2011). Although many of the staff do not have academic credentials, they do have years of knowledge about communicating sex-positivity sexuality education, and these lay voices are an equally important component to understanding this movement.

Lastly, Good Vibrations is an optimal choice of study for an organization frequented by the public because GV offers the rare opportunity for leading voices of sex-positivity, Dr. Carol Queen or the trained Sex Educator-Sales Associates (SESA), to interact daily with curious customers. Although some customers may self-select—they find an organization like Good Vibrations fits the ideals of sex-positivity and deliberately seek it out—others may just be looking to have a question answered or make a purchase with no conception of the philosophy behind Good Vibrations. Yet others may simply encounter the store on a shopping trip on the streets of San Francisco. This potential for a mix of backgrounds and experiences provides an excellent reason to investigate Good Vibrations.

I researched four different Good Vibrations (GV) locations in San Francisco—the Mission Street Store (often referred to as the Downtown Store), the Valencia Street Store, the Polk Street Store, and the Berkeley Store—from June 15, 2011, through July 6,

2011.³ When I started the study, I met with Dr. Charlie Glickman, the Education Program Manager for Good Vibrations, at the GV administrative offices. The offices are located in downtown San Francisco in a separate building from the GV stores. I had been to the offices once before, in November 2010, when I met with Glickman and Carol Queen, staff sexologist, regarding using GV as a site in my study. Glickman remembered me, greeted me at the door, and we walked up to his office on the third story of the building. The first floor of the offices are used as the storage center for the products GV ships via their online store, and the second story houses a kitchen and work area. Charlie shares his office with Carol Queen; Queen was out of the office during our meeting.

During our meeting, Glickman and I discussed my observations at the stores and worked out some ground rules for my observations. I was allowed to visit all the stores at a time that worked best for my schedule. Glickman informed me that he sent an email to the store managers to notify them of my project. He gave me directions to each of the stores and some background information about the store managers and the vibe or feeling that I could expect to garner from each of the four stores. I was told that I could not openly take notes, and that SESAs (sex-education sales associates) or managers were not allowed to talk to me on company time. I was also instructed not to promote my study to any customers in the store because this could make patrons feel uncomfortable. In a follow-up conversation I had with Glickman, I was also told that I could not take photographs of the inside of the stores, again to ensure the privacy of the shoppers. Glickman cleared my attendance at the free educational workshop “Strap it To Me! With Dr. Carol Queen,” held at the Valencia store, and encouraged me to attend the gallery

³ Although Good Vibrations does have an online store, I am not focusing on this part of the organization for my study. Rather, I am only investigating the stores, staff, customers, store class sessions/workshops, and store produced textual materials such as flyers and advertisements.

showing of “legendary sex-positive” photographer Phyllis Christopher, held in the back room of the Good Vibrations Polk Street Store (“Phyllis Christopher,” 2011). He also mentioned that Good Vibrations participates in San Francisco Gay Pride celebrations (commonly referred to as *Pride* celebrations), and he encouraged me to attend the Good Vibrations-supported events like the Valencia Street Store Pink Pleasure Party. The entire meeting with Glickman lasted about an hour.

Good Vibrations Data Collection Methods

Observations. I spent roughly ten to twelve hours observing at each of the four Good Vibrations stores (Mission, Valencia, Polk, and Berkley) for a total of 50 hours in the field. Due to its remote location, I was only able to observe at the Berkeley store twice for a total of approximately five hours; however, during my observations I did feel as if I hit a point of saturation at the store. Mason (2007) describes the point of saturation as the time when a researcher has “a picture of what is going on and can generate an appropriate explanation for it” (p. 134). Since I had been also observing the other stores, I had a good basis for observing interactions at Good Vibrations. The Berkeley store confirmed these expectations, but I also found that during both of my visits, on different days of the week and times, I observed similar interactions that were unique to this store. Therefore, I feel I had a good sense of the typical interactions at the Berkeley store.

Specifically in my observations of the stores, I investigated how the stores are designed, what products they sell, the floor plans, product layout, and other nonverbal elements such as color and smells. I also noted where the stores are located geographically within the Bay Area. Within the stores, I engaged as an observer-as-participant with the interactions at Good Vibrations. An observer-as-participant primarily

observes the setting, but may informally and nondirectly interact with participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I specifically observed employee customer communication and noted employees' greeting styles, communicative styles (direct, indirect, authoritative, etc.), questions posed to the customers, and nonverbal communication. I also paid attention to the SESAs, noticing that most of them were females in their 20s or 30s; however, there were a few male SESAs I observed as well.

In addition to observing the stores as a participant, I also observed and participated in Good Vibrations' booth at the Dyke Rally in Dolores Park, Good Vibrations' Pink Pleasure Party, a tour of the Mission Street store Charlie Glickman facilitated for participants of the Summer Institute, and the only GV educational workshop/class scheduled during my time in San Francisco, "Strap it To Me! With Dr. Carol Queen," held at the Valencia Street store. During these classes and events, I wanted to interact with the patrons, so at these events, I assumed more of a participant-observer role, interested in understanding the sites from a first-person perspective (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). During observations of these events, I gathered data on what language the educators or SESAs used, what materials were used (videos, handouts, diagrams, etc.), what questions other patrons asked, and information about the overall experience.

When I entered each of the stores, I introduced myself to the SESAs working and usually spoke with the manager on duty as well. Since I could not discuss my role as a researcher with the patrons of the store, I did not record any identifying information about any of the patrons I observed except for broad demographic characteristics. Since I was not allowed by Glickman to overtly take notes, I would situate myself in a corner of the store or sit on the couch or benches in the stores and take notes on my smartphone or

wait until the patrons of the store had exited to write down field notes in a small memo book I brought with me and carried in my bag.

Interviews. I conducted in-depth interviews with three representatives from Good Vibrations: Dr. Charlie Glickman, Education Program Manager; Dr. Carol Queen, Staff Sexologist; and SESA Vickie. Two other SESAs indicated an initial interest in talking to me, but they never returned my multiple messages. Glickman's interview took place on July 6, 2011, at the Good Vibrations administrative offices and lasted an hour. Due to scheduling problems, I had to conduct Queen's interview over the phone on July 20, 2011; it lasted an hour and 15 minutes. I interviewed Vickie on July 7, 2011, at a Mexican restaurant located next to the Polk Street store for 45 minutes. All of the interviewees knew they were being audio recorded and agreed to using their real names within the dataset.

Since I had the opportunity to interview both administrators and an SESA, I had different goals for the interviews. During my interviews with the administrators, I focused on how they make decisions that affect the company, SESAs, and the community. In the interview with an SESA, I inquired about the day-to-day operations of Good Vibrations and what her job as both a sex educator and sale associate entails. Across the interviews, I chose to ask nondirective questions, such as, "What does sex-positive mean to you?," "How do you define sex-positive?," "Do you promote sexual communication? If yes, how?," "What kinds of resistance have you felt from the community?," or "How do you create a safe space for people to engage with topics that can be very intimidating or uncomfortable?" Unfortunately, because I was not allowed to discuss my role as a researcher when I was observing in the stores, I did not have a

chance to interview any patrons to talk about their experiences at Good Vibrations. An additional reason I attended the Good Vibrations-sponsored gallery opening of Phyllis Christopher's photography was to see if I could secure any interviews with patrons at the gallery opening; however, this did not prove to be a good place to ask about and arrange interviews.

Texts. The last type of data I analyzed was educational brochures written by Carol Queen about various sexuality and sex-toy topics. These brochures are available for free and are located next to their corresponding products within the stores. Although I did not observe any store patrons spontaneously taking any of these brochures, SESAs encouraged customers to take them, and Glickman told me that they serve as an important educational component that the store offers its customers. I reviewed each of the 11 brochures that GV produces. All of the brochures are 4 x 10, double sided and on glossy cardstock. The brochure topics are as follows: "Lubricants," "Vibrators," "Silicone & Glass/Cleaning Your Toys," "Prostate," "Anal Sex," "G-Spot," "Condoms," "PC Muscle & Kegels/ Pumps," "Harnesses/Dildos," "Cock Rings," and "Bondage & Spanking." Brochures provide quick, key information, and are written in a conversational tone.

Good Vibrations Observation Sites

In this section, I provide a brief description of each of the stores and the events I observed. Further details about the Good Vibrations case analysis appear in Chapter Four.

Mission Street Store. The Mission Street store had its grand opening in January 2011, making it the newest Good Vibrations store that I observed.⁴ The store is located

⁴ Since my visit in the summer of 2011, Good Vibrations opened a fifth store, located in Oakland, California.

across from the back entrance of a Bloomingdale's department store and is on the same side of the street as a large parking garage, restaurants, and service retailers, such as dry cleaners and cell-phone stores. Pedestrians walking or driving past the storefront would not necessarily realize it is a Good Vibrations store.

Since this store is close to the shopping district and Powell Street BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) stop, many of the patrons of the store are tourists. It is common to see couples or groups of friends peek into the store, smile, and start to browse around. The SESAs at the Mission Street store are female and male, appear to be in their early 20s, and were outgoing and friendly with all customers. I also sensed that the Mission Street store SESAs were interested in my research because they remembered who I was when I would come to observe and eagerly offered to assist me with any questions.

Valencia Street Store. The Valencia Street store is the original Good Vibrations store. Located in the Mission District, a neighborhood of San Francisco that is hip, artsy, and edgy, the Valencia Street store mirrors this neighborhood's culture. The store is located on the middle of block that has taquerias, bars, gift shops, and retail stores such as trendy furniture stores. I was informed by SESAs and Glickman that this store has the most "community" feel. Shoppers seem to come into the store, deliberately looking for something or seeking assistance. There was also a large age range of shoppers. I observed teenagers to middle-aged and older adults shopping at this store. While the Valencia Street store may be known for its sense of community, this store was where I personally felt the most unwelcome. The SESAs did not seem to understand why I was there, and often time gave me strange or questioning looks while I was observing. Luckily, this store has a large ottoman next to the books and the DVDs; therefore, it was easy for me

to sit on the ottoman and observe in a non-conspicuous way. However, while the SESAs may have not understood my role in the store, they were attentive to the customers and had friendly interactions with each other.

Polk Street Store. The Polk Street store, located in the Nob Hill neighborhood, is tucked away in a community with numerous bars, restaurants, and retailers such as convenience stores and flower shops. Customers tended to be a mix of tourists and locals browsing the merchandise and looking for help/products. During the day, the store was usually filled with locals—men and women—of diverse ages. During the evening, especially during weekends, the store was occupied by a younger crowd that seemed to come into the store for the novelty. Although many times patrons may have only entered the store out of curiosity or a gag, many ended up talking with an SESA and often left with one or more products. Regardless of the customers that may or may not have come into the store for serious reasons, SESAs treated each patron with respect, interest, and personalized assistance. I also felt the most comfortable and welcomed at the Polk Street store. This store also had a large seating area by the books and DVDs that made it extremely easy for me to sit and observe the entire store without invading any customer's space or privacy.

Berkeley Store. The Berkeley store, located off the beaten path from downtown Berkeley, is smaller than the other stores and has a more somber tone as well. Located on a street with houses and local retail shops and next to an independent coffee shop on the corner, the Berkeley store is unique but not overly eye-catching within the sleepy neighborhood where it resides. The clientele of this store was the most diverse I witnessed at any GV location. Older adults, in particular men, were very often in the store

as were younger couples or middle-aged women. The SESAs at this store were not as overtly welcoming to me as at the other stores, and at times seemed to enjoy chatting with each other more than with the customers. However, they always volunteered help and assistance to the customers. Conversations between SESAs and customers were hushed, not in a secretive way but in a special, intimate way. The only place available for me to sit was a small bench located in front of the books; however, since the store is small, it was also quite close to the vibrators. This placement directly next to the vibrators, where patrons and/or patrons and an SESA often stood and discussed products, made it very difficult for me to stay out of the way.

Good Vibrations Booth at the Dyke Rally. The Dyke Rally, a Pride event that celebrates lesbian solidarity, was held Saturday, June 25, 2011, at Dolores Park. The Dyke Rally started at 3:00 p.m. and went until 7:00 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. the crowd left the park and began to march to the Castro neighborhood. At the rally, there was a main stage set up where various acts performed; however, the crowd seemed less interested in listening to the performances and more interested in using the park as a place to congregate and celebrate before the Dyke March began. Good Vibrations and a few other organizations had tents set up close to the stage, and I observed the Good Vibrations booth for two hours. Their booth provided the opportunity for the public to ask Carol Queen and SESAs sexual health questions, play GV-sponsored games for prizes, and purchase select products. The booth was also used to promote Good Vibrations Pink Pleasure Party held following the rally and march.

Good Vibrations' Pink Pleasure Party. The route of the Dyke March passed in front of the Valencia Street GV store, making it the perfect opportunity for the store to

have a celebration. I was at the tail-end of the march; therefore, when I got to the Valencia Street store on June 25, 2011, around 7:30 p.m., the “Pink Pleasure Party” was in full swing. All of the administrative personnel, including Charlie Glickman, Carol Queen, and Jacki Stano, the GV Chief Operating Officer, worked there. Glickman was dressed in a black-leather vest, kilt, and combat boots. SESAs from other stores also worked at the party. I talked with Glickman briefly, and he informed me that the crowd “goes in waves” (author’s notes, 2011). As he explained to me, many of the customers have never been to the store because they visit San Francisco specifically for Pride celebrations. I could tell that the customers in the store were not the usual clientele of the Valencia Street store because the regular customers usually enter the store targeting specific products. These patrons, in contrast, looked around, laughed, and seemed slightly overwhelmed by all of the products. The SESAs constantly moved around the store, grabbing products from the backroom, or explaining how to use certain products. When an SESA did initiate a conversation with a patron or ask if they could answer any questions, I observed that those patrons were more likely to leave the store with a product. I observed the Pink Pleasure Party for over an hour.

“Strap it To Me! With Dr. Carol Queen.” This workshop was held on Thursday, June 21, 2011, from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Valencia Street store. The topic of this workshop was about how to participate in sexual activities using a harness. A harness is worn around the genitals and a sex toy, commonly referred to as a *dildo*, is placed inside the harness. Harnesses can be worn by any gender, and some harnesses are designed to be worn by people with disabilities, such as spinal cord injuries. Seventeen people attended the workshop, the majority of whom were women. Ages ranged from young to older

adult. Carol Queen's presentation was humorous and thorough. Topics included health and safety, beginners' tips, and more advanced suggestions. She promoted the use of GV products as well as other retailers' products or even do-it-yourself ideas. At the end of her presentation, she asked if anyone had any questions to which an older man asked if "you can do it wrong" (author's notes, 2011)? Queen then reassured the class and then proceeded to give additional examples and suggestions until the workshop was over at 7:30.

Phyllis Christopher Art Gallery Reception and Opening. On Thursday, June 23, 2011, at 6:00 p.m., I attended the reception and gallery opening for photographer Phyllis Christopher. The back room of the Polk Street store was used as a gallery displaying her photos on the walls. The event was free, and GV provided free wine and hors d'oeuvres. Between 30 and 35 people attended the reception.

Tour of Mission Street Store. During the afternoon of July 5, 2011, Glickman hosted a tour of the Mission Street store for Summer Institute students enrolled in the class, "Sex In and Outside of the Field." Glickman led the group of around ten students through the store while it was open, and customers were shopping. He would stop at each one of the major sections (vibrators, anal toys, lubricants, etc.) and give descriptive information about the products, why Good Vibrations carries them, and background information about GV philosophy and mission. The entire tour lasted about an hour and a half.

The Good Vibrations case study was the most extensive of my three research sites. I collected data from all four GV stores, attended a GV workshop, tour, art opening, and events during Pride celebrations. The variety of events provided me with a clear

sense of what this organization did, how it put sex-positive sexuality education into practice, and what its overall role within the community was.

Case Two: National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute 2011

My second research site was the National Sexuality Resource Center⁵ Summer Institute (SI). The Summer Institute was held in San Francisco, CA, from June 20 to July 15, 2011. The SI, founded in 2001 at San Francisco State University by Gilbert Herdt, then director of the Sexuality Studies Program and the National Sexuality Resource Center, has the following mission:

Every summer NSRC gathers leading voices on sexuality issues to prepare advocates, students and researchers to embed the concepts of sexual literacy and lifelong sexual well-being into the work they do. Attendees receive college credit, and explore historical and current issues surrounding sexuality through activities, lectures and seminars. (“Our Projects,” n.d., para. 3)

The mission of the NSRC is to promote sexuality literacy. According to the NSRC website (About Sexual, 2008) sexual literacy is a:

positive, integrated and holistic view of sexuality from a social justice perspective. We believe that every person should have the knowledge, skills and resources to support healthy and pleasurable sexuality—and that these resources should be based on accurate research and facts. We examine how race, gender, culture, ability, faith and age intersect with and shape our sexual beliefs. We know that sexuality education and learning should be lifelong. (para. 1)

⁵ In February 2012, the National Sexuality Resource Center merged with the Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality to form the Center for Research and Education on Gender and Sexuality (CREGS). The Summer Institute is now sponsored by CREGS.

The summer I attended and observed at the SI—the summer of 2011—marked the tenth year in which the institute has been held. Over 300 undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral participants from academic fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, women’s studies, gender studies, and history, as well as practitioners from varied professional backgrounds including nurses, teachers, clergy, social workers, counselors and doctors, attend the SI (“NSRC History,” n.d., para. 1).⁶ The theme for 2011 was “Culture, Sex, and Pleasure,” which was described as designed to “explore the concepts of culture, sex, and pleasure through a critical analysis of race, gender, sexuality, age, disability and religion” (“Summer Institute,” n.d., para. 1).

SI 2011 was an optimal site for my research because the teachers communicate sex-positive sexuality education to an academic audience. Since “preeminent sexuality research scholars whose work challenges conventional paradigms around sexuality and pleasure” were part of this organization and attended the institute, I was able to have a unique experience observing and interviewing leading scholars in the field (“Summer Institute,” n.d., para. 1). The SI combines structured in-class learning with out-of-class trips to influential sites of sex-positive education in the San Francisco area, such as the San Francisco Pride events and the Frameline Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival screenings. I had the opportunity to sit in on these classes and events and garner data on how academically recognized scholars of sexuality conceptualize and communicate about sex-positive sexuality education and pedagogically enact it in the

⁶ Although the NSRC uses the phrase *sexual literacy* instead of *sex-positive* to explain its approach to sexuality education, the organization is aligned with a sex-positive framework for sexuality education. Within my personal correspondence with Dr. Gilbert Herd, Founder and Past Director of the NSRC, and Dr. Christopher White, SI Executive Director, I was assured that this organization does construct sexuality education from a sex-positive lens.

classroom through their use of discussion topics, readings, self-narratives, and the SI agenda.

I was interested in studying the SI further because of the chance to observe, interact with, and interview the participants of the institute. The SI attracts an elite group of participants because they must apply to this two-week (three-college credits) or four-week (six-college credits) program and be able to afford the course fees, which range between \$1,500.00 and \$2,225.00. The participants the SI admits provided a valuable interview sample because they were passionately interested in concepts of SPSE.

In November 2010, I contacted Dr. Chris White, the SI director, about my proposed study. I was able to secure a meeting with him at the NSRC offices at San Francisco State University Downtown Campus on November 15, 2010. White requested that I send him a formalized research proposal for my involvement at the SI. After much correspondence, I was informed, in January, 2011, that my research plan was approved and I could attend and observe sessions of the SI for free.

I attended the Summer Institute during Session I, which ran from June 20, 2011, to July 1, 2011. I also attended the first two days of Session II on July 5, 2011 and July 6, 2011, for an estimated total observation time of over 60 hours. A detailed schedule of the events I observed is listed in Figure 3.1. During my time at the institute, I observed nine core lectures—“Love, Sexuality, and Disability,” “Building Coalitional Politics through Written Praxis,” “Emotions, Politics, and Transness,” “Using Sociological Theory to Understand Pleasure and Power: Bottom Identity Among Gay Men as a Case Study,” “HIV Disclosure Laws in the US: Theory, Practice, and Politics,” “Ideologies of Black Churches Around Sexuality and Health, and Responses to HIV Among Black MSM,”

“The Possibility of Critical Consciousness as a Church-Based Intervention to Facilitate Dialogue Around Same-Sex Sexuality and HIV Mobilization,” “International Perspectives on Adolescent Sexuality, Health, and Pleasure,” and “New and Emerging Paradigms of Adolescent Sexuality, Health and Pleasure.” These lectures were taught by Bethany Stevens, Bethany Stevens and Sonny Nordmarken, Sonny Nordmarken, Thomas Samson,⁷ Thomas Samson, Patrick Wilson, Patrick Wilson, Amy Schalet, and Amy Schalet, respectively. I also attended the following elective courses: “I Am Not Your Fetish,” taught by Samhita Mukhopadhyay, “Queering American History,” taught by Don Romesburg, “Graduate Seminar,” with Chris White, and “Sex Education” taught by Charlie Glickman. I provide additional details about their courses within my explanation of my data sample. A total of 16 students were enrolled for Session I, when I did the bulk of my research, and an additional seven students were enrolled in Session II. The total number of participants at the 2011 SI was 23.

Week	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 6/20 – 6/24	10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Welcome Breakfast 9:30am Room 609	Bethany Stevens	Bethany Stevens & Sonny Nordmarken	Sonny Nordmarken	
	1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Orientation & Scavenger Hunt	Chris White	Charlie Glickman	Charlie Glickman	
			Chris White	Chris White	Chris White	
	3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.		Don Romesburg	Don Romesburg	Don Romesburg	
Samhita Mukhopadhyay	Samhita Mukhopadhyay		Samhita Mukhopadhyay			
Week 2 6/27 – 7/1	10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	No Class	Thomas Samson	Thomas Samson	Patrick Wilson	Patrick Wilson
	1:00 p.m. -		Charlie Glickman	Charlie Glickman	Chris White	Class

⁷ Some names have been changed at the request of participants.

	2:30 p.m.					Presentations
			Chris White	Chris White	Work Day	
	3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.		Don Romesburg	Don Romesburg	Don Romesburg	
			Samhita Mukhopadhyay	Samhita Mukhopadhyay	Samhita Mukhopadhyay	
Week 3 7/5-7/8	10:30 a.m.- 11:30 a.m.	No Class	Amy Schalet	Amy Schalet		

Key
Core Lectures with all students
Graduate Course
Final Presentations
Electives
Undergraduate Course

Figure 3.1. “Summer Institute at a Glance” Schedule (Source: “Information Guide,” 2011)

I did not have a clear plan for observing at the SI. Before I left for San Francisco in June, 2011, I tried to contact White, but he did not respond. I then began to work with SI Program Coordinator Nicole Darcangelo. She was helpful, although when I went to the SI for the first day of classes, I did not know what to expect or have clear guidelines about what the SI expected my role to be. When I got to the SI, I asked White what his expectations were, and he told me I was free to participate in as many courses as I liked. He offered no restrictions for my data collection. I then proceeded to attend as many sessions as I could in order to fully experience the SI. Below I provide a short description my methods and of each of the events or classes I observed during my research at the SI.

Summer Institute Data Collection Methods

Observations. Just as at the Good Vibrations stores, I also spent considerable time observing at the SI. First, I attended and observed core lectures and elective classes, which I will describe in detail later. The core lectures were held every morning with all of

the SI participants⁸ and featured a guest lecturer. The elective classes took place in the afternoon. Students could choose what elective courses they were interested in taking. My schedule of attendance from the SI is noted in Figure 3.1. While observing the core and elective class, I would take field notes on my computer in the back of the classroom. I took notes on topics such as the content of the class, whether and how sex-positivity sex education was related to the discussions, what the students and instructors said, what outside sources participants brought in to the discussion, the communication strategies used by the instructors and participants, the relational climate built, the design of the rooms, and how space was used within the room. The educators and participants in the class signed informed consent waivers before I observed the class. My field notes did not contain any identifying information about participants.

I also observed evening activities and special events at the SI such as the scavenger hunt and the Frameline Film Festival. Instead of being an observer-as-participant, as I was during the core lectures and elective classes, at these events I was a complete participant because this role “allows researchers to use the self to understand behavior in a natural setting. In that sense, it holds real promise for getting inside the subjectivity required for meaningful communicative action” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 144-145). During my observations of these events, I took field notes when possible on how issues such as how sexuality was understood and how the participants communicated. I felt it was crucial that I be a complete participant in these events so that I could allow my observations and field notes to be informed from the perspective of a

⁸ I use the term *student* and *participants* interchangeably within this section because the students were sometimes as active as the instructors; therefore, student does not fully appreciate their role. However, at times they did behave as traditional students.

fellow social actor experiencing these activities for the first time and not just an investigator with a research agenda.

Interviews. I interviewed Chris White, the Executive Director of the SI, and eight student participants attending the SI. Interviews with students took place on the final days of my observations during lunch or after the last session of the day. Interviews lasted from half an hour to an hour. I conducted the interviews in private locations within the 6th floor of the San Francisco State University Downtown Campus, such as sitting areas or empty classrooms. Due to a schedule conflict, I interviewed White over the phone in mid-July. Interviewees knew they were being audio recorded and gave informed consent. It was valuable for me to interview so many participants because they come from very different professional and academic backgrounds yet share a common interest in the training offered at the SI.

I asked SI participants questions such as, “Describe how you found out about the SI and what prompted you to apply and attend,” or “Please compare and contrast your experience during the SI to other sexuality-education trainings/classes you have attended.” I asked White questions, such as: “How do you create a safe space for people to engage with topics that can be very intimidating or uncomfortable?” “How do you decide on the yearly theme for the SI?,” or “Please describe any challenges you face running the institute.” These interviews were crucial to my study because I was able to ask participants questions that helped me understand the SI from multiple perspectives.

Texts. Just as I did at Good Vibrations, at the SI I collected all materials available to me—course readings, syllabi, and the SI 2011 Information Guide. These documents helped garner an understanding about what readings, themes, and authors the SI deemed

significant. The Information Guide was a useful text because it contained a welcome letter from the NSRC and SI directors; the schedule; a description of core lectures and electives; undergraduate and graduate track course descriptions; course policies; a list of special events; biographies of core-lecture speakers, instructors, staff, and participants; logistical information; and emergency and health resources. I used these texts to illuminate my observations and interviews. They helped me investigate and understand the messages the SI sends about sex-positive sexuality education and how they communicate with others in their organizational documents.

Summer Institute Observation Sites

Welcome Breakfast. On June 20, 2011, at 9:00 a.m., the Summer Institute began with a welcome breakfast at the San Francisco State University Downtown Campus. As participants came into the large classroom, Nicole Darcangelo, the Summer Institute Program Coordinator, greeted them and passed out a San Francisco tote bag that contained an SI program, name badge, and other supplemental information. Participants were encouraged to mingle and get something to eat from the spread of foods and drinks located in the back of the room. The classroom contained long tables arranged in a square. Participants sat down, chatted about their backgrounds and interests, and got to know one another.

Orientation. At 10:00 a.m., Chris White, Summer Institute Executive Director, called together the large group of participants and National Sexuality Resource Center staff members. White introduced himself and Nicole Darcangelo; then the participants were asked to introduce themselves. White asked participants to give their names, preferred gender pronoun, where they were from, and what brought them to the SI. Many

participants were students in undergrad or MA programs, while others were practitioners in sexual health fields.

After the introductions, the group played three icebreakers. White broke the participants into two groups, and encouraged me to play with a group. In the first game, participants stood in a circle and threw a beach ball to one another and answered a question about themselves when the ball was thrown to them. The second and third games, “Zip, Zap, Zoom” and “Big Booty,” were silly repetitious games where participants stood in a circle and had to follow a pattern a leader would call out.

After about twenty minutes of the games, the participants reconvened at the tables, and White asked me to introduce myself. I explained my study and passed out consent forms for participants to return to me at their convenience if they wished to participate in the study. After my presentation, White gave the participants details about the classes, structure of SI, and logistical information about living and commuting in San Francisco.

Scavenger Hunt. After Chris White reviewed SI policies and logistics, he introduced Don Romesburg, one of the instructors of an elective course during Session I, an assistant professor at Sonoma State University, and curator for the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco. Romesburg explained to the group that he had organized a “Homo History Scavenger Hunt” for the participants to serve as a getting-to-know you exercise (author’s notes, 2011). Participants were asked to get into small groups based on who had smartphones. I was also encouraged to join a group. Romesburg passed out a sheet of clues and informed us that we would need to use our smartphones and could even text him once for assistance on the hunt. The hunt clues took groups to historic

places relevant to gay and lesbian history in San Francisco and led the groups through neighborhoods of the city, such as the Tenderloin and Civic Center. Finally, all groups met at the GLBT History Museum in the Castro neighborhood. Once all groups had reconvened at the museum, Romesburg went over the answers and awarded the winning group with postcards from the museum.

Frameline Film Festival. The Frameline Film Festival (commonly referred to as *Frameline*) is a yearly festival held at select theatres throughout San Francisco that showcase national and international films with GLBTQI content. The SI partnered with the Frameline Festival to provide students with five free tickets to eleven different films during the festival. Students who went to a free showing were expected to write a blog about the film and their experiences at the festival. The blogs were submitted to Nicole Darcangelo who forwarded them to Frameline administrators. I was allowed to participate in a free showing, and I chose a voucher to see the film, *Out for a Long Run*, about gay adolescent athletes, which played at the Victoria Theatre on Saturday, June 25, 2011 at 1:30 p.m. I was not aware of any other SI participants at that showing.

Core Lectures at Summer Institute

“Love, Sexuality, and Disability.” Bethany Stevens taught the core lecture course, “Love, Sexuality, and Disability” on June 21, 2011, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Stevens is a faculty member and policy analyst at the Center for Leadership and Disability. She was a past participant of the SI and is a friend of Chris White. Stevens’s lecture focused on disability rights, including a discussion of her own experiences as a person with a disability.

“Building Coalitional Politics Through Written Praxis.” Bethany Stevens and Sonny Nordmarken led the morning core lecture entitled, “Building Coalitional Politics through Written Praxis,” on June 22, 2011. Stevens and Nordmarken are friends, writing partners, and past participants of the SI. Their lecture and discussion focused on the benefits and challenges of coalition building.

“Emotions, Politics, and Transness.” Instructor Sonny Nordmarken is a Ph.D. student in sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He led the core lecture on June 23, 2011, entitled, “Emotions, Politics, and Transness.” This lecture consisted of Nordmarken performing an autoethnography chronicling his experiences as a transgender⁹ man and explaining key issues surrounding the identity politics of the transgender community.

“Using Sociological Theory to Understand Pleasure and Power: Bottom Identity Among Gay Men as a Case Study” and “HIV Disclosure Laws in the US: Theory, Practice, and Politics.” Thomas Samson was the morning-core lecture series speaker on June 28 and 29, 2011. Samson is a doctoral student studying sociology and women’s studies. His lectures focused on his research studying gay men who identify as “bottoms” in their sexual relationships and the public health ramifications of HIV laws.

“Ideologies of Black Churches Around Sexuality and Health, and Responses to HIV among Black MSM” and “The Possibility of Critical Consciousness as a Church-Based Intervention to Facilitate Dialogue Around Same-Sex Sexuality and HIV Mobilization.” Instructor Patrick Wilson is an assistant professor at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Wilson taught the morning core lecture series on June

⁹ Transgender people are those whose gender identity differs from their biological sex.

30 and July 1, 2011. His lectures discussed his research on black churches and their stance on same-sex relationships and HIV prevention.

“International Perspectives on Adolescent Sexuality, Health, and Pleasure”
and “New and Emerging Paradigms of Adolescent Sexuality, Health and Pleasure.”

Amy Schalet is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is well-known and published in the area of adolescent sexuality. Schalet taught two morning core-lecture series during Session Two—on July 5 and July 6, 2011. Schalet’s presentations discussed her recent research and publications on the difference in Dutch and American perspectives about adolescent sexuality and the new framework she has created for adolescent sexuality. She used a combination of lecture and discussion during her presentations.

Elective Courses at Summer Institute

“Graduate Seminar.” Chris White taught the afternoon graduate course on June 21, June 23, June 28, and June 29. At times, the core speakers—Patrick Wilson, Thomas Samson, and Amy Schalet—would lead this class as well. White’s course was aimed at helping graduate students or students interested in graduate education to work on proposals and projects related to the content of the institute.

“Queering American History.” The elective course, “Queering American History,” was taught by Don Romesburg during the afternoon in Session I. Romesburg’s class traced the “development of queer sexual identities and communities over the past approximately 150 years” (“Information Guide,” 2011, p. 7). Romesburg is an assistant professor at Sonoma State University who approached his class as a formal graduate seminar.

“I Am Not Your Fetish.” Samhita Mukhopadhyay is the Executive Editor of Feministing.com. She taught the elective course, “I Am Not Your Fetish,” during the afternoon of Session I. This course investigated the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality in online identity formation.

“Sex Education.” Charlie Glickman, the Educational Program Manager at Good Vibrations, taught the afternoon undergraduate course in Session I, “Sex Education.” Glickman presented lectures and discussions on how to be an effective presenter and ideas for teaching sex-education classes. He also prepared his students to present a teaching demonstration to all participants during the final class session of Session I.

Class Presentations

On July 1, 2011, all of the participants in the SI met together to give presentations as a culminating experience of Session I. Students enrolled in Chris White’s graduate course gave 15-minute presentations on their research interests or on a project on which they were working. The topics of the participant’s presentation varied greatly, from issues such as San Francisco’s Sit Lie Ordinance to representations of female ejaculation in pornography. Some presentations were very professional while others were more impromptu. The students in the undergraduate “Sex Education” class with Charlie Glickman gave group presentations about a sex-education topic. Presentations discussed consent and fantasies and included audience participation.

The Summer Institute approaches sex-positive sexuality education from an academic perspective. I was able to observe classes and events that cost participants upwards of one thousand dollars to attend. My unrestricted access to the SI allowed me to understand how the SI operates and its approach to sex-positive sexuality education.

Case Three: Scarleteen.com

Scarleteen is an “independent, grassroots sexuality education and support organization and website” (“About Scarleteen,” n.d., para. 1). According to Alexa (2011), a web-information company, Scarleteen is the highest-ranked website for sex-education and sexuality advice that offers its viewers “comprehensive, inclusive and sex-positive advice, help and accurate information about teen and young adult sexuality” (Alexa, 2011, para. 1). A recent review of 29 Internet sexual health sites aimed at teens ranked Scarleteen second based on components such as interactivity and educational content (Whiteley, Mello, Hunt, & Brown, 2011). In 1998, site founder, Heather Corinna, was operating a women’s sexuality-information website, Scarletters.com. She decided to create Scarleteen in 1999 in response to young people asking her and her colleagues about where to find sexuality information specifically for young people. Corinna is a Montessori-trained classroom educator and thus took this approach to designing Scarleteen. A Montessori approach allows young people to ask for information that is relevant to them; the educator takes his or her clues about what information to offer from the questions themselves (“About Scarleteen,” n.d.; Shaun, 2009, para. 5). This approach led Scarleteen to create over 200 comprehensive sexuality articles, guides, and factsheets; over 1,000 in-depth advice answers; interactive message boards; a text/SMS service; a large Facebook and Twitter presence; a referral system for sexual/reproductive health-care services; offline teen outreach and staff training in and around the Seattle, WA area; and mentoring and leadership opportunities (“About Scarleteen,” n.d.).

This organization provides an excellent case for my study for numerous reasons. First, Scarleteen explicitly was designed to offer a sex-positive approach to sexuality

education. Scarleteen was created and built by Corinna and a few writers who shared an “understanding of human sexuality as a positive and beneficial part of life” (“About Scarleteen,” n.d., para. 5). In addition to the explicit use of the term *positive* in her mission statement, Corinna also utilizes the term *feminist-sex education* to frame her approach. How Corinna sees sex positivity is evident in a series on the site entitled, “Spotlight on Scarleteen, The Behind the Scenes Blog.” Within this series, an entire article is dedicated to explaining how Scarleteen is sex-positive. As staff writer Lena (2009) writes:

...if sex ed were more sex-positive, I would imagine we could vastly reduce the need for repairs and revisions [to sexuality education]: *We would know what a positive sexual relationship looks like and not settle for any less.* We'd know how to reduce the risk of *pregnancy* and STIs so we could focus on the pleasure and partnership. Instead of a band-aid to patch up an old wound, we could avoid many such pains in the first place.

Scarleteen aims to do just that: We seek to educate and empower young people to become familiar and comfortable with their unique sexualities so we all can make the decisions to have a healthy and happy sexual life right from the start, whether it's with a long-term partner, a one-night-stand or even just ourselves. (italics in original, para. 3-4)

This post also highlights other articles, blogs, and message-board threads that deal specifically with framing sex positively.

Second, although I believe that sex-positive sexuality education should *not* just be directed at adolescents or young adults, realistically they struggle with sexuality in ways

that adults may not. Scarleteen is “one of the few sexuality resources online that is national or international, that specifically serves young people, and which is interactive” (“About Scarleteen,” n.d., para. 8). This site, most frequented by young adults between the ages of 15 and 25, is vital to include in this case study because it targets yet another crucial audience for me—young people—to compare how premier organizations enact sex-positive sexuality education.

Finally, Scarleteen is an important online site. As Sprecher et al. (2008) indicate, young people are increasingly turning to informal mediated sources for sexual health information. Since 2006, Scarleteen has had over one billion hits and 70 million page loads, and on average, Scarleteen’s visitors view 5.4 unique pages each day. Young people spend twice as long on Scarleteen than users on Facebook and nine times as long as people spend on MySpace or YouTube (“About Scarleteen,” n.d.; Alexa, 2011, para. 2). Investigating an online source allows for the opportunity to investigate how an organization communicates sex-positive messages to clients they never will interact with face-to-face; thus, the organization cannot rely on context or nonverbals to tailor its messages or check for successful message transmissions. Lastly, Scarleteen was an apt choice for the online case because, according to Alexa (2011), Scarleteen “appeals more to low-income, childless women browsing from home and school” (para. 2). Since I framed this study within a feminist paradigm, I selected a site utilized by women; that many women from a lower socioeconomic status use the site also gave me the opportunity to observe sex-positive sex education designed to take this population into account.

Scarleteen.com Data Collection

Data on Scarleteen consisted of a selection of texts from the Scarleteen website. Since Scarleteen is such a large data set, I limited my analysis to 10 articles chosen at random from four sections of the site: (1) “Skin Deep: Anatomy, Body, General Health, and Body Image;” (2) “SexYOUality: Just What It Says—Sex and Sexuality Basics and Not-So-Basics;” (3) “Take Two: Relationships and Relationship Issues;” and (4) “Pink Slips: Issues Specific or Pertaining to Female-Bodied or Identified People.” I also examined 15 discussion threads from the “Message Boards: The Busy, Fully Moderated Discussion Community at Scarleteen” (“The Scarleteen Tour,” n.d., para. 2). These units of analysis provide an opportunity to investigate how Scarleteen communicates and constructs sex-positive sexuality education in a variety of contexts and on a variety of topics. Scarleteen is a free, public website, and I did not need to sign-in or register to view and/or access any of the data. On July 20, 2011, I downloaded the articles and posts from the message boards section of the site for a total of 40 articles and 15 message posts. Below I describe each of the five sections and give a brief explanation of the types of articles found in these sections.

Section:	Article/Topic Name:
Message Boards:	"Why DON'T You..." ¹⁰
	"Would You Change?"
	"Gender and Relationships"
	"Losing a Best Friend.."
	"Homophobic Family & Friends"
	"My Mom"
	"Making Love or Having Sex"
	"3 Negative Tests, No Period Still?!"
	"Bumping & Double Posting"
	"The Pill and Timezone Changes."

¹⁰ The titles of articles and message board posts were not always capitalized using APA guidelines. I have decided to capitalize these titles in order to retain consistency within the manuscript.

	"Cracked Nipples?"
	"Pregnancy Caused by Precum"
	"Bump Inside Lips Down There"
	"Friend Getting In The Way"
	"What now?"
Take Two:	"Be a Blabbermouth! The Whys, Whats and Hows of Talking About Sex With a Partner"
	"Why I Deeply Dislike Your Older Boyfriend"
	"Ready or Not? The Scarleteen Sex Readiness Checklist"
	"Sp[ace] Exploration: What Sexual People Can Learn from Asexual Communities"
	"Hi, My Name is Polyqueergenderqueer"
	"Not a Faceless Disease"
	"Boys, Birth Control, and Nature"
	"To Be...AWESOME or Just Be-- Tips on Making the Most of Your Life Right Now!"
	"Q is for Questioning"
	"About That 'Talk' with Your Parents..."
SexYOUality:	"Living without Labels"
	"Start Your Sexuality Canon"
	"To Slide or to Slice? Finding a Positive Sexual Metaphor"
	"Love the Glove: 10 Reasons to Use Condoms You Might Not Have Heard Yet"
	"A Calm View from the Eye of the Storm: Hysteria, Youth and Sexuality"
	"Safer Sex...for Your Heart"
	"An Immodest Proposal"
	"Magical Cups & Bloody Brides: Virginity in Context"
	"Birth Control Bingo"
	"Driver's Ed for the Sexual Superhighway: Navigating Consent"
Pink Slips:	"My Corona: The Anatomy Formerly Known as the Hyman & the Myths That Surround It"
	"Sorting Maybe from Can't-Be: Reality Checking Partnered Sex Wants & Ideals"
	"Hello, Sailor! How to Build, Board and Navigate a Healthy Relationship"
	"Misconception Mayhem: Separating Women's Sex 411 and Sexual Health Myths from Facts"
	"Love Letter"
	"Blinders Off: Getting a Good Look at Abuse and Assault"
	"The Buddy System: Effectiveness Rates for Backing Up Your Birth Control With a Second Method"
	"Your First Gynecologist Visit"
	"From OW! To WOW! Demystifying Painful Intercourse"

	"On the Rag: A Guide to Menstruation"
Skin Deep:	"The FBI Files: Vaginismus"
	"Get With the Flow: All About FAM"
	"Granny Panties"
	"Safe, Sound & Sexy: A Safer Sex How-To"
	"I, Being Born Woman and Suppressed"
	"Vagzilla! (Or, All Genitals Great and Small)"
	"Yes, No, Maybe So: A Sexual Inventory Stocklist"
	"Let's Get Metaphysical: The Etiquette of Entry"
	"With Pleasure: A View of Whole Sexual Anatomy for Every Body"
	"Disability Dharma: What Including & Learning From Disability Can Teach (Everyone) About Sex"

Figure 3.2. Scarleteen.com Dataset

“Message Boards.” The first section I analyzed was “Message Boards.” Any registered user, anyone who signs up with a valid username, email address, and password, can post on the message boards, and Scarleteen volunteers respond. The message boards are available to post on 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The content of the message boards varies. Sometimes users are seeking immediate assistance on an urgent problem such as thinking they are pregnant. Other times, posts on the message boards are philosophical musings such as, “Would you change your sexual orientation if you could” (“Would You Change?,” 2011)? Heather Corinna, site founder, director, and designer, as well as other Scarleteen volunteers, respond to the message posts sometimes within an hour. The staff, including assistant director, CJ Turett and fourteen volunteers from countries including the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., also replies to posts after traditional business hours. There are hundreds of posts on the message boards. Some messages get resolved quickly and only include correspondence from the user and the

staff member. Other messages have dozens of replies or threads, and the replies are from multiple users and multiple staff members.

“Take Two.” Articles tagged under “Take Two” are about relationships. The majority of the articles are about intimate or sexual relationships; however, articles about relationships with parents and even the relationship a user has with him or herself are covered in this section. Other articles in this section discuss sexual identities and managing relationship risks such as HIV/AIDS. Dozens of articles are tagged as “Take Two” articles, and the articles range from 1,100 to 10,000 words each. Most articles are written by Corinna; some, however, are reprinted articles from magazines, books, or pieces users wrote that have been uploaded to the site.

“SexYOUality.” The articles in the “SexYOUality” section discuss sex and sexuality in multiple ways. First, some articles are informative and explain basic terminology or facts about sex, such as reasons to use condoms. Other articles are theoretical, such as those encouraging the use of different metaphors for sex acts, or articles having broader definitions for sexual orientations. Some articles include history lessons or are creativity written. For example, one article, written by Corinna (2010a), is “An Immodest Proposal”; it challenges traditional notions of female desire through the use of a short piece of creative writing. Most of these articles are written by Corinna, although some articles from outside authors and volunteers are included as well. There are about 50 articles in this section, and article length ranges from 1,500 to 10,000 words per article.

“Pink Slip.” “Pink Slip” articles focus on female-identified bodies. Out of the roughly 50 articles posted with this tag, most are about sexual health basics, such as

going to a gynecologist for the first time, menstruation, or painful intercourse. Other articles focus on creating healthy intimate relationships. Articles are written in various formats, including one article written by Corinna in the form of a love letter to the readers. Article length ranges from 1,500 to 7,000 words. Articles are generally written by Corinna, although some articles are written by authors from other sexual health organizations or by volunteers.

“*Skin Deep.*” About two dozen articles are tagged as “Skin Deep” articles. These articles focus on health and the body. A broad range of health topics are discussed in this section. First, articles deal with standard health topics such as birth-control methods or approaches to safer sex. Yet other articles theorize about constructing paradigm shifts in regard to our construction of sexual health. For example, one article encourages the use of communicating about women’s genitals in the same empowering way as men do, such as, “check out my BIG VULVA” (Corinna, 2010j, p. 1).¹¹ Other articles encourage learning about people with disabilities and how they, too, can enjoy sex. Corinna writes most of these articles; however, some articles are written by users, such as a personal account of an abortion experience. Most articles are contain 1,000 to 7,000 words.

The above data sample of 40 articles and 15 message boards discussions are my sample for Scarleteen. I emailed Heather Corinna, site founder, director, and designer, multiple times to request an interview. I never received a response from her; therefore, this collection of texts is my data set from Scarleteen.

Thematic Analysis

¹¹ Since Scarleteen articles were extremely long, I printed them out using the print function located at the top of every article. Direct quotes are referenced from these page numbers instead of paragraph number due to the length of the articles.

I used a thematic analysis to investigate the strategies used to construct, communicate, and define sex-positive sexuality education on Scarleteen.¹² According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (p. 79). A theme is a pattern found within the text that “at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Therefore, themes may be classified at the manifest level (directly observable and explicit) or the latent level (underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies) (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). I investigated themes at the manifest and latent level because I was interested in the explicit and implicit strategies through which sex-positive sexuality education is communicated.

Conducting a thematic analysis is a six-part process. First, the researcher becomes familiar with the data. As I mentioned above, I limited my unit of analysis to 10 articles from four different sections on the site (for a total of 40 articles) and 15 discussion threads on the Scarleteen message boards. The second step of a thematic analysis is to generate initial codes. This process consists of “coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Next, I searched for themes within the data. Fourth, I refined the initial themes and then worked on collapsing themes to ensure they were concise and non-repetitive and/or eliminated themes that lacked logic or coherence. Fifth, I defined and named the themes. During this step I named the themes of strategies that Scarleteen uses to communicate sex-positive sexuality education. And lastly, I produced

¹² Although I collected texts from Good Vibrations and the SI, I do not consider my analysis of them a textual analysis because I did not review them with the same rigor as I did the Scarleteen articles. Instead, I completed a textual review of them as their content helped inform and explain my research.

a report, a descriptive narrative, about these themes. My report of my findings was particularly interesting because I was able to compare and contrast them to my findings in the field.

Scarleteen.com is an important site because it is an example of computer-mediated sexuality education for adolescents. I investigated both articles and message board correspondence in order to understand Scarleteen's site but also its approach to sex-positive sexuality education.

Data Analysis

In this section, I will discuss the multiple levels of my data analysis. I offer a description of my use of grounded theory, close reading, and NVivo computer data analysis package. These methods helped me understand my data and ultimately construct a model for understanding sex-positive sexuality education at my three sites.

Grounded Theory

As I collected my data in the field at Good Vibrations and the SI through the use of field notes and audio recordings, I needed to make sense of it. In order to do so, I used grounded theory. According to Charmaz (2006), in a grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis happen simultaneously in a four-step process. The researcher seeks data, describes the data, answers questions about the data that seem intriguing, and then begins to develop theoretical categories. For the first level of my analysis, I used open coding in the field to mark down in my field notes specific categories, themes, and locations where certain things happened. For example, at times I would write "definition," if something reminded me of a definition of sex-positive sexuality education, or "humor," "power," or "relaxed," when I observed interactions that had

these characteristics. When I found something interesting in the field, open coding allowed me to go back into the field and dig deeper to ultimately try to understand that phenomena. For example, during my observations at the Mission Street Good Vibrations store, I observed how nervous some of the patrons seemed. Making this note was important because it reminded me to look to see if patrons at other stores also appeared that way and what I thought that might mean.

The process of observing, noting points about what was observed, and going back to the field to look more closely at those issues was a continual process throughout my site observations. I would review my data, that would raise additional questions, and those questions would prompt additional observations and data gathering. This process eventually allowed me to be able to make sense of important themes within my data set, to gain a more nuanced understanding of those themes, and to help me determine how those themes fit within and help construct a definition of sex-positive sexuality education. Ultimately, then, my conclusions and theorizing were formed from a combination of observation, participation, and sense making followed by additional observation and clarification.

After I collected all of my data from the field using the methods of grounded theory, I also conducted a close reading of my data. This stage of the analysis process allowed me to begin to sort out the answers to my research questions. Throughout this phase of analysis, then, I looked for references to sex-positive sexuality education (Corinna, 2009; “Declaration,” 1999; Fine, 2006; Helmich, 2009; Kulwicki, 2008; Perry, 2008; Queen & Comella, 2008). Next, I used NVivo8 qualitative data analysis software package. I developed categories to search for in my data. These categories are listed in

the chart below (Figure 3.3). NVivo allowed me to make connections within my data set and uncover the answers to my research questions and confirmed themes and patterns that had begun to emerge during earlier levels of analysis. At this time, I also coded the themes from the Scarleteen dataset into NVivo. Having all of these categories together allowed me to do an initial analysis because I looked specifically for words relevant to my data, while I worked on developing and applying categories as I saw fit (Mason, 2007). Through the use of this interpretation process, I deciphered patterns in the data for communicating, constructing, and ultimately defining sex-positive sexuality education.

Coding Categories			
A-E	F-L	M-Q	R-Z
Academic	Female Empowerment	Metaphors	Race
Agency	Fun	Narrative	Recommendations
Caution	Health and Safety	Negative Tone	Relaxed
Close	Holistic	Networking	Responsibility
Communication	Honest	New Term	Safe Space
Community	Humor	Nonverbal	Self Reflexive
Compassion	Inclusive	Normalization	Sex-Positive
Critical	Instructions	Power	Silence
Culture	Intersections	Practical	Tension
Debunk	Lack of Pleasure	Presentation Skills	Unique
Detailed	Language	Privacy	Unusual
Direct	Links	Privileged	Validating
Encouragement	Listening	Questioning	Vulnerable

Figure 3.3. Coding Categories

However, as I made sense of my data I realized that all three organizations enacted sex-positive sexuality education similarly, and thus I created a model to describe this enactment process. This model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education, guides my results for each case study I present in the next three chapters. In the following section, I introduce the model and its key components.

The model of Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education provides a foundational understanding of how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed and communicated at my sites of study. However, it does not necessary explain how sex-positive sexuality education is defined and what sets this approach apart from other methods of teaching sexuality education. In Chapter Seven, I build on this model and provide a three-tiered framework for charting how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed, communicated, and ultimately defined.

Altogether, then, I used a variety of methods to analyze my data. By using grounded theory, I made sense of the data I encountered while I was still in the field. I supplemented grounded theory with additional data analysis from my close reading of data after the fact and from the use of NVivo data mining software, I made sense of how sex-positive sexuality education is enacted at Good Vibrations, the Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.

Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education Model

From my data analysis, I discovered that the three organizations I studied all constructed sex-positive sexuality education in the same manner. The three shared elements that form the foundation of my definition of sex positive education. First, each organization has a set of core values that were explicitly sex positive and that guided the mission of the organizations. Second, their use of space and their physical environment was instrumental in enacting SPSE; all three organizations privileged a certain kind of interactional and physical space. Lastly, they each had a clear set of communication strategies that aided their transmission of sex-positive sexuality education.

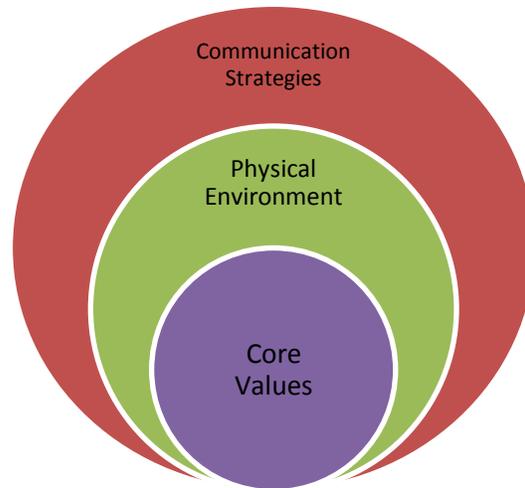


Figure 3.4. Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education Model

I developed a model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education, (Figure 3.4) to explain this process. Drawing inspiration from social-ecological approaches to health that are used to guide this study, I conceptualized this model as concepts nested within each other. Since the core values were the essence of the organization, I put them in the center of the model. The physical environment encapsulates the core values and at times benefited and at times hindered the actualization of the values. Lastly, the communication strategies are the largest part of the model. They are the outer ring because without them, SPSE could not be transmitted to learners. In the following sections, I provide brief definitions and descriptions of the key elements of this model—values, physical environment, and communication strategies—to help justify their importance in the enactment of sex-positive sexuality education at these organizations.

Values. Research about values started in the 1960s, when values were part of attitude change studies. Many philosophers studied and offered foundational definitions of values. Parsons and Shils's collection, *Toward a General Theory of Action* (1962), provides early theorizing of the meanings and implications of values on individuals and

cultures. They posit that values are one of the “most crucial cultural elements in the organization of action,” and that organizations are motivated by their values (p. 139). Kluckhohn advances the notion that values formulate action commitments, and that values can be discussable, desirable, observed, and justified by morals or reasoning (p. 396). Building on these concepts, Rokeach defined value in his 1968 text, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values* as “a single belief that transcendentally guides actions and judgments across specific objects and situations, and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence” (p. 160).

More recent work on organizational values by organizational communication and culture experts, such as Schein (1992) and Kouzes and Posner (2003), also offer reasons as to why understanding an organization’s values can provide insight to the organization as a whole. Kouzes and Posner (2003) explain that shared values within an organization are the “foundations for building productive and genuine working relationships” (p. 78) and that organizations benefit internally and externally from having shared values. In order to understand what the shared values of an organization are, Kouzes and Posner (2003) explain that one must listen to the organizational members “dialogue” because such activity allows for an emergent “process” of understanding (p. 81). Similarly Schein (1992) explained that a person can help “decipher a culture” by identifying the culture’s values. Schein advises researchers to ask, ““Why are you doing what you are doing?”” in order to elicit understanding about an organization’s cultural values (p. 151).

Focusing on values within sexuality-education programs initially may appear to be counterproductive to a progressive approach to sexuality education. Since abstinence-only programs take a moralistic tone and express judgments about the “correct” values to

have (heterosexuality, desire for marriage, monogamy), some may think a program that transcends abstinence-only may not have strong values or may disavow teaching learners about values. However, that is not the case. Sexuality education and values cannot be separated. Organizations that educate about sexuality education must be guided by principles about what contributes to successful sexual health and well-being and education. Furthermore, when people learn about sex and sexuality they are also, implicitly or explicitly, learning about values such as self- and mutual respect and responsibility.

By understanding the values that inform the sex-positive approach to sexuality education, I can more fully explain how values help construct and create this new approach to sexuality education. Since values can formulate and guide actions of those within an organization, provide a discussable and observable way to understand what an organization finds desirable or justified, and reflect what organizational members deem as relationally and organizationally critical to their success, understanding the values of sex-positive sexuality education organizations provides an important part of the process of understanding how SPSE works. For these reasons, core values, are the first element within the model I created to explain how organizations enact sex-positive sexuality education.

Physical Environment. The second element within the model of Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education is an organization's use of space in its physical environment. Due to its complexity, the term *space* has no "single and universally accepted definition" (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 170). Still, space is a social location that is

affected by cultural phenomena and social practices. Space also can be conceptualized as occurring within a physical environment.

Recently, health scholars have investigated the importance of environmental factors on health and well-being (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005), including the impact of one's physical environment on health. Kreuter, Lezin, Kreuter, and Green (2003) define physical environment as the "existing or potential community structures that may influence health behaviors and decisions" (p. 174). Du Pré (2000) explains that "the environment sometimes says as much as words do about a health experience" (p. 63). Furthermore, scholars explain that physical environmental factors can support an individual's behavior, health, and quality of life (Green & Kreuter, 1999). Du Pré (2000) mentions that physical environments can provide benefits for patients such as reduced stress, higher spirits, and better facilitation of communication. A meta-analysis conducted by Dijkstra, Pieterse, and Pruyn (2006) on the effects of environmental stimuli on health and well-being of patients also found that physical health-care environments affect patient well-being with particular benefits found from sunlight, windows, and odors. Lastly, Douglas and Douglas (2005) report that patients perceive certain physical environmental factors as supportive to their care, such as a welcoming atmosphere, good physical design in terms of usability, accessibility, control, and a sense of personal space.

Since the physical environment of a space can impact an individual's health, well-being, and facilitation of health communication, and was found critical to SPSE, I made physical environment the second element of my model. Since Scarleteen does not have a traditional physical environment, I analyzed the design and layout of the website environment. An analysis of the space within the physical environment of these

organizations is important to understanding how these physical environmental structures influence the dissemination and enactment of sex-positive sexuality education at these organizations.

Communication Strategies. Successful health communication education initiatives must use effective communication strategies. A strategy is “the overall approach a program takes” to disseminate its message (National Cancer Institute, n.d., p. 251). Communicative strategies are thus the “guiding principles” within a health program (p. 41). Strategies are often based on an organization’s knowledge of their audience’s wants and needs. Organizations, however, are not always familiar with their audience’s motivations; therefore, communication research, such as audience analysis, may be necessary in order to better serve their audience. In my research, none of the organizations implemented formalized audience analysis techniques; however, I did observe informal techniques such as asking patrons or participants about their interests or questions they have about products or services. This informal research about the audience’s wants and needs allows organizations to guide their communicative strategies. Communication strategies are such an important part to my model because each organization valued communication and deliberately considered the best communication strategies to use within the constraints of their physical environment and mission for the organization.

In sum, since communicative strategies “influence the type of message” the audience receives, it is important to provide an analysis of the communicative strategies used at my sites of study (Kreps, Barnes, Neiger, & Thackeray, 2009, p. 88). I offer an analysis of the prominent verbal and nonverbal strategies employed at these

organizations. Defining the communication strategies most often used at these organizations helps to explain how sex-positive sexuality education is communicated and constructed at these resource centers.

I created the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model from my data analysis on Good Vibrations, Scarleteen.com, and the Summer Institute. This model provides the foundation for understanding how sex-positive sexuality education was defined at these organizations. I use this model in Chapters Four, Five, and Six to outline my results of my research questions examining how sex-positive sexuality education is communicated and constructed at these organizations. In Chapter Seven, I build upon this model to offer a definition of sex-positive sexuality education.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodology that guides this study. I conceptualize the paradigms that guide this study on a continuum, from interpretive to critical and feminist influenced by social-ecological models of health. Second, I detailed the research design of this study. A case-study approach provided an excellent framework to highlight each organization while also providing an opportunity for comparison and contrast related to their enactment of sex-positive sexuality education. This chapter also introduced the three organizations I studied and why they are optimal choices for this investigation. Lastly, I detailed my process of data collection and analysis for each site and explained the model I constructed from my data set, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education.

To review, the purpose of my study is to examine various organizations that have implemented a sex-positive sexuality education approach and understand how they

construct and communicate this approach. By conducting observations, interviews, and textual analysis of organizations that are using this approach I will be able to showcase communicative strategies for teaching sexuality education, provide a definition of sex-positive sexuality education, and explain how the process of sex-positive sexuality education is enacted at Good Vibrations, National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute, and Scarleteen.com.

Chapter Four: Good Vibrations

In this chapter, I present my first case, Good Vibrations, an adult retail store with locations in the San Francisco area and in Massachusetts. Good Vibrations has been a leader of sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE) for the general public since the 1970s. In this case study, I present the findings from my research observing four San Francisco Good Vibrations stores and interviewing Good Vibrations stakeholders. Structuring my discussion is the model—Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education—that I generated from my data across all three of my sites of study. Thus, in the present chapter, I outline and discuss how this model provides an answer to how sex-positive sexuality education is enacted and communicated at Good Vibrations.

Model of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at Good Vibrations

My observations of the stores and community events, interviews with administration and staff, and analyses of archival artifacts address how SPSE is enacted at Good Vibrations. SPSE is enacted at Good Vibrations using three elements: values, physical environment, and communication strategies. The first element, core values, explains five components that together create Good Vibrations' conceptualization of sex-positive sexuality education. The second element, physical environment, describes the space created at GV. The third element, communication strategies, describes specific communication practices GV enacts.

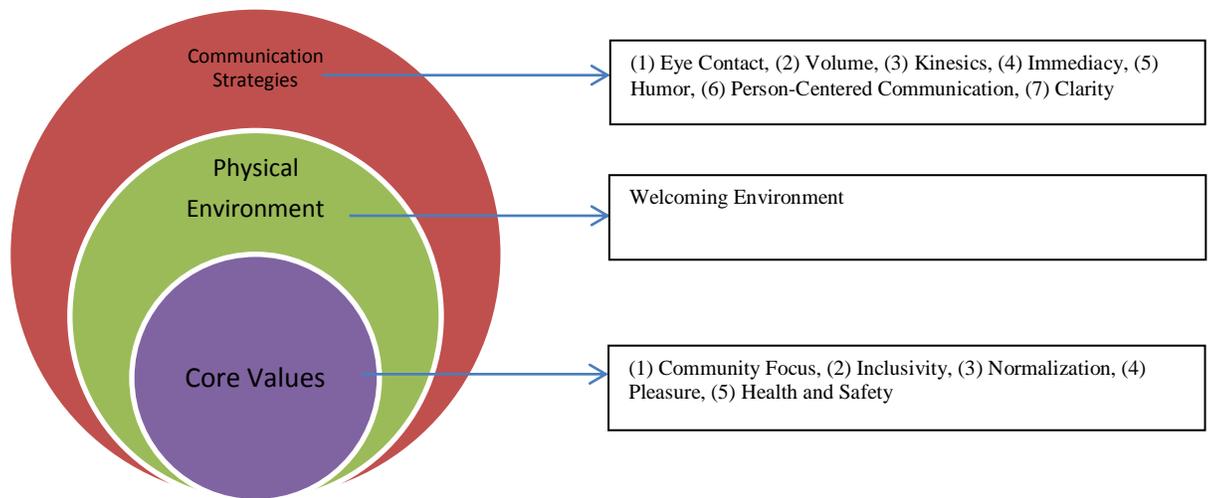


Figure 4.1. Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at Good Vibrations

Element One: Core Values at Good Vibrations

Five components—community focus, inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, and health and safety—are the core values central to how Good Vibrations constructs sex-positive sexuality education. The five components of the core values, displayed numerous times within my data, guide the mission and work of the Good Vibrations organization.

Community Focus

The first component at the core of Good Vibrations' (GV) construction of SPSE is a focus on community. Good Vibrations opened in San Francisco in 1977, and throughout the last 35 years has experimented with different management styles, including being a co-op. Although it is currently a single-proprietor business, it remains committed to being more than just a retail store that could be housed in any community. Instead, the organization gives financially to the community, the administration finds ways to serve the community's needs, it is a community-information clearinghouse, and GV associates participate in community events on behalf of the organization.

First, GV donates money to various organizations that support the San Francisco community. Charlie Glickman, the Education Program Manager, explained to me the benefits of the GV GiVe program. This program sponsors and donates money to various organizations, not necessarily just those affiliated with sexuality, throughout the community such as Meals on Wheels of San Francisco and Silicon Valley Roller Girls. Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011) explained:

We support a lot of different communities. Our GiVe Program, we have worked with non-profit agencies and organizations, we solicit donations at the register. And unlike a lot of other companies, 100% of the money we collect goes to the agency.

I observed large signs for the GiVe program in all of the GV stores. A poster in the Valencia store read in part:

Good Vibrations strives to be an agent for social change. Through GiVe, our extensive donation program we: support local and national nonprofit organizations, support community empowerment initiatives, give 100% of collected donations to our GiVe partners, provide in-kind product donations, host fundraising events at our retail stores. (author's notes, 2011)

The sex educator sales associates (SESA) would ask for donations when customers came up to the registers to check-out. A common solicitation was, "Would you like to donate a dollar to the San Francisco AIDS Foundation?," to which customers would usually answer with a response such as, "Sure, why not" (author's notes, 2011)?

In addition to giving financial support to local organizations, GV also serves as a community resource for organizations that help support the community. According to Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011):

In addition to the workshops that we hold at Polk Street, we also host events for other groups. There was one organization, an organization that teaches people about bicycle safety. Because if you are going to be an urban bicyclist there are things you need to know to be safe. And so we let them use our room. 'Cause we weren't using it, so come on in and bring your folks in, and no problem.

However, one of the largest ways that community is a core component in how GV constructs sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE) is through the belief that information and outreach to the community is vital. Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011) explained:

We do, Carol Queen and I, do a lot of interviews for things or organizations. For that matter we are also a resource for anytime or anything people have a question about something. They are welcome to email us, and we get quite a few.

Everything from doctors who aren't sure how to answer a question, that doesn't happen as much, doctors are a little bit more hesitant to admit that they don't know something. But I've gotten quite a few emails from therapists saying, you know, what books are there on this topic? Um, and we do out-reach. Our OFSE program, Off-Site Sex Education, that's where we send sex educators to college groups, student groups, non-profits, a few companies here and there. Last year I think we did almost 100 of those. Ninety or 100 of them over the course of a year, and that is in addition to the 70 or 80 workshops that happen in our stores.

During the Dyke Rally, I also witnessed the importance of the community to GV. The Good Vibrations tent at the rally could have been filled with numerous products from their stores to sell to the crowd. However, the only product they sold were Go Girls, urination devices that make it possible for women and transgender women to urinate standing up. Furthermore, Carol Queen and another SESA sat in the tent all day with a sign that read “The Doctor is In” and were eager to answer questions from the crowd without payment or purchase necessary. Although GV wanted rally goers to sign up for the company mailing list before they could spin a wheel to receive a free prize, my impression is that GV participation in this rally was not a decision made to help increase their financial bottom line but rather to support the Dyke March and the community at large (author’s notes, 2011).

Community is also a core value at GV because they have stores in different communities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Good Vibrations stores existed in four diverse neighborhoods within the city.¹³ Each of these neighborhoods supports a different culture and community scene. Vickie, an SESA at the Polk Street store, explained to me that she enjoys the Valencia Street and Polk Street stores because they exude a sense of community. To her, the stores appeared to be part of the community and served as a trusted, well-known establishment to community members. As I discussed earlier, I observed many people who appeared to be locals stopping into the Polk, Valencia, and Berkeley stores. I classified these shoppers as locals because they knew the layout of the store well, seemed to shop with a purpose, and at times shopped for products they had previously purchased. Because GV opens stores in various parts of the city, including in areas of San Francisco that are not as frequented by tourists, I argue that

¹³ In January 2012, Good Vibrations opened its fifth Bay Area store in Oakland, California.

being a resource to many people within various parts of the San Francisco community is one of GV's core values.

The last way that I observed community as a core value of Good Vibrations' approach to sex-positive sexuality education is through their use of social media. GV has a large online presence and spends a lot of time maintaining and updating the company website (www.goodvibes.com), online magazine (www.magazine.goodvibes.com), Facebook account (www.facebook.com/goodvibestoys), and Twitter account (www.twitter.com/#!/GoodVibesToys). Although beyond the scope of my study, GV's online presence and social media activity is a form of community building.

According to Cothrel (2000), an online community is a space where members are allowed to "create something other members can see" (p. 20). Online communities are beneficial because they can increase brand awareness, increase customer satisfaction, enable better communication between supplier and customer, and maintain or intensify customer loyalty (Cothrel, 2000). Good Vibrations has built a considerable following in the community and online. In January of 2012, they had over 9,000 Twitter followers and 3,000 fans on Facebook (Good Vibes Toys, 2012a, 2012b). GV disseminates information about GV promotions; links to articles about sex and sexuality from a variety of sources such as non-profit or government agencies; and provides information about community and cultural events that may be of interest to their Facebook, Twitter, or magazine followers. Glickman told me during our interview that he sets up the GV Twitter account to publish tweets automatically because he wants to stay in contact with the GV online community at least daily. In sum, GV uses social media to help them build an online community and to help disseminate sex-positive sexuality education to a wider audience.

To summarize, community support and outreach is essential to Good Vibrations; therefore, community is one of their core values of sex-positive sexuality education. The company decides to financially sponsor, donate, and/or make resources available to organizations and people that are not necessarily affiliated with GV, has a variety of stores in various locations throughout the community, and connects users through their vast online presence simply because of its desire to serve and aid the community.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity is the second core component in Good Vibrations' construction of sex-positive sexuality education. Inclusivity is demonstrated through nonjudgmental language choices, avoiding generalities and stereotypes, and generally fostering openness.

First, GV is inclusive in not making generalizations regarding their customers' wants, needs, and identities. For example, the "Physiological Facts" section of the "Vibrators" brochure explains, "For most people, the nerve endings that are most sensitive to vibration are on, or near, the surface of the body" ("Vibrators," n.d.). Instead of generalizing that the nerve endings near the surface of the body are the most sensitive for *all* people, GV chooses to use the word *most*. Similar language choices are seen throughout the brochures. Another example is in the "Condoms" brochure, where GV explains, "Some men find that these reduce sensation," or "Many men really like these condoms" ("Condoms," n.d.).

Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011) explained to me that avoiding generalities is a priority, but sometimes generalities must be made to ensure all customers are served:

We also talk about the toys in reference to the anatomy. We don't talk about toys for men, we talk about cock rings, because anyone can use a vibrator, anyone can use a butt plug. We don't have toys for women and toys for men; we have toys for the G-Spot or for anal play. This is where we start to get into some of the tricky dances that we do in marketing and sex positivity on our website. For example, you will see on the left-hand side above where it says cock rings it says, Toys for Men. And that is because that is a search-engine optimization thing. So here is the thing that we have to figure out: How much do we do what people want us to in order to make it easier for them to find us? 'Cause you have to meet people where they are. If we stand up here on this mountain and say, "Oh, there is no such thing as toys for men!," the people who need us aren't going to find us. So we use words such as "toys for women," "toys for men," "toys for lesbians," "toys for dykes," but then when they come to us, we don't use that kind of language.

In addition to not making generalizations, GV demonstrates inclusivity by not making assumptions. According to Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011):

We really try not to assume the gender of someone's partner; for that matter, we really try not to assume the gender of someone we are talking to. Just because somebody looks to me like a man or a woman doesn't mean that that's their gender identity. They might be transgender, they might be intersexed, they might be any of a number of possible genders. Including gender neutral and gender queer, and all of these others.

Vickie, an SESA at the Polk Street store, also explained to me how SESAs specifically are trained not to make assumptions about the customers. Vickie (personal communication, July 7, 2011) recalled:

At GV, even when I first started, my manager would catch me saying terms that even as a Gender [Studies] student I should know better. Like I was showing someone a toy and I would say, “Oh this would go into a women’s vagina,” and she’d be like, “You know what, you need to be careful when you say that because men can have vaginas as well.” So, that really stuck out, because that was like my first week. And we also talk about what we call people when they enter the store like, “hey guys or hey girls,” so I found myself saying folks a lot.

The discourse in the brochures also does not assume gender, sexual orientation, or sexual interest of a customer. In the brochure on “Harnesses,” GV explains, “For some, harness play is an important part in gender roles, while for others, they’re just a hand-free way to have fun” (“Harnesses,” n.d.). This unassuming approach is seen throughout the brochures. For example, in the “Vibrators” brochure, generalizations are not made about who is using a vibrator or why a vibrator is used; rather, the brochure explains that, “Vibrators are a wonderful way to facilitate that feeling [orgasm], alone or with a partner” (“Vibrators,” n.d.).

Good Vibrations also refrains from making assumptions by not presuming a “one size fits all approach” to its products and to sexuality in general. For example, Good Vibrations sells dozens of different brands of condoms. Along with selling female condoms and vegan condoms, they also sell “snugger fit” and larger condoms in order to be inclusive of a variety of wants and needs. GV also does not assume that all of its

customers will want the same things. Within the brochure on “Bondage & Spanking,” GV explains that, “Different desires mean different approaches to bondage” (“Bondage & Spanking,” n.d.). Overall, GV does not establish what their customers should do or want to do; rather they try to meet the customer where the customer is.

Lastly, inclusivity is a core concept of GV’s approach to sex-positive sexuality education because the administrators and SESAs encourage and seek to model openness regarding sex. During my interview with Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011), he explained a pivotal moment for him when he was an SESA:

Being an SESA is an amazing education in learning to let go of assumptions. My second day in the store, I still remember this, now fifteen years later. This woman comes in, silver-haired, she mentioned that her granddaughter had mentioned to her about Good Vibrations, and this is only my second day, so I’m assuming, oh well, you know she will probably want a book of erotica or some advice about something or other. And so we chit-chatted for a while, and then she turns to me, and says, “So, my boyfriend and I are interested in anal sex and cock rings. How do they work?” And so that was my introduction to really believing, in a way that most people don’t even though they say it, that you genuinely never know what anyone really gets up to. And at this point what I try to practice is believing or thinking or imagining or envisioning that everybody does everything. You know, you can be any age, any sexual orientation, any gender, any race, any physical ability, anything, and I just try to assume that you’ve done or are interested or enjoy doing all of it or none of it. And that way I’m not so surprised if you come

to me and say, “Well this is what I like to do.” So, it really becomes a daily practice.

In conclusion, GV demonstrates its commitment to inclusion in its language choices and rejection of generalizations, unassuming behavior, and overt open mindedness. While GV does an excellent job of incorporating inclusivity in many ways in its stores, important to note is that new design features may keep GV from achieving inclusivity in the future. In my conversation with SESA Vickie, she explained that the Mission Street store is the new model for store staging and design. This store looks like a boutique. It has ornate tables and lighting and uses the color pink for all of its signage. Vickie explained that the natural wood tables at the Polk Street store where she works were swapped out for black tables, and the signage was changed to pink as well. While this boutique-style physical environment is inclusive for stereotypical cisgendered¹⁴ notions of femininity, it may serve to keep customers who do not align with this gender expression or desire such a feminine shopping experience out of the store. However, these are not changes I observed, but are aspects that GV might consider. Overall, then, inclusivity is a core component to how GV constructs sex-positive sexuality education, and it works in tandem with the next component, normalization.

Normalization

In conjunction with being inclusive, the third core component that guides GV is its tendency to normalize sex acts, sexualities, sexual identities, and the body. I most often witnessed this normalization during face-to-face interactions with customers and also from listening to Glickman describe the stores. One of the most interesting examples

¹⁴ A cisgender person is an individual whose biological sex matches the person’s gender identity. For example, a person with female sex organs whose gender identity is feminine is considered to be cisgender.

of normalizing sex occurred during Glickman's tour of the store. Glickman was in front of the anal toys and was explaining why they are useful. As he was discussing this, he began to explain that people think that anal sex is easy to do but inherently painful. He discussed how often times people who have viewed pornography mistakenly believe that anal sex should be easy. However, once they try it themselves they are upset because they encounter difficulties. Glickman explained that in reality, anal sex takes a lot of time and practice to ease emotional and physical nerves. He began to adamantly object to people who copy sex acts from the porn they view. He explained that the performers in pornography are professionals and have used lubricants and "warmed up;" however, those actions are edited out of the movie and/or were done off screen (author's notes, 2011).

Glickman's irritation with people copying sex acts from pornography is interesting because GV sells and/or rents numerous titles of pornography that most likely glamourize the problems he has with pornography. However, Glickman went out of his way to explain that pornography is not real sex and should not be treated as such. His lecture that "copying porn is a mistake" demonstrates how he naturalizes sex. In his role as GV Educational Program Manager, he does not want people to think that they are supposed to automatically be able to do what they see in the movies; rather he encourages people to take their time and learn about sex acts before they try to perform them.

A second example of normalizing sexualities as a core construct of GV's conception of sex-positive sexuality education is its philosophy on lubricants. During my observation at the Mission Street store, I watched a senior-level SESA training a new SESA on lubricants. He explained to her that 90% of the time when people come into the

store for a sexual problem, the answer to the problem is they are not using lubricant. As I watched SESAs at various stores interacting with customers, encouraging customers that it is not only okay, but normal, to need to use lubricant was a common conversation.

Glickman described a typical conversation where SESAs need to normalize the application of lubricant—specifically to heterosexual men. Glickman explained that often men with women sexual partners are hesitant to use lubricants because the men feel inadequate sexually if they cannot arouse a woman. Thus, they believe a woman's lack of arousal is a reflection on how good of a lover they are or is an indictment on their masculinity. Glickman then explained that customers need to be told that this is a myth, and that a variety of factors including medicines, cigarette or marijuana smoking, birth control, post-childbirth, and menopause can impact women's arousal.

Another example of normalizing sexuality took place during a discussion on sex acts in Carol Queen's "Strap It to Me" workshop. Queen normalized the act of anal sex for the class. She explained that anal sex is often mistakenly stereotyped as a sexual act only between gay men. In reality, she explained that research shows that heterosexual women are the largest percent of people to engage in anal sex. She discussed that there are no sexual acts that are normal or abnormal for people of certain sexualities to want to participate in. She explained that it is quite normal for both heterosexual men and women to participate in anal sex simply because they enjoy the sensations. Queen's refutation of categorizing what sexual acts are customary for certain sexual identities demonstrated how the staff at GV work to normalize and dispel cultural stereotypes regarding sexual acts.

Glickman's description of how GV actively works to naturalize bodily functions, manager's conversation with the SESA regarding lubricants, and Queen's discussion of how it is normal for all sexual identities to be intrigued and find pleasure from certain sexual acts demonstrates how often GV must work against stereotypical and cultural assumptions about sex and the body. Instead, Good Vibrations finds ways to normalize sex and the body for customers.

Pleasure

The fourth component that constitutes Good Vibrations' core ideas about how to construct sex-positive sexually education is pleasure. A focus on pleasure is created by product selection, the workshops GV offers to the community, and promotion of pleasure.

First, pleasure is displayed through the choice of products the stores carry. Most, if not all of the products, sold at the GV stores are produced to provide enjoyment or pleasure to the customers. Good Vibrations sells numerous varieties of each of its product categories to ensure that customers will find something that is pleasurable to them. For example, they sell roughly twenty different types of lubricants, dozens of different kinds of condoms, and about 100 different kinds of vibrators ranging from electric vibrators, pocket-vibrators, wearable vibrators, etc. The amount of different products they sell specifically to aid a patron's sexual pleasure is astonishing.

While GV stores have a large selection of products that specifically aid in producing sexual orgasms and are well known for selling vibrators, they sell numerous other products that can provide other pleasures to the body. This shows that GV has a broad definition of what constitutes pleasure. GV realizes that some people find pleasure

from reading about sex and sexuality, and therefore the stores carry numerous titles of erotica. Other products encourage GV customers to experience the pleasure of relaxing, and GV sells various products that customers can use alone or with a partner to help relax, such as luxury oils, bath balls, lotions, and scented candles. GV also appreciates and promotes the pleasure of enjoyment and fun. The stores sell products such as edible body paint, couples' board games, candy bras and g-strings, and even pasta in the shape of penises or breasts. While to some these products are risqué and silly, they allow the customers of GV to experience a different type of pleasure that can come from using fun novelty products. Good Vibrations encourages its customers to experience pleasure in multiple ways. While Good Vibrations' wide product selection actively assists customers in gaining pleasure, GV also demonstrates a commitment to pleasure by holding workshops that instruct participants in how to engage in pleasurable activities.

Although the only workshop that occurred during my time in San Francisco was Carol Queens's workshop on using harnesses, GV usually runs four or five educational workshops per month at their stores. Many of these workshops are free and cover such topics such as multi-orgasmic sex or sex toys for couples. Other workshops cost a minimal fee, generally around \$15.00 in advance and \$20.00 at the door; well-known sex educators teach these classes on topics ranging from energetic sex, oral sex, and open relationships. The goal of the workshops is to explain how to create or enhance pleasure in one's life and can serve a very important function for learners and the community. As Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011) explained:

I will say, one of my most favorite customers ever, this is when I used to work almost all of the workshops, she was in her fifties and she had just gotten

divorced. And for the first time in her life she was exploring what she wanted to do. She was coming to every single workshop, and for about six months she was like a kid in a candy store. And every time she would see me she would come up and tell me about this new thing that she had just done. And one of the things that I like most about working here is knowing that she is out there and other people are out there somewhere having a happier sex life because of what we do. And if somebody is not getting that, we want to do what we can to help them find what that means.

As illustrated in Glickman's statement, workshops are important for the individuals in the community because they offer adults a chance to learn sexuality education. Sexual pleasure is an important and normal part of health and wellness, and it is something that middle aged and older adults are interested in learning about and achieving in their lives. Good Vibrations workshops offer this audience an opportunity to learn lessons about pleasure they never learned about before or did not know were possible. From a social-ecological approach to health, this is an extremely important function of GV. These classes offer the opportunity for individuals to better their health, share this information within their interpersonal relationships, and so on until potentially pockets of the community are feeling the effects of more pleasurable sexual health.

Lastly, pleasure is a core value at GV because the company encourages and promotes pleasure. The public often stereotypes sex stores as being dirty, dark, and in seedy sections of town; GV is just the opposite. The stores are bright, clean, and located in the midst of bustling neighborhoods that serve both tourists and locals. They sell branded merchandise within the stores that promote GV's commitment to pleasure such

as shot glasses, coffee mugs, stickers and sweatshirts that have the GV logo on them and read, “Creating a Buzz since 1977” (author’s notes, 2011). The SESAs are proud to provide a service that encourages pleasure. I often times observed SESAs happily explaining why a certain product would be beneficial for a person, and SESAs would enthusiastically explain the benefits of products. I observed one SESA asking a customer who was looking at cock rings if she had ever tried one. The SESA explained to her how “awesome” they were and how they can provide an amazing sensation for both men and women (author’s notes, 2011). While some SESAs were more enthusiastic towards patrons than others, I consistently observed SESAs promoting sexual pleasure to customers as something they could easily attain in their lives by using GV products.

In conclusion, Good Vibrations demonstrates a commitment to pleasure by selling a wide variety of products, appreciating many different kinds of pleasure, offering pleasure-focused workshops, and eagerly encouraging and promoting pleasure. Even the name, Good Vibrations, signifies the importance of pleasure in the way they construct sex-positive sexuality education. Although GV stores focus on providing pleasurable experiences for their customers, GV also is concerned about the health and safety of their customers.

Health and Safety

The last core component to GV’s conceptualization of sex-positive sexuality education is a focus on health and safety. This component was demonstrated throughout all of the data I obtained in my observations of and interactions at GV stores. I will concentrate here on how health and safety was promoted in the brochures, in the workshop I observed, and within the store.

First, every brochure I analyzed discussed some aspect of health and/or safety. Even though these brochures are not lengthy, GV made it a priority to warn readers of the risks that accompany certain experiences. For example, the “Pumps” brochure dedicated a whole section to a “Safety Warning.” This brochure warned readers about many risks: do not use “pumps if you bleed easily or have a blood clotting disorder, if you are diabetic or suffer from any peripheral vascular disease” (“Pumps,” n.d.). Also, in the “PC Muscle & Kegels” brochure, GV warned readers to be cautious when beginning these exercises, “remember to rest in between repetitions. Like any other exercise routine, it’s important to start slow and increase intensity” (“PC Muscle & Kegels,” n.d.). The brochures also encouraged safety with products as evidenced by the “Vibrators” brochure. In this brochure, there is a section entitled, “Care & Cleaning.” Along with reminding readers that “all toys can be cleaned with soap and warm water” they also told the reader to “never insert any object into the anus if it doesn’t have a base. It may slip all the way inside, requiring a trip to the emergency room” (“Vibrators,” n.d.). The brochures explicitly reminded patrons of health risks and warned them to be safe while engaging in sexual acts. Queen’s workshop on “Strap on Sex” was also filled with these reminders.

Queen facilitated the workshop, “Strap It to Me” so that patrons could learn about hands-free pleasure. Throughout her presentation, she reiterated the importance of health and safety. She repeated numerous times within her presentation that dildos and harnesses must be cleaned. She also encouraged the learners to put dildos in the dishwasher as an easy way to keep them clean. In terms of safety, Queen stressed that harness activity should not hurt “unless you get really good at it and then you want that

pain.” She explained that certain harnesses may hurt more petite, small, or thin people because the harnesses have snaps on them that could potentially be uncomfortable when they press into the person’s body frame (author’s notes, 2011). Overall, Queen’s workshop was meant to provide education on dildo and harness play, and a key component of this education was cleanliness.

Another example of how GV takes health and safety seriously as a core component of their conceptualization of sex-positive sexuality education was an event I observed at the Mission Street store. One of the senior-level SESAs trained a new SESA about condoms and lubricants while a woman and her partner were about six feet away, looking at dildos. The woman and her partner held the “tester” products and compared them to one another. At one point, the woman took one of the sealed dildos out of its box because she did not see its model available as a tester. Immediately, the senior-level SESA rushed over to the woman and her partner and said, “Excuse me, we ask that you don’t open any of the products!” The woman seemed embarrassed and apologized. The SESA remarked, “Yeah, I just need to take this and sterilize it now.” He then took the product behind the register and sterilized it (author’s notes, 2011). This episode demonstrates GV’s dedication to ensuring that all products are sterile when they leave the store. The SESAs immediate action is indicative of how seriously GV takes its role in keeping their customers healthy and safe.

One final example of why health and safety are core values at Good Vibrations is because they sell numerous types of products that promote health and wellness. In addition to selling dozens of different types of male condoms, the stores also sell female condoms. Good Vibrations also sells less mainstream safer sex materials such as finger

cots, dental dams, and gloves. Along with safer sex materials, Good Vibrations stores also sell numerous books that promote health and safety. Some of the titles of the books I observed at the stores included *Our Bodies Ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Collective, *Talking to Your Kids about Sex* by Laura Berman, *Anal Pleasure and Health* by Jack Morin, and *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability* by Miriam Kaufman. In sum, Good Vibrations carries a vast array of products that are specifically designed to maintain the health and safety of patrons. The well-being of their customers is a core component in GV's construction of sex-positive sexuality education, evident in brochures, workshop instructions, product selection, and attentiveness to customer behavior with products in the stores.

To recap, five components, then, constitute core values of Good Vibrations—community focus, inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, and health and safety. These components were displayed in varied ways throughout my analysis including in the interactions I observed, products the organization sells, and activities GV sponsors for the community. Together these sex-positive values form the foundation for how Good Vibrations conceptualizes sex-positive sexually education. In the next section I will describe the second element of my model—physical environment. The core values and physical environment have a mutually influential relationship—without such a strong set of sex-positive core values, the physical environment at GV would be dramatically different. Yet these values could not flourish without a supportive physical environment.

Element Two: Physical Environment at Good Vibrations

In this section, I discuss GV's physical environment. First, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the importance of GV's physical environment and how it adds to

the organization's dissemination of SPSE, I offer a more nuanced discussion of my sites of study than I originally offered in Chapter Three. I discuss each of the sites and give more insight into the environment created within the space. Based on these descriptions, I conclude that GV has an overall welcoming physical environment.

Mission Street Store

The Mission Street Store is the newest store to open during my time in San Francisco. Located in downtown San Francisco directly behind the street from the Westfield Centre shopping mall, the storefront windows are frosted glass with the Good Vibrations' logo and its website (goodvibes.com) etched in the glass. There are also large display windows that, during my visit, were set up to celebrate San Francisco Pride (Figure 4.2). Among the different products within the display window were a motorcycle and a large banner that announced the GV Pride promotion "Ride with Pride." This theme was also printed on store coupons that were passed out to customers in the store and at events like the Dyke Rally. The entire slogan was "Ride with Pride and Get Off...15% OFF" ("Ride With," 2011). The doors usually were propped open to this store, and this encouraged many tourists or passersby to casually meander into the store.



Figure 4.2. Mission Street Store Front (source: author)

Once inside, the store appears like a boutique. The majority of the products are located around the perimeter of the store with displays and promotions on black wooden tables throughout the middle of the store. Different sections of products wrap around the store, beginning with lubricants and moving to areas such as condoms, dildos, harnesses, S&M/bondage, books, anal toys, vibrators, male masturbation, candles and massage, and bachelorette party/ gift items. The Mission Street store also houses a portion of Good Vibrations' Antique Vibrator Museum in a glass display case. The space of the store is open, and all of the products and display cases are in pristine condition. All signage describing products is printed on a magenta-pink paper.

Valencia Street Store



Figure 4.3. Valencia Street Storefront (source: author)

The Valencia Street store is located in the Mission District, a very eclectic neighborhood in San Francisco. The store has large windows that are covered with a light blue-and-white-striped film. The Valencia Street store also keeps its doors propped open during store hours. Once inside the store, there is a large mural behind the cash registers

that wraps around to the next wall. The mural was painted by Percita Eyes Mural Arts Association, a community based organization that is responsible for creating numerous murals in the Valencia Street neighborhood (“About Percita,” n.d.). The mural, painted in bright colors, shows a variety of people engaging in activities such as talking on the phone, eating at a café, and a woman staring dreamily off into the distance. This artwork is lovely to view and undoubtedly is designed to make customers feel more at ease. In contrast to the welcoming and colorful mural, the interior of this store looks rather mechanical though functional. The walls are painted gray, and large beige wall fixtures with small holes are attached to the wall. Shelves are mounted onto these fixtures in order to display products, or products hang from the fixtures directly. The floor plan has sections of products located around the perimeter and tables promoting sales and certain items placed in the middle of the store. Sections for condoms, lubricants, vibrators, and massage oils wrap around the left side of the store. On the right side, past the cash registers, is a wall with adult DVDs that are available for rent or sale. Topics range from educational to movie spoof and are directed at a variety of sexualities and interests. For example one educational title was, *Gush: The Official Guide to G-Spot and Female Ejaculation*. On the same wall as the DVDs are educational and erotic books. The wall adjacent to the books contains harnesses. All of the harnesses are out of the box and hooked into the wall, which makes it easy for customers to test them. Next to the harnesses was S&M/bondage materials and a wall devoted to dildos. The last wall is filled with male-masturbation products, bachelorette party/gift items, and small display cases with more expensive items such as glass vibrators.

Polk Street Store

The Polk Street store also blends into the neighborhood façade because there are many interesting store or restaurant fronts on the blocks surrounding the store. The Polk Street store also uses a frosted covering on their large windows to secure the privacy of their patrons. These coverings were cut apart at the Polk store, so large promotional posters and tasteful displays staged in a display window could be seen. The door is always propped open, and when customers enter the store, immediately to their left are cash registers where an SESA welcomes them. The Polk store is painted white and, similar to the Valencia store, uses green metal fixtures with small holes in them to display products and hang shelves. This store also uses narrow shelves throughout the perimeter and in the middle of the store to display products. Signage again leads customers throughout the store. Although the Polk store deliberately uses shelves in the middle of the store to display items such as massage oils, bondage/S&M, and harnesses, it follows the pattern of the other GV stores of having the majority of the products located around the perimeter of the store with tables in the middle to display promotions. Immediately to the left of the cash registers is a wall of vibrators that moves into dildos and anal products. The back wall of the store contains a large collection of DVDs. Adjacent to the wall of the DVDs are books, male-masturbation products, bachelorette party/gift items, and condoms and lubricants. The Polk store has a back room that was being used during my visit as a gallery for an art exhibit of work by noted erotic photographer Phyllis Christopher.



Figure 4.4. Inside of Polk Street Store (source: Yelp.com, 2011)

Berkeley Store

The outside of the Berkeley store uses the same privacy film across the windows as the Polk and Valencia Street stores and displays the GV logo in the windows. The door was not always propped open during my visits; however, this may be due to the fact that it was cool outside. Once inside the store, the lights are dimmer than at the other stores, suggesting that this store seems to rely more on natural lighting. The walls alternate between white paint and wooden paneling from which shelves and products hang. Products are generally placed along the perimeter of the store with large tables throughout the store to house displays and promotions. There is also a rack in the middle of the store that contains adult DVDs. The store is divided into sections of condoms, lubricants, bachelorette party/gift ideas, male masturbation, dildos, vibrators, and large bookcases filled with books. One of the promotions happening during my visit was, “water fun.” To correspond with this promotion, the Berkeley store had a small fish bowl with a red beta fish swimming in blue gravel on a table next to blue vibrators, lubricants with blue labels, and Good Vibrations’ shot glasses with blue ribbons in them as a

decoration. The cash registers, located at the back of the small store facing the entrance, make it easy for the SESAs, who generally would stand at the registers when not working with a patron, to greet customers as they enter the store.

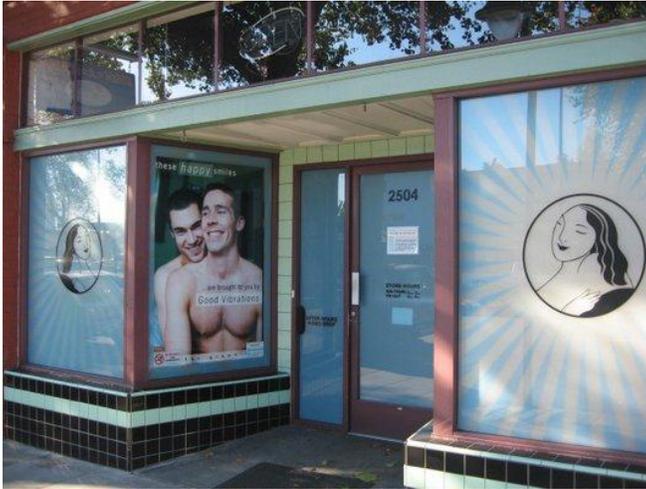


Figure 4.5. Storefront of Berkeley store. (source: Yelp.com, 2010)

In addition to the stores, the GV community events have a welcoming physical environment. Most of these events draw patrons who were not store regulars; therefore, this is a testament to how welcoming the environments are because all patrons seemed to be enjoying themselves at these events. In the next section I discuss elements of these events that helped create this atmosphere.

Good Vibrations Booth at the Dyke Rally

As I discussed in Chapter Three, the Dyke Rally was a meeting spot for friends before they participated in the Dyke March that evening. At the GV booth set up in Dolores Park, Carol Queen and another associate sat in the tent with a sign that read “The Doctor is In.” Queen and the associate are available to give advice or suggestions and easily chatted with the crowd. Sitting on a table under the tent was a mannequin of a torso wearing a harness and a dildo. There were also vibrators lined up, and GV was selling Go

Girls, a urination device that allows women to urinate standing up or can be used by transgendered people to pass as male. On the other side of the tent, GV employees use a sign-up sheet where people could be added to the GV mailing list. After someone signed up, s/he had the chance to spin a prize wheel. The categories on the wheel were: sexy prize, Good Vibrations wipes, Pearl Drop [a vibrator], Bullet Vibes [small vibrators], and lube shooter [a device that helps insert lubricants]. At times, the line to spin the wheel was quite long; however, the crowd remained in great spirits.

Good Vibrations Pink Pleasure Party

The Dyke March passes along Valencia Street, right in front of the Valencia Street Good Vibrations store. Good Vibrations celebrates this fact by hosting a party within their store for march and rally goers to celebrate Pride. When I got to the “party,” many people were standing outside the shop laughing, dancing, and taking photos. Two young white women, wearing pasties, lingerie, high heels, and stylish hair and make-up, took turns dancing in the store’s one display window with a sign that read, “Photos for Tips.” People would stop in front to take photos with them, without always tipping, or dance alongside them. Some people would go into the store and place dollar bills into their garters (author’s notes, 2011).

The store was packed with patrons. Right by the entrance to the store, a female DJ named Justin Credible, dressed in a cocktail dress, spun records—from Michael Jackson’s “Rock with You” to current pop hits. Although the store was very crowded, it appeared that more people were browsing than buying. There were big clusters of people around the vibrators, harnesses and dildos, and lubricants. The laughter, loudness of the music, and overall party atmosphere could be heard outside of the store and helped to

welcome and encourage other people to come inside. As I exited the store, night had fallen; however, the streets were still crowded with people milling about and partying, and GV remained crowded as well (author's notes, 2011).

“Strap it To Me! With Dr. Carol Queen”

Carol Queen's class on strap on sex at the Valencia store was free of charge, and 17 members from the community attended. Three rows of folding chairs were set up in front of the dildos for the workshop participants. As participants filed into the seats, Queen went around the store grabbing products like harnesses, lubricants, and dildos and placed them on a shelf near the seating area. After the workshop, the learners got up and examined products more carefully, and Queen made herself available to consult with patrons.

Phyllis Christopher Art Gallery Reception and Opening

To kick off the start to San Francisco Pride celebrations, GV hosted an art gallery reception and opening for erotic photographer Phyllis Christopher at the Polk Street store. About 20 of Christopher's photographs were displayed on the white walls of the back room of the Polk Street store. All of the photos were black and white and depicted women and lesbians in different erotic moments. The reception was crowded with GV administrators, Christopher's friends, and the general public. The guests mingled, drank complementary wine, ate hors d'oeuvres, and viewed the photos.

Physical Environment: Welcoming Atmosphere

Based on my analysis of the physical environments of the stores and events I observed, the physical environment that was created at the Good Vibrations stores and events was a welcoming environment. All stores were always brightly lit (except for the

Berkeley store, which relied more on natural lighting), clean, and had attractive store staging such as colorful and fun table displays. This clever staging of the displays made it easy for customers to feel welcome in the store. Furthermore, each store played upbeat pop or light rock music from artists such as Britney Spears, Lenny Kravitz, the Scissor Sisters, and Ke\$ha. The songs were lively and played at a comfortable volume so as not to distract customers, but yet again make them feel comfortable.

I also observed that customers had a positive reaction to the environment in the store. Although I assumed I might observe couples in the store who were upset because they were experiencing sexual or intimacy problems, I did not observe any couples being icy or rude to one another. On the contrary, most couples looked as if they were having a fantastic time in the store. At the Mission Street store, it was common to observe couples who stopped in because they happened to walk by. One partner often seemed to be excited to enter, and the other was a bit hesitant. However, due to the welcoming environment, the more reticent partner quickly became less nervous. At the Valencia, Polk, and Berkeley stores, I often witnessed very intimate nonverbal behaviors from partners when they were in the store. At the Berkeley store I witnessed a man and woman, most likely in their mid- to late- sixties, hold each tight and whisper to each other and smile while they looked at vibrators. Other times, I witnessed couples rubbing each other's backs, smiling, laughing, embracing, or kissing. These intimate behaviors were facilitated by Good Vibrations' warm, welcoming environment.

Good Vibrations also works at maintaining a welcoming environment by correcting behaviors that do not uphold this environment. One sign posted in front of the spankers and floggers in the Mission Street store read, "Spanking! We love it, but for the

safety and consideration of our customers we ask that you refrain from doing it in the store” (author’s notes, 2011). Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011)

explained how SESAs actively work to maintain a positive environment within the store:

If some customers are getting a little rowdy or raucous, which does happen sometimes, it happens more with younger folks and crowds. You know, somebody will pick up the biggest dildo we have and they will start waving it around. Or they will say really loudly, “Oh, that’s freaky, why would anybody do that?” And we will go up to them and say, “Look, we are glad you are here. We are glad you are having a great time, and we need you to tone it down because it is making other people uncomfortable.

Vickie (personal communication, July 7, 2011), an SESA, discussed how she sometimes struggles with customers who threaten the positive environment:

It’s like, I don’t want to kick them out [of the store], but where do I draw the line? Because they may be laughing at this butt plug, but that is [something] someone else wants to buy, and then they are too embarrassed to buy it.

I did observe many instances where SESAs approached customers and asked them to not play with products, or in one instance, an SESA asked a young man to put his shirt on because they try to “de-sexualize” the store (author’s notes, 2011). Although SESAs sometimes are put in a disciplinary role, this role functions to keep the welcoming spirit of the store alive. In sum, a welcoming environment was created at Good Vibrations. The staff and administration work hard to create an atmosphere patrons want to enter and feel better once they leave. The staff’s effective communication behaviors allowed for a welcoming atmosphere to be created through the store design and interactions. In the next

section I outline how the third element of the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at Good Vibrations model—Communication Strategies—was constructed.

Element Three: Communication Strategies at Good Vibrations

Sex-positive sexuality education cannot be disseminated without effective communication strategies. Being a skilled communicator is something that the Good Vibrations employees work on mastering. As Glickman (personal communication, July 6, 2011) explains:

The biggest thing that I think we do is model the fact that we don't think there is anything wrong or shameful in anything that people do. If somebody comes to us and they are asking us about anal sex, and you know we are looking down or we are looking away or all embarrassed—and that does happen with some of the newer folks—that is what gets communicated to the customer. What we do is let folks know, yeah, alright, let me give you the information that you need. And I will make whatever level of eye contact you are comfortable with, and I will share this information with you. And I will show you that I don't think there is anything wrong with it. I don't think this [way of communicating] is something you can learn from like a website or book. It is something that happens in relation to someone else, and we put a lot of energy into our relationships with our customers.

Throughout all of my time in the field at GV stores and events, I observed certain communication strategies that were very commonly employed by the staff. I discuss these strategies—eye contact, volume, kinesics, immediacy, humor, person-centered

communication, and clarity. These strategies enabled employees to communicate SPSE in an effective way.

Eye Contact

Eye contact, as a communicative skill, can serve several functions in U.S. interactions. It is a way to demonstrate interest and to convey an eagerness for communicative interactions. Throughout my observations of the SESAs at Good Vibrations, I noticed that most practiced good eye contact. When SESAs would talk with customers they would turn their bodies toward them and look the customer in the eye. For example, at the Mission Street store, I observed an SESA working with a woman who was interested in purchasing multiple products. The SESA made direct eye contact while she asked the customer questions about her interests in products. Her eye contact with the customer helped to show interest in what the customer was saying, and it helped the SESA choose products that were tailored to the customer's needs.

Another example of how effective eye contact occurred was during the greeting of customers. Although at times the store would be very busy, and SESAs would be busy working with customers, I noticed that they always made a conscious effort to make eye contact with and greet each customer who walked into the store. This engagement with the customers established a sense of appreciation for the customer. Similarly, when a customer left the store, regardless if he or she had made a purchase, the SESA would look up and thank them for stopping in or say goodbye. Eye contact during these greetings was very consistent and helped to establish a warm and inviting tone to the interaction.

Eye contact, however, is not always appropriate; it is most effective when both interactants feel “its intensity is appropriate for the situation” (Gorman, 2008, p. 43). Culture and difficulty discussing a topic can influence the amount of eye contact a person feels comfortable giving (Gorman, 2008). There were times, as Glickman mentioned above, when customers seemed nervous and did not want to establish direct contact with the SESA. When this occurred, the SESA would focus instead on the products in order to make the customer felt most comfortable. An example that demonstrates this behavior occurred at the Polk Street store. One of the SESAs noticed that a customer was looking at the male-masturbation products. She went over to the customer and asked if the customer had any questions. The customer appeared a little hesitant, somewhat unsure of what to say, and looked down. The SESA then focused her eye contact strictly on the products in front of them. She would pick up a product and gaze at the product while explaining its functions. At times she would catch the eye of the customer, but it was only a brief glance. Focusing eye contact on the products appeared to be helpful in this interaction because the customer started to talk more once the SESA focused her gaze on the products.

The staff at Good Vibrations seemed cognizant of the fact that eye contact is an important consideration when addressing topics related to sex and sexuality, but always within the context of what is comfortable for the customer. SESAs both used and avoided direct eye contact to make customers comfortable. On the one hand, when they made direct eye contact with customers, they signaled that talking about sexual matters is the most natural thing in the world—and it facilitated interaction about products and issues. When they avoided such eye contact and focused on products instead in order to

decrease customers' discomfort, they also were intent on creating the most comfortable space for customers. SESAs needed to be aware, then, of the ways eye contact can function, and for the most part I saw it used effectively to contribute to a comfortable environment and interaction.

Volume

The second communication strategy I noticed the SESAs use effectively was voice volume. Volume refers to how loud or soft a person speaks. Since volume is “influenced by one’s surroundings and cultural customs,” SESAs usually would match their volume to that of customers (Rai & Rai, 2008, p. 2008). For example, if a customer was speaking quietly, the SESA would adjust her volume as well. In general, the conversations between the SESAs and the customers were at a soft volume. Many times in my observations, a customer and an SESA would have a conversation no more than ten feet away from me, and I could not easily hear their conversation. This soft volume was effective because it allowed conversations to remain somewhat confidential and intimate.

At other times, I could hear the conversations of an SESA and customer from across the room; however, these customers seemed comfortable with this volume level. While this volume level seemed comfortable for both parties, I observed an unintended consequence of this level of volume. Since other shoppers in the store could hear conversations at a louder volume, it helped educate them as well. At the Mission Street store, for example, a couple was looking at dildos for a while, but did not seek SESA assistance. Eventually another shopper asked an SESA a question, and the SESA directed them over to the dildo section. The SESA began to discuss product information

with the customer, and I observed the first couple also beginning to listen to their conversation. In this instance, a loud volume by the SESA and customer allowed the couple who may have been too shy to ask a question to also learn valuable information about a product.

Overall, as with eye contact, SESAs used volume to enhance the effectiveness of the interactions in the store. And as with eye contact, they took their cues about level of volume from their customers. At times, the conversations between the SESAs and customers were hushed, keeping conversations more confidential and private. At other times, their conversations were louder, and these loud conversations seemed to be perfectly acceptable to interactants and served to educate those around them. That SESAs used this strategy flexibly was its most effective quality.

Kinesics

The study of kinesics investigates nonverbal behaviors such as body movements and posture. I observed the SESAs effectively utilizing kinesics in their interactions with customers. First, at a basic kinesic level, SESAs had confident posture. They would stand up straight or lean toward the customer when conversing. The confident posture communicated that the SESA was not embarrassed about talking with the customer about anything. Leaning toward the customer made it appear that the SESA was interested in what the customer had to say and created a close personal space and sense of intimacy between SESA and customer. This creation of personal space created the possibility for SESA and customer to have a private conversation if that is what the patron desired.

The basic sense of space and posture was enhanced by helpful body movements. Often when SESAs were explaining a product to a customer, they would gesture with their hands to accentuate or clarify a point. In using gestures freely and comfortably, SESAs communicated that they were comfortable speaking about the topic and comfortable speaking in general. At times, too, staff used gestures to explain how products worked. For example, during Queen's presentation on strap-on sex she would often use her hands or body to demonstrate how harnesses work. Rarely did I observe an SESA use a distracting body movement. In sum, in communicating comfortably with hand movements, gestures and body language, SESAs contributed to the sense of a comfortable conversation, making it easier for customers to engage and interact as well.

Immediacy

According to Kreps (2012) "immediacy is a relational dimension of human communication that influences physical and emotional closeness, comfort, engagement, caring, personal involvement, intensity, enthusiasm, authority, and enjoyment in human interactions" (p. 254). In health care, behaviors that demonstrate immediacy range from using clients' names, building rapport, and providing feedback (Kreps, 2012). I observed the staff at Good Vibrations using numerous immediacy strategies.

First, GV associates employed a conversational approach with customers. When customers first enter the store they are greeted in a manner that is casual yet friendly. The SESAs are not overly serious or solemn and do not ignore any customer. After initially greeting a customer, an SESA usually would follow up with the person in a comfortable manner in order to break the ice. For example, while a customer was looking at vibrators, an SESA came up to her and said, "That is a really great product. Let me know if you

have any questions, okay” (author’s notes, 2011)? The SESA broke the ice with the customer because she reassured the customer that the product she was looking at was a good choice and also provided a non-threatening way for the customer to follow up with her that came across as just a friendly conversation. Many times, I observed that a simple ice-breaker by an SESA helped a customer initiate a conversation about a product with the SESA.

A second example of immediacy is seen in GV brochures. The tone in the brochures is very conversational—like having a discussion with a friend. For example, in the “Condoms” brochure, GV tells the reader, “Buying condoms is just like buying clothes...you need to try them on to see what fits” (“Condoms,” n.d.). Similarly, the “Vibrators” brochure reads, “Want a vibrator with more? These beauties have all the bells and whistles” (“Vibrators,” n.d.). The tone used to discuss these products is conversational and friendly; it serves to put the customer at ease and to reassure them that buying condoms or vibrators can be as normal as buying clothes or as elegant as buying a premium product.

Finally, the clothing the SESAs wore contributed to customer immediacy. Anderson (1979) found that teacher immediacy was increased when instructors wore casual clothing. The SESAs generally dressed in a casual style that also included unique and funky accents. For example, I observed SESAs wearing jeans and fashionable T-shirts with knee-high boots, casual dresses with bright colored leggings, or cotton skirts with simple blouses. The SESAs always looked comfortable in their clothing. Their easy-going approach to clothing also helped to maintain an equal power distance with the customers who also were generally dressed in casual yet trendy clothing. In sum, it was

common to see SESAs in casual clothing that was still fashion-forward, and this helped to create immediacy with the customers.

Overall, immediacy was created through the use of many strategies including using ice-breakers, having a conversational approach in person and in the brochures, and dressing in a casual and fun style. These immediate behaviors served to build rapport with customers and to increase comfort and engagement.

Humor

Humor positively functions to help people relate to each other, relieve uncertainty, and create a more open and relaxed environment (Meyer, 2012). Correspondingly, effective communication is also practiced at Good Vibrations through the use of humor. Humor was used in interactions with customers, during the workshop I observed, and in brochures.

First, I observed the SESAs using humor while they consulted with patrons. Due to Glickman's request that I not record specific customer statements while I was observing, I do not have any concrete examples of how customers and SESAs used humor in their interactions. However, I observed countless instances when SESAs and patrons would laugh and smile during their interactions. Sometimes this laughter came after the SESA would demonstrate how a certain product, like a vibrator, worked, or other times it was during a consultation for great bachelorette or birthday party gifts. It appeared that SESAs made the patrons laugh first, but then the patrons usually tried to reciprocate.

One of the best uses of humor I observed was during Queen's "Strap it To Me" workshop. Queen sprinkled her discussion with humorous stories or jokes throughout the

entire one-hour presentation. While she was discussing the importance of cleaning your toys, she said, “You can just throw it in the dishwasher, unless of course your mother-in-law is there, or you live with a lot of people” (author’s notes, 2011)! During a section of the workshop when she was encouraging people to view some of the educational DVDs, she joked with them, “You can even watch a DVD with me in it—a lot different looking me, about a twenty-years-younger me” (authors notes, 2011)! Lastly, she found humorous ways to name products. For example, Good Vibrations sells dildos that cost over \$100.00. Instead of simply saying that these products are expensive, Queen used the humorous term *heirloom* to reference that since these products are so expensive, a person might consider them a family treasure.

Another example of how humor was incorporated within GV is in the brochures that describe products and practices. Although the brochures are educational, they have light humorous touches throughout. For example, in the brochure on dildos it reads, “People have been using dildos for over 30,000 years, but today’s toys have a lot more to offer than those Paleolithic phalluses” (“Dildos,” n.d.)! Other brochures use funny headings. Within the “Lubricants” brochure, one heading is “GOT LUBE?,” and another is “THROUGH THE THICK & THIN” (“Lubricants,” n.d.). These headings help to catch the reader’s eye and set them at ease before presenting more serious product, health, and wellness information.

Queen’s use of humor in her workshop, humorous innuendos within the brochures and store, and humor used by the SESAs all work to facilitate positive outcomes in terms of the interaction. Humor is helpful in developing a trusting relationship, releasing tension, and facilitating open mindedness (Dziegielewski, Jacinto, Laudadio, & Legg-

Rodriguez, 2003). In terms of Good Vibrations, humor is a communicative tool that allows customers and learners to reduce anxiety over being in a sex store. Once patrons are relieved of this stress and feel comfortable, the Good Vibrations' staff can have productive interactions with them.

Person-Centered Communication

Person-centered messages are valuable during interactions because they acknowledge and legitimize feelings and are commonly listener centered, emotion focused, and nonevaluative (MacGeorge, Feng, Wilkum, & Doherty, 2012). Good Vibrations offers its customers person-centered messages in numerous ways.

Vickie explained that the most important skill she uses as an SESA is to be able to “negotiate [people’s] needs and wants without being intrusive. Just being able to listen to what they need and being non-judgmental definitely helps” (Vickie, personal communication, July 7, 2011). As Vickie’s statement suggests, SESAs can spend an enormous amount of time and energy working one-on-one with customers. I commonly observed SESAs working for a half hour to an hour with one customer. During these interactions, an SESA first would find out what the patron was looking for and then try to provide them with options. However, explaining each option can be a laborious process. At the Berkeley store, I observed an SESA work with a woman interested in buying a vibrator for over an hour. The SESA explained in great detail what the different vibrators provided and then encouraged the woman to touch each one and get a sense for what she liked best. Once the woman had narrowed her selection down, she continued to ask the SESA more questions. This process went on until the woman finally made a purchase.

SESAs also try numerous ways to ensure that customers will be satisfied with their products. One evening, I observed a man on vacation come into the store to purchase a vibrator for his wife. The SESA worked extremely hard trying to find the best product choice for this couple. At one point, however, the man needed to make an important distinction regarding what type of product he would buy. The SESA could not help him with this decision, because it was something that would have been a personal preference for his wife. The man appeared distraught and confused. Instead of giving up on the situation and telling the man to come back later with his wife, the SESA encouraged him to “just shoot her a text” in order to see what she would prefer (author’s notes, 2011). This turned out to be a good idea: The wife replied, the man could make a purchase, and everyone was satisfied. The SESAs worked very hard with every customer; at times, I felt as if they were providing a service as personalized shoppers for patrons, even though they do not work on commission. SESAs can spend hours with customers finding the right product for them, testament to their commitment to making sure customers are satisfied.

Because they do not work on commission, SESAs are not required to sell certain items, and they can tailor their advice to what product will actually serve the customer best. In order to figure out how to give the best person-centered message to each customer, Good Vibrations encourages its customers to test and experiment with products in the store and at home. Having a demo version or tester of most every product allows the SESAs to work with customers to find the best option or allows customers who would rather shop without the assistance of an SESA to get an intimate sense of what the products are like before purchasing them.

Furthermore, GV also provides opportunities for personal experimentation when customers leave the store. Glickman explained on his tour of the store that GV makes a conscious decision to sell products that are inexpensive, single size, or “loose” to encourage such experimentation. For example, GV sells single-use packets of lubricants, individually wrapped condoms, and vibrators for modest prices such as \$10.00 because they want customers to be able to find the product that works best for them. Glickman said that the need to provide opportunities for experimentation is similar to the philosophy behind a wine tasting. According to Glickman, a person needs to try something first to be able to determine if it is a good match to his or her palate. Thus, Good Vibrations encourages the use of experimentation because its associates are committed to helping the customer make the best personalized product decision.

Clarity

The last function that Good Vibrations’ effective communication skills facilitate is the transmission of clear, detailed instructions. According to Ken Bain’s (2004) research on the best scholarship practices utilized by the most successful college teachers within the U.S., “generally the most accomplished of the teachers had the best ways of explaining things” and “the capacity to talk well—in brief instructions or in long explanations” (p. 117). In person, in the stores, and in their brochures, GV teaches clients about products and practices by providing detailed instructions to help customers practice sex-positive sexuality education in their own lives.

First, I observed many instances where SESAs would provide clear guidelines and instructions for product use to customers. When customers had questions about any of the products, an SESA would walk them through how the products work. For example,

because some customers, according to an SESA, “can be intimidated” by lubricants, when customers had concerns that may be alleviated by the use of lubricant or were buying a product that would be enhanced by also using lubricant, an SESA would walk over the lubricants and break down the many differences between them (author’s notes, 2011). Lubricants are made of different materials which aid different sexual problems or activities; therefore, it is important for SESAs to give customers details about why one lubricant might serve their needs better than another. One couple came into the store to purchase a flavored lubricant. Instead of just pointing to the wall where the lubricants are displayed, the SESA walked over to the wall with the customers and gave them some options to try, explaining how some flavors are “for more of a complex palate” while others are not (author’s notes, 2011). These instructions helped the customers make an informed product decision.

Similarly, during Queen’s workshop on strap-on/hands-free sex, she was extremely clear and thorough in her instructions. Since this class was for beginners interested in this type of activity, she made sure to start off with very basic information—explaining what harnesses and dildos are and how they operate. When she described how something works, she made sure to demonstrate it using demo products she pulled from the shelf. When topics came up for which she did not have demo products handy, she quickly raced to the proper section of the store to get a model in order to provide the best instructions.

Queen’s instructions also included referring people to other products that could help them best understand the process. Since GV does not demonstrate live sexual acts within their store, it can be difficult to teach about these acts without showing the learners

how they are done. To remedy this, Queen listed many resources during the workshop for people to learn more about the topics she was discussing. Since the presentation was only an hour, these resources were also important because they allowed the learners to know trusted sources from which to receive additional instruction.

Good Vibrations also makes sure that customers have clear instructions about their products even if customers choose not to interact with an SESA. At certain stores, underneath *every* product in the store is a business card size “info card.” This card lists the product title and about three bullet points explaining the product. Sometimes the cards will offer recommendations. For example, on one card the information encouraged the use of condoms with silicone based toys. The brevity of the instructions also was useful because some customers may have lower literacy skills or may be apprehensive discussing these products with an SESA; therefore, these cards provided a simple yet effective way of communicating key instructions to customers.

Overall, the employees and the design of GV stores work provide clear, detailed instructions. These instructions are facilitated by the effective communication practices demonstrated within the stores. Clear instructions allow customers to realize for themselves GV’s mission of sex-positive sexuality education.

Summary

To summarize, within this case I outlined my observations of the Good Vibrations stores and community events, interviews with Good Vibrations staff, and analysis of Good Vibrations educational brochures and provided answers to my research questions through the use of the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at Good Vibrations Model. The core values I uncovered in the first element of the model—community focus,

inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, and health and safety—explain how the process of sex-positive sexuality education is enacted at Good Vibrations. The physical environment in the second element of the model provides a welcoming atmosphere for sex-positive sexuality education to be constructed and communicated. Lastly, the communication strategies—eye contact, volume, kinesics, immediacy, humor, person-centered communication, and clarity—in the third element of the model facilitate the transmission of the core values to the GV customers. This model thus explains that sex-positive sexuality education is enacted at Good Vibrations in the realization of core values, welcoming physical environment, and transmission of this structure through communication that is supported by successful communication strategies.

Good Vibrations, then, is an organization that is successfully constructing and communicating sex-positive sexuality education. Good Vibrations differs from my two other sites because it is a for-profit organization. Its mission is not solely to provide sexuality education for the general public but to also be profitable. However, I observed Good Vibrations privileging sexuality education more so than sales—SESAs are not encouraged to sell expensive items or given a commission for reaching or exceeding selling goals, for example. Good Vibrations is expanding their retail stores because they are making a profit; however, in a world where a consumer can purchase any product on the Internet, I argue that Good Vibrations is expanding not just because they are a profitable business but rather because they offer customers sex-positive sexuality education—something customers cannot get by buying products online or at competing adult retail stores.

Good Vibrations' approach to sexuality education is unique because they offer clear core values which reflect important concepts of sex-positive sexuality education and transmit these tenets through the use of skilled communication practices in a welcoming environment. In conclusion, the administration and SESAs are committed to providing experiences for their customers that will maintain the financial health of the organization, but that will also that benefit their sex lives and overall health and well-being.

Chapter Five: Scarleteen.com

In this chapter, I present the case of Scarleteen.com (referred to as Scarleteen). Scarleteen is the number one ranked site for teen sexual health information and one of the only online sources of sex-positive sexuality education that is specifically targeted for adolescents (Alexa, 2011). Through my thematic analysis and subsequent data analysis of articles and message board postings from the site, I analyzed how Scarleteen, my second data set, incorporates the components of sex-positive sexuality education. As with my other sites of study, the data I uncovered at Scarleteen is best presented through the model I created, “Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education on Scarleteen.com” (see Figure 5.1). In this chapter, I explain how Scarleteen is constituted, offer a description of Scarleteen’s components within the model, and conclude by describing how SPSE is enacted and communicated on Scarleteen.

Model of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education on Scarleteen.com

My textual analysis of Scarleteen, a sex-positive sexuality education website for teens, suggests that Scarleteen is successful at enacting its approach to sex-positive sexuality education. The model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education on Scarleteen.com, seen in Figure 5.1., represents how Scarleteen constructs and communicates SPSE. Scarleteen has a clear set of values that comprise its approach to sex-positivity. These values are disseminated to users through the site’s adequate use of its physical environment and effective communication strategies. I determined the categories within each of the three elements of the model through my observations and data analysis.

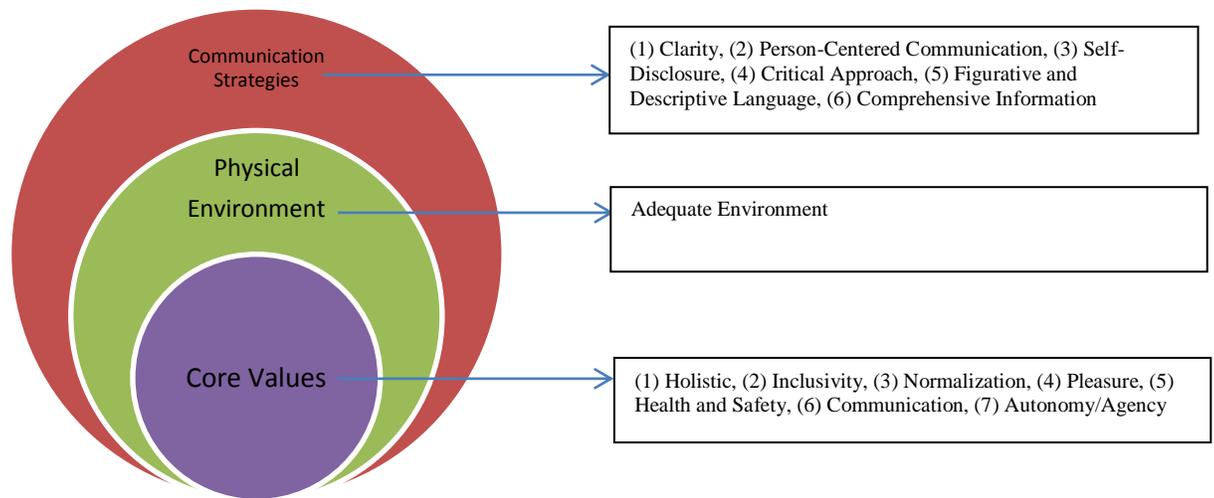


Figure 5.1. Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education on Scarleteen.com

Element One: Core Values on Scarleteen.com

The core values of Scarleteen consist of seven principles: holistic, inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, health and safety, communication, and autonomy/agency. Each principle is frequently utilized throughout the site and demonstrates how Scarleteen constructs sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE).

Holistic

The first component of the core values of sex-positive sexuality education on Scarleteen is a holistic view of sexuality. Scarleteen informs its users that sex is more than an act to cause pleasure within the body. Instead, Scarleteen teaches that sex must also involve other aspects such as the mind and emotions. As Heather Corinna, site founder and director, tells users, “Sexuality and sexual partnership is more than just physical, even when it’s casual—it involves our feelings and thoughts as well, and those of our sexual partner” (Corinna, 2011h, p. 1). In another example, Corinna (2010f) explains, “During our teens specifically, our sexual development is doing the most developing it ever will, physically and socially (the experiential, interpersonal, emotional

and intellectual parts of sexual development tend to be more of a lifelong process)” (pp. 1-2).

The site also encourages a holistic approach to sexuality encouraging users to have well-rounded lives. Although Scarleteen is a website devoted to sex education, the authors of the articles remind users that there is more to life than sex. For example, in an article entitled, “To Be... AWESOME or Just Be—Tips on Making the Most of Your Life Right Now!,” Femke (2010) writes, “*Romantic partners aren’t (and shouldn’t be!) our only source of love and companionship* [italics in original]” (p. 1). In yet another article, Corinna reminds users that, “Sex cannot, by itself, give us self-worth, self-esteem or long-term positive body image” (p. 3). The authors on Scarleteen work hard to remind its users that sex, while important, is not going to give them a holistic sense of self.

Scarleteen also values a holistic approach to sex-education because of the way the site’s creators and writers create articles and respond to message posts about a wide variety of topics that deal with a holistic approach to not just sexuality but overall wellness. In Femke’s article (2010), users are encouraged to work toward financial and social independence in order to receive the “benefits of being behind the steering wheel of your destiny” (p. 3). In a message post titled “Losing a Best Friend,” chapsticklovin wrote about her sorrow and difficulty managing the fact that her two sisters moved out of the house. Corinna responded to the user by suggesting she use Skype and Facebook to keep in touch with her sisters. Corinna realized that this is a difficult situation for the user, and even though it is not her area of expertise because, as she explained, she “comes from a family without any close sibling relationships,” she still understood how important it was to serve this user. Even when chapsticklovin explained that she figured out a way

to stay in touch with her sisters, Corinna asked, “Do you want to talk some more about your mom and dad, and things about your family life that you feel a little weird about?” to further show interest in a holistic approach to the user’s wellness (“Losing a Best Friend,” 2011, pp. 1-2).

Scarleteen’s holistic approach to sexuality heeds the call of researchers such as Aggleton and Campbell (2000), Goldman (2008), and Lewis (1994) to use sexuality education as a space to also teach adolescents about life skills. Scarleteen believes that educating adolescents about sex and sexuality is much more than just providing information about sex acts. A holistic view of sexuality is seen throughout the site; therefore, it is the first component in the core values of how Scarleteen conceptualizes sex-positive sexuality education.

Inclusivity

The second component of SPSE demonstrated throughout Scarleteen is inclusivity, which is displayed on the site in both implicit and explicit ways. An inclusive approach values diversity and multiple perspectives. First, Scarleteen explicitly promotes inclusivity as a tenet of sex-positive sexuality education within the content of many of its articles. For example, in an article on disabilities, Corinna (2011d) writes:

We should always be inclusive of as many people in sex education and sexuality as we can, no matter what group we’re talking about, even if it doesn’t directly benefit anyone but members of that group. We should be inclusive of disability and persons with disability in both sex education and our sexualities and sex lives for the sole reason that it and we are part of human sexuality and sexuality is part of those of use with disability, just like it’s part of abled people. It’s also a lot

easier to be inclusive than most people think, especially when we're educating about sex well, and thinking about sexuality in ways most likely to make all our sexualities and sex lives beneficial and positive. (p. 2)

The authors at Scarleteen also explicitly promote inclusivity by providing supportive information for multiple people and identities. In one article about sexual identity, Corinna (2010f) reminds users that:

If you feel like trying on an orientation out loud to others as a way for you to figure things out, that's okay, and you can even qualify whatever orientation that is with a "I think I'm, but I'm still not 100% sure." Heck, many people who identify as heterosexual do this with some frequency. (p. 3)

In addition, Scarleteen articles make an effort to include multiple readers' identities. For example, in an article on a first gynecological visit, an article in which one might assume only cisgendered females would be interested, Corinna adds a side note that reads, "Hey, Trans Guys! Many of you still need some GYN care, too, including pap smears. Want more information? Here is a great site that'll fill you in: <http://www.checkitoutguys.ca/>" (Corinna, 2010k, p. 1). By including transgendered males in this article, Corinna demonstrates an inclusive approach to multiple sexual identities.

Besides explicitly framing sexuality as inclusive, Scarleteen also implicitly demonstrates inclusivity within its articles. The authors deliberately use inclusive language terms and examples within their articles in order to be as inclusive of their readers as possible. For example, in an article on abuse and assault, Corinna (2011c) writes a detailed example of the cycle of abuse. However, rather than using traditional gender specific names, which could be alienating for a user who is not in a heterosexual

relationship, Corinna simply uses the initials “M.” and “J.” In another article on painful intercourse, Corinna (2011f) addresses a section of the article to “Dear Person with a Penis” (p. 4). Using this salutation, rather than “Dear Men,” is an example of inclusivity. Corinna avoids being exclusionary by not assuming that the only person that can have a penis is a man. Women or transgendered men and women may also use a penis or a penis-like sexual aid during intercourse; addressing this section of the article to a “person,” Scarleteen therefore promotes inclusivity.

Inclusivity also was encouraged on the message boards in respect to terminology. A member, MusePen (2011), wrote a post asking users which term they prefer: “making love” or “having sex.” Corinna responded:

When y’all have this discussion, it might be helpful to remember that there are WAY more than just these two words or phrases people use for describing sex or the kind of sex that they have, and that what one word or phrase means to one person may mean something different to someone else. (“Making Love,” 2011, p. 1)

To conclude, inclusivity is a core value of sex-positive sexuality education that Scarleteen promotes; however, Scarleteen also proves its commitment to this tenet by demonstrating inclusive language and inclusive examples within the material on the site. This commitment from the authors on Scarleteen to be inclusive in their own writing and to encourage inclusivity among the site’s users as well demonstrates how Scarleteen is passionate about providing sexuality education that takes into account the multiple and varied standpoints of its users.

Normalization

The third component of Scarleteen's core values of sex-positive sexuality education is normalization. Since Scarleteen is a website dedicated to providing adolescents—a population that does not necessarily receive adequate formalized sexuality education—with information about sex and sexuality, the content within many of the articles or message boards focused on reassuring users that their bodies, experiences, thoughts, and concerns are normal. For example, in the article, “Q is for Questioning,” Corinna (2010f) explains to readers that “It’s very common for people of all stripes to question their orientation: most people do it at least at some point, even if they don’t tell anyone else about it” (p. 2). Likewise on the message boards, Corinna responded to a post by a volunteer who felt remorseful because she admitted she may want to change her sexual orientation to straight if possible. Corinna’s response was that she did not see anything wrong with the volunteer’s admission and normalized her feelings by saying that, “I think most of us, at one time or another, would gladly have ditched or adapted parts of our life or person that created huge obstacles or traumas for us. I’d call that human” (“Would you change?,” 2011). In another article, Corinna (2010f) explains:

As well, suggesting heterosexual is what’s “normal” and everything else is different is a whole lot like suggesting that being white is what’s “normal” and everyone else’s race is a variance, or that speaking English is what’s normal and all other languages are deviations. (p.2)

Corinna and Blank (2010) also discuss the dangers that can happen when others do not treat multiple sexual identities as normal. They write:

When we stigmatize, manipulatively hamper, misunderstand, mistreat or intrude upon the flowering of anyone’s sexuality for our own aims, we create real problems. When we attempt to define what any individual’s sexuality “should” be, rather than creating a context of informed choice based in an awareness of cultural issues, biographical facts, and our knowledge of tendencies and patterns of human development, we create a poisonously Procrustean bed. (p. 1)

These examples demonstrate how Scarleteen normalizes users’ questions about sexual orientation and identities.

Secondly, Scarleteen normalizes concerns about the body. In an article on pleasure, Corinna (2011l) reminds readers that, “*Nothing on the body is gross or unacceptable* [italics in original],” and “*If you’re a person with a penis who is all hung up (as it were) on how long your penis is, by the time you get to the end of this piece I’m hoping you’ll see why that’s silly* [italics in original]” (p. 4). In addition, Corinna writes “People aren’t perfect, so neither is anything we do, and that includes sex. Sex should be a place where we get to be imperfect and feel okay about—and maybe even enjoy—being so” (2011i, p. 5). Scarleteen also tells its users that their bodies and preferences about what is normal may change. Corinna (2010g) explains:

There isn’t a statute of limitations on your sex life. You can initiate any of it at any time during your life, and change what you want to do as you go along, determining at any time what is best for you, and for your partner(s). (p. 4)

Lastly, Scarleteen normalizes experiences users may be encountering such as going to the gynecologist for the first time. Corinna (2010k) reassures readers that, “Gynecologists aren’t perverts who just want to spend all day looking at vaginas,” and

that “There is no reason to feel it [going to the gynecologist] is dirty—It isn’t. You’re taking care of yourself, and so is the doctor” (p. 2). In sum, Scarleteen spends a great deal of time normalizing readers’ concerns. The time its writers spend normalizing sex and sexuality is a reflection of Scarleteen’s commitment to the normalization of sexuality as a core component in sex-positive sexuality education.

Pleasure

The next component in the core values of Scarleteen is the site’s focus on pleasure. Scarleteen is aware that adolescents know that sex is pleasurable; therefore, the site does not hide this from its users. Instead, the site communicates to its users that both women and men should receive pleasure from sex, and the website explains and encourages different approaches to pleasure.

First, Scarleteen encourages a range of pleasurable experiences. Mary Maxfield Brave (2011), an author whose piece was published on the site, writes:

We have a right to determine whether we feel comfortable embodying these definitions [of sexual desire]. If “sexuality” as we’ve come to understand it doesn’t bring us confidence, pride, safety, and joy, we have a right to revise its terms. How might your definition of sexuality shift if you began with the blank slate of desire’s absence—and built a sexual identity defined solely and only by what you experience? How might your (sex) life be different if you had the right to define it yourself? (p. 2)

Furthermore, Scarleteen values varied expressions of pleasure—romantic and gentle or intense. In a message-board post responding to a user’s question about what terms others use to talk about intercourse, September, a Scarleteen volunteer, says,

“‘Making love’ seems to imply a deep emotional connection. But it, to me, does not have the connotations that I’ve seen others mention here. I think it’s perfectly possible to express deep love and devotion through rough, passionate sex” (“Making Love,” 2011, p. 5). Similarly, Corinna (2010g) explains:

A lot of sex is innate and intuitive, and it is perfectly normal to feel driven by our libido and our emotions, but it isn’t smart to ignore good sense and responsible behavior, or the practical parts of sex, because of those feelings and desires.

Rather, when we have our basic needs in place, it can be a lot easier to be spontaneous and free-spirited with sex. (p. 3)

Not only does *Scarleteen* promote varied expressions of pleasure, it also communicates to its readers that pleasure from a sex act must be mutually enjoyable for both partners. Throughout the articles, authors stress that consent is “absolutely foundational for any kind of healthy sexuality” (Corinna, 2010a, p. 2). *Scarleteen* is also committed to promoting female pleasure on the site. Past scholarship (Farrelly et al., 2007; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Hayden, 2001; Helmich, 2009; Trimble, 2009; Welles, 2005) has demonstrated that information about female desire is missing from much sexuality education; thus *Scarleteen* places female desire at the forefront of its conversations about sex. In the article, “An Immodest Proposal,” Corinna writes a story about an adolescent couple experiencing sexual debut. She uses a very familiar sexual script for how these actions unfold for adolescents. However, at the end of the story, after the couple has had intercourse for the first time, Corinna (2010a) begins to critique this common scenario: “Nowhere do we really see a strong, undeniable sexual desire, deep,

dizzy sexual pleasure, or earnest and equal sexual satisfaction on her [the young woman in the story] part.” She continues:

We saw her say yes as the answer to someone *else's* desire, rather than as an affirmation of her own. Her yes is uncertain, but sexual desire—whether we choose to act on it or not—is wholly certain, unmistakable and persistent [*italics in original*]. (p. 2)

The authors of the articles on the Scarleteen website explain to readers that fulfilling women’s sexual desires is a right and responsibility of sex partners.

Scarleteen is also aware that due to the missing or hidden curriculum in formalized sexuality-education programs that do not focus on different aspects of pleasure other than male orgasm, many adolescents do not know varied ways of experiencing sexual pleasure. Scarleteen includes articles that provide instructions for pleasurable sex acts such as explaining that, “For a woman to enjoy vaginal intercourse—regardless of how many times she has done it and what is being inserted in her vagina—she needs to be aroused and lubricated (wet)” (Knöfel, 2011, p. 1). Furthermore, Scarleteen communicates to its readers that pleasure depends on more than genital stimulation and in fact “sex is mostly between your ears, not your legs,” (Corinna, 2011, p. 1). Another article explains, “It’s important to recognize the key role played by a women’s mind, whole body and clitoris in sexual arousal and enjoyment” (Knöfel, 2011, p. 1).

Overall, pleasure is a core value to sex-positive sexuality education that Scarleteen promotes in multiple ways throughout the site. Scarleteen communicates the importance of a range of pleasurable activities, supports mutual pleasure, and highlights

the necessity of female desire while simultaneously providing clear instructions for how to experience varied pleasurable outcomes.

However, while pleasure was most certainly communicated in the articles and message boards, I believe it could have been discussed even more and in different ways. Since promoting female pleasure is a key tenet of sex-positive sexuality education, I expected Scarleteen to include more articles on different ways to achieve pleasure, such as male and female vibrators, or offer users more information on why pleasure is necessary for healthy sexual relationships. In sum, though, Scarleteen was skillful at executing this core values on the site.

Health and Safety

Health and safety comprise another element of the core values of Scarleteen's approach to sex-positive sexuality education that emerged from my analysis of the Scarleteen website. Scarleteen promotes multiple ways for its users to participate in healthy and safe sexuality activities and relationships throughout the site. First, health and safety are core components within the site because many articles are devoted to these concerns. For example, articles such as "Birth Control Bingo" (Corinna, 2011b), "Love the Glove: 10 Reasons to Use Condoms You Might Not Have Heard Yet" (Corinna, 2010d), "Blinders Off: Getting a Good Look at Abuse and Assault" (Corinna, 2011c), and "Misconception Mayhem: Separating Women's Sex 411 and Sexual Health Myths from Facts" (Stephanie, 2010) are representative of the many varied articles that specifically address health and safety on the site.

The website does not take for granted how difficult health and safety concerns can be for its users. For example, Corinna explains that it is important to question your sexual

identity; however, she recognizes that this process might not always be safe. Corinna (2010f) explains:

If you or someone else is living in an area where it's really unsafe to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, visiting or moving to a place where it is safe can provide more room to really ask the question of sexual orientation. (p. 2)

Not only does Scarleteen recognize the safety concerns its minority users may face when discussing sexuality, it realizes past trauma can affect users' motivation to stay healthy. For example, in a side note to an article on first gynecological visits, Corinna explains, "If the chair or the posture of being on your back with legs spread freaks you out, or you just feel that's not something you'd prefer, you can always ask your health care provider if they could give you an exam lying on your side" (2010k, p. 2). This example demonstrates how the authors on Scarleteen are mindful of numerous ways that users' health and safety may be jeopardized and ways that they can proactively educate them about their options.

Furthermore, even when the articles or message posts are not specifically devoted to questions or concerns about health and safety, the authors of the website included supplemental information about health and safety. This supplemental health and safety information is not tacked on to the end of the article. Instead, information about health and safety is woven into the articles and message post replies. For example, within an article on perception checking, Corinna discusses fears that adolescents have that their sexual partner does not love them (Corinna, 2011i). Corinna explains that conversations about STI testing are a good way to judge the thoughtfulness of a partner. This example

is representative of Scarleteen’s consistent approach to including health and safety information throughout their discussions.

This attention to health and safety is also done in a creative, fun way that may be appealing to adolescents. For example, in an article on safer sex, readers are encouraged to practice safer sex for interesting reasons such as “being savvy about sexuality and knowing how to manage it well is a natural buzz,” and “Betcha didn’t know that condoms can help to maintain erection and fend off premature ejaculation” (Corinna, 2010h, p. 5). Throughout the site, Scarleteen presents information on health and safety in entertaining ways.

Health and safety, then, are critical parts of Scarleteen’s core values that comprise its definition of sex-positive sexuality education. Health and safety explicitly are incorporated into the site, mentioned within articles that are not directly related to health and safety concerns, and discussed in an appealing way in order to spark users’ interest in this subject.

Communication

Communication is an essential part of Scarleteen’s core values in constructing sex-positive sexuality education. Communication is encouraged among partners, families, friends, and health providers, and the site provides communicative techniques and strategies to help ensure users’ effective communication. First, Scarleteen repeatedly informs users of the importance of communication in order to have healthy relationships. While the site generally discusses communication between intimate partners, communication among important people in adolescents’ lives—such as parents—also is encouraged. In one article, “About That ‘Talk’ with Your Parents...,” Rayne (2010)

encourages users to communicate with their parents because, “Your parents probably want to talk with you about sex too, and they just can’t find the words to start the conversation” (p. 1)! In another article, the importance of effective patient-provider communication is discussed. Corinna (2010k) explains, “Be sure and communicate with your doctor, and if for any reason (s)he seems rushed or uncooperative with your needs, cancel the appointment and find another doctor” (p. 1).

Along with promoting communication within varied interpersonal relationships, Scarleteen stresses the importance of effective communication in general. It is common to find content in articles across the many sections of the website such as, “if you don’t know how to openly communicate with your partners, with your words, chances are neither you nor your partner are going to have really healthy, beneficial and satisfying sexual experiences, especially in the long-term (Corinna, 2011a, p.1),” or “Communicate clearly and openly with a partner, and ask that they also communicate about what they need and want to keep their hearts and bodies safe to you” (Corinna, 2011i, p. 3). Articles also discuss ramifications for participating in negative communication practices. Corinna (2011h) explains, “What it all comes down to is that dishonesty stands in the way of real communication, and communication is one of the most important things good, healthy sex and relationships require, with yourself and with others” (p. 1).

Often times, the authors on the website ask users pointed questions to determine if they are practicing effective communication skills such as, “Are you communicating with your partner, and is he or she responding to what you’re communicating” (Corinna, 2011f, p. 4)? While Scarleteen admits that “talking about sex openly and intimately isn’t very easy,” and “For a lot of people of all ages, honest and open sexual communication is

brand new terrain (Corinna, 2011a, p. 1),” the authors insist users participate in sexual communication for many reasons. This direct approach to promoting communication is even seen in the message boards. A Scarleteen volunteer, patrickvienna, responded to Midnightmoon’s post about his family telling him to simply ignore his mother’s homophobic jokes toward him by asking, “Have you told these members of your family how upset this is making you? It might be worth attempting talking [*sic*] to them again” (“My Mom,” 2011, p. 2).

Lastly, Scarleteen offers users a multitude of communication strategies and scripts for how to talk about difficult topics with sexual partners or parents. Topics include negotiating safe sex options, how to access contraception, or deciding what sexual activities to participate in. Within numerous articles on the site, Scarleteen offers conversation starters, scripts, and/or examples of ineffective or effective communication techniques. For example, in the article, “Driver’s Ed for the Sexual Superhighway: Navigating Consent,” Corinna (2011e) offers advice about communication skills such as “verbal signals of consent and nonconsent” (p. 3) that include specific words and phrases as well as “nonverbal cues” to help decipher consent and nonconsent, including “an active body” versus “just lying there” (p. 5). Scarleteen equips adolescents with knowledge about why communication is essential for their sexual, physical, and emotional well-being while also providing them with explicit communication techniques to help them navigate these interpersonal interactions.

Autonomy/Agency

The last component that contributes to Scarleteen’s core values of sex-positive sexuality education is a commitment to its users’ autonomy and agency. Scarleteen

supports this commitment by explaining what is involved in autonomy/agency, encouraging its users to be autonomous/agentive, and giving them permission to do so. First, Scarleteen explains autonomy and agency for its users. For example, in an article on intercourse, autonomy is explicitly defined as “a sovereign, inarguable ownership in and with our bodies” (Turett & Corinna, 2010, p. 2). In her article titled “Immodest Proposal,” Corinna does not explicitly say that she is defining agency for the readers, but she (2010a) provides a definition nonetheless:

But there are no barriers beyond the limitations of our own imagination when it comes to rewriting the scripts of our sexual ideals, our individual sexual lives, and what we present to ourselves, our sisters and our daughters. We have the power to dream up and manifest something far better than a woman merely being able to say no and to say yes. (p. 4)

These definitions are included within the articles on the site in order to help educate young users on what these terms mean in relation to their well-being.

In addition to defining these terms, Scarleteen supports autonomy and agency as core values because its authors encourage and give permission to users to be autonomous and agentive. For example, in an article about virginity, Corinna (2010e) writes, “Only YOU can define your sexual life. Someone else can’t do it for you, and you shouldn’t allow anyone else to do so, ever” (p. 2). Furthermore, Scarleteen reminds its users, particularly female users, that empowering themselves is important. In an article about visiting a gynecologist, Corinna writes, “So, take a deep breath, and realize that keeping your sexual health in tune should be something empowering for you, not something

dreadful” (Corinna, 2010k, p. 3). However, in the same article Corinna (2010k) explains that health decisions are autonomous:

Do understand that a parent can't force you to have any kind of health care you refuse, even if you're a legal minor. While we think gynecological exams are a good idea, and encourage everyone to make preventative reproductive health care a habit, that doesn't mean you have no choice or no rights when it comes to your own health care. It is a choice, not a requirement. (p. 3)

Lastly, Scarleteen gives permission to its users to be independent. In an article that outlines reasons why Corinna does not like older boyfriends, she reassures the reader that s/he is “more powerful than you know, and it's time to find that out,” and that “Changing this [a bad relationship] rests on you because it benefits him for things to stay exactly as they are. What benefits you is to make damn sure that they don't” (Corinna, 2011k, p. 4). Scarleteen authors encourage users to embrace the benefits of autonomy. Corinna (2011h) explains, “Partnered sex cannot substitute for our own exploration or understanding of our own bodies” (p. 3).

Similarly, in the message boards, it was common for the volunteers or Corinna to prod the user to make a decision. For example, in response to a message post about how to handle the trauma of being sexually abused, a volunteer asks the user, “Can I also ask what you're doing for yourself lately” (“What Now?,” 2011, p. 1)? Similarly, in a message post seeking assistance on a meddlesome friend, Corinna asks the user, “Well, what do you feel like you want to do” (“Friend Getting In The Way,” 2011, p. 1)? These techniques guide users to make independent decisions for themselves. In sum,

autonomy/agency are part of the core values at Scarleteen because they are seen in various ways throughout the site.

The core values I discovered on Scarleteen’s website include a commitment to a holistic view of sexuality, inclusivity and normalization of sexual identities and activities, promotion of pleasure and health and safety, focus on competent communication, and encouragement of its users’ autonomy and agency. By means of these core values, Scarleteen constructs its version of sex-positive sexuality education on its website. In the next section, I explain the web design employed on Scarleteen.com—the second part of my foundational model of SPSE as it emerged in Scarleteen.

Element Two: Physical Environment on Scarleteen.com

Since Scarleteen is a website,¹⁵ I cannot analyze physical space in the same ways as I did for Good Vibrations and the SI; therefore, to make a competent judgment of the site’s physical environment, I base my analysis on principles of effective website design (Beird, 2010). According to Beird (2010), a website has good design if it is easy to use, functional, and visually appealing. I use elements from Beird’s discussion of web design to evaluate how Scarleteen has constructed the environment on its website.

First, effective websites have a functional and easy-to-use webpage “anatomy” (n.p.).¹⁶ This anatomy consists of six elements—containing block, logo, navigation, content, footer, and white space. The first element, the *containing block*, positions the website within the computer screen. Containing blocks can be either fluid or fixed depending on whether the width of the site changes when viewed on different sized

¹⁵ In March, 2012, Scarleteen redesigned its webpage design. The design I am analyzing was seen on the site from 2006 to mid-March, 2012.

¹⁶ Beird’s book was only available through the University of New Mexico’s library as an e-book (electronic book). There were no page numbers listed, and a printing function was not available. Since the chapters were quite long, and I could not print off the pages, no particular pages are listed.

browser windows. Scarleteen uses a fluid container. When the site is viewed on smaller browsers such as a smartphone or tablet, the site does not look the same as it does when viewed on a large computer monitor. For example, when a user logs on to the Scarleteen homepage using a large computer monitor or laptop, s/he will see half of the home page. In order to see the whole page, s/he will have to scroll down. When accessing this site on a smartphone, the user sees much more of the home page, but still must scroll down depending on the size of her phone or tablet. This fluid containing block is cumbersome because it causes the user to have to alter the way she views the site every time she uses a different device. This inconsistency could be detrimental for a sexual health resource site. If teens cannot easily find certain links or navigation tools because the site is presented in a different way, they may leave the site and not receive the assistance they need.

A second element of good website design is the prominent display of the organization's logo. Scarleteen's logo is always in the upper-left hand corner of content pages. As seen in the screenshot in Figure 5.2, Scarleteen's logo is about three inches wide and one-and-a-half inches tall. The logo looks like a banner that is split by color into two horizontal sections. The top section, in a maroon-filled box reads, "Scarleteen," written in a white block theme font color except for the letter "S," which is in maroon. The letters also look like they are slightly falling on each other. The bottom part of the logo, which resembles a banner with a light blue background, reads, "sex ed for the real world" in a shade darker blue font color and cursive font theme. The choice of maroon and light blue colors for the logo may have been used as subversion of the traditional gendered colors of pink and blue. Also, the use of block fonts and cursive fonts may be used to instill a sense of fun.

According to Beard, most of the time, the logo of the website should be displayed prominently at the top of every page or in some other consistent and easily seen location to create an identity for the site and to remind users where they are. This may not be as important on Scarleteen because the site does not directly link users to content outside of the site very often; therefore, users most likely can recall what site they are visiting. However, since Scarleteen includes advertisements at the bottom of some pages for companies like educational grants and menstruation products, it may be wise for them to prominently display their logo on top so users realize when they have left the site.

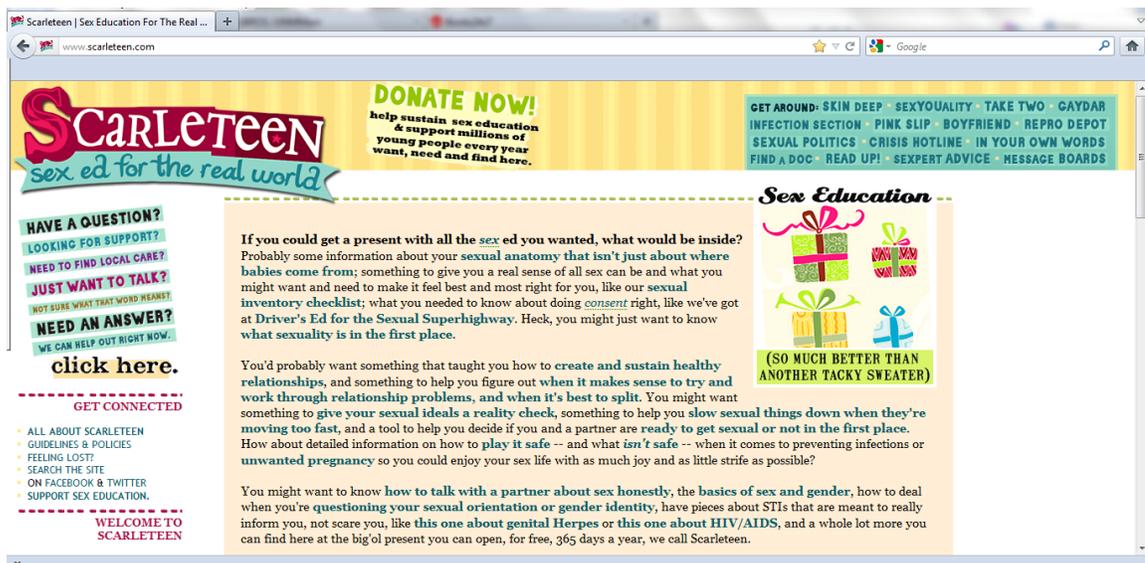


Figure 5.2. Screenshot of Scarleteen.com Homepage (source: Scarleteen.com)

Next, viewers of webpages expect “to see navigation right at the top of the page” (Beard, 2010, n.p.). Incorporating navigational tools in a place that is easy to locate and where users expect them to be makes it more likely that those who find the site will navigate around it. Scarleteen places navigational tools in many areas of the site. On the left hand side of the site, right below the logo, is a text box that includes phrases such as, “HAVE A QUESTION?,” “JUST WANT TO TALK?,” “WE CAN HELP OUT RIGHT

NOW,” and “click here” (Scarleteen, 2011). This portion of the text sends users to the message boards where they can get direct assistance. Underneath that text is more navigation to other parts of the site such as policies or how to financially donate to the site. On the top of the site in a blue box is another navigational tool. The box reads, “GET AROUND” and lists all of the different topic areas about which Scarleteen has articles, such as “Skin Deep,” and “Sexpert Advice” (Scarleteen, 2011). These navigational tools are located at the top of every article on the site.

When I first logged on to the Scarleteen site, I recall thinking the site was extremely difficult to navigate. Although it follows Beard’s instructions, I was confused about which navigational tool to use because there were so many. As I used the site more, I learned how to navigate it better; however, it is not simple. Perhaps adolescents are more web savvy; therefore, this amount of navigational tools around the site is helpful for them. However, I suspect that for new users who do not know what titles like “Skin Deep” mean or are panicked because they have a sexual health emergency, these multiple navigation tools may overwhelm them.

The fourth component of webpage anatomy is content. The content block should be the “focal point of design” (Beard, 2010, n.p.), and Scarleteen’s site is designed to feature content. As shown in Figure 5.2, the content is always in the middle of the site. Although there are sometimes additional content links or text boxes on the sides of the page, the main content is always centered in the middle of the page.

While Scarleteen again follows effective web-design structure by having the content be the focal point of each page, the way the site’s content is presented is less effective. Often times, multiple colors are used within the content box, which makes

reading distracting. Other times there are no colors used, and it is just pages of black-font text on the white background. This uniformity during such extensive articles can also challenge a reader to stay interested in the content. Overall, it is useful that the site makes content a focal point, but the design elements within the content often distract from the message.

Fifth, the footer is a crucial element to include within a webpage. A footer usually includes the copyright, contact information, links, and when the site was last updated (Beaird, 2010). Scarleteen also follows this design element. The footer, as shown in Figure 5.3, includes a search box, copyright information, policy information, and another navigational box to help users find more information. Scarleteen’s use of a footer is straightforward and effective; it provides the essential information a user would look for in this part of a webpage.



Figure 5.3. Footer on Scarleteen.com (source: Scarleteen.com)

The last element within webpage anatomy is white space. White space allows for a website to “breathe” and is “any area of a page without type or illustrations” (Beaird, 2010, n.p.). Scarleteen does use white space within its space on the site. When the site is viewed on a computer monitor, versus a hand-held device or tablet, there is generally white space on the right-hand side of the page. When the site is viewed on a smartphone or tablet, there is generally no white space on the sides. White space also is used within

the articles to separate headings and paragraphs. I think the site would be clearer if they used white space differently. Overall, the site would benefit if it used more white space within the articles, because currently they appear cramped. The white space on the right side of the page should also be altered. Since not enough white space is visible when viewing the site on a tablet or smartphone, it does not “breathe” easily. If this space were increased, the content and articles might be easier to read.

In sum, Scarleteen incorporates all of Beaird’s (2010) principles of effective webpage anatomy. However, while the site implements these principles, I argue that they are not especially exceptional or outstanding. Successful webpage anatomy helps the user function easily on the site, and by not using these elements to the best of its ability, Scarleteen presents a disorganized site for users to navigate. Effective webpages do not just have good anatomy, however; they also must be aesthetically appealing (Beaird, 2010). I now will discuss some key stylistic components that are important to incorporate into a site (Beaird, 2010) and evaluate Scarleteen’s use of these components.

One of the first components in creating an aesthetically pleasing website is balance. Balance on a webpage refers to how elements on either side of the page are equal in weight (Beaird, 2010). The articles from my sample and other various articles on the site appear to be balanced. Figure 5.4 is representative of articles on the website and how webpages on the site are designed. Generally, within the articles there was the same amount of content on the left as there was on the right. The articles usually followed a similar pattern: the main content of the article was in the middle of page, navigation, links, and advertisements were on the left hand side of the page, and there was often a graphic or supplemental box of information along the right hand side of the page. The

only time articles did not look balanced was when they were extremely long. These articles had content in the middle and links or ads running alongside the left hand side but often nothing on the right hand side. Although white space is useful, this long strength of empty space was at times distracting.

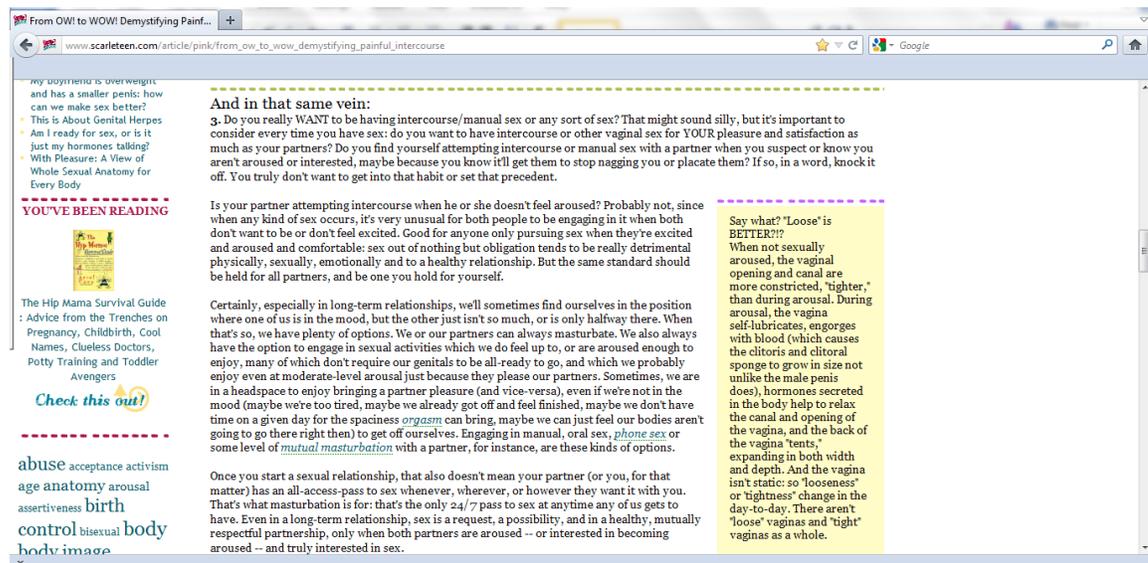


Figure 5.4. Screenshot of an Article on Scarleteen.com (source: Scarleteen.com)

The second component of a webpage characterized by good composition and design is unity. Unity describes how design elements—shapes, colors, graphics, text—interact with each other on the page (Beaird, 2010). The webpages on the Scarleteen website generally are unified, but, at times, distracting design elements cause the page to appear fragmented. Scarleteen web designers incorporate many colors on the site, which is most likely supposed to appeal to adolescents and make the site look hip. However, at times these colors can come across as competing with the text, and they end up looking disjointed. Figure 5.2 provides a good example of this fragmentation. Although the designer who created this page most likely wanted to use multiple colors to be engaging, the colors are not unified with each other or with the text, and the site looks disorganized

as a result. At other times, multiple fonts are used that also hinder the unity of the site. While it may seem important to teen users to use eye-catching fonts, perhaps simply switching between more traditional fonts would help unify the site.

Shapes were also used on the site, often to call attention to special information. While these shapes are useful to draw one's eye, at times they were so dissimilar from the rest of the content that they contributed to the lack of unity. The graphics Scarleteen creates are usually clever illustrations, and they generally interact well with the other design elements on the page. However, Scarleteen also includes advertisements on the bottom of some pages, and these graphics are not usually clever and sometimes look cheap. This distracts the users and does not create a unified feel. Although they are usually only at the bottom of the site, they nevertheless hamper the design. Design elements are important components for an effective webpage, they must be unified in order for the site to be effective. Scarleteen does a nice job of including many design components, which is probably appreciated by the site's young users, but it needs to be wary of how these elements interact.

A last component of appealing web design is emphasis, created by "making a particular feature attract the viewer's attention" (Bearid, 2010, n.p.). Emphasis can be constructed on a webpage by implementing elements such as placement, continuance, isolation, contrast, color, and proportion. Overall, the webpages on Scarleteen tried to implement these elements in various ways. For example, within the articles, adjacent to the title is a graphic. This graphic is a great way to emphasis what the article is about. For example, Figure 5.5 shows a representative graphic seen on the site. This graphic is a spoof on the movie poster for the film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*; instead, the title is

“Attack of the 50 ft Vulva” (Corinna, 2010j) to correspond to an article on genital size. One area where emphasis was not seen as much was on the webpages of the articles. At times, certain key words were bolded or a diagram was inserted within or to the side of the text; however, for the most part, during the longer articles tools of emphasis were not utilized often.

As I discussed within the section on unity, sometimes the site emphasized too many design elements. This could distract the user from seeing a unified site and confuse them on what is important versus supplemental information. However, at times there was not enough emphasis in the longer articles. The site would benefit if it included more tools of emphasis within these articles, and relied less on these tools during the shorter articles or on the homepage.



Figure 5.5. Screenshot of an Article on Scarleteen.com (source: Scarleteen.com)

Overall, design components of balance, unity, and emphasis were used on Scarleteen, but they could have been implemented more effectively. Although the

designers were most likely trying to project a creative site that would appeal to its young users, they may be trying to do too much.

Physical Environment: Adequate Environment

Throughout this analysis of the function and aesthetic elements that the best webpages use, I determined that Scarleteen generally uses all of these elements, but they do so in a lackluster way. Although a website differs from physical locations in its use of space and construction of a physical environment, by utilizing the principles of good website design, I suggest that Scarleteen constructs a physical environment that is adequate. The term *adequate* is fitting to describe Scarleteen's physical environment on the site because it meets the principles outlined for good webpage design, but at times it is less than ideal.

It should be noted that Scarleteen does not receive foundation or public funding; therefore, the site may not have the resources required to invest in a professional web designer. However, the site does not need a professional designer to implement a more streamlined approach to design. This approach would add clarity to the site and make visiting it an easier experience. Even though a website does not have the same components to its physical environment as a brick-and-mortar store, it still must work to create a space where users feel comfortable or else they will not return to the site or will use it sparingly. To conclude, when users log on to Scarleteen, users may find a physical environment that only adequately meets their needs.

Element Three: Communication Strategies on Scarleteen.com

The seven core values—holistic approach, inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, health and safety, communication, and autonomy/agency—that constitute Scarleteen's

construction of sex-positive sexuality education are transmitted to users through the use of six communication strategies. Since Scarleteen's communication with users is computer mediated, the site needs to provide excellent communication strategies in order for users to find the site a valued source of sex-positive sexuality education. The strategies used consist of clarity, person-centered communication, self-disclosure, a critical approach, figurative and descriptive language, and comprehensive information.

Clarity

The first method Scarleteen uses to transmit its core values of sex-positive sexuality education is to provide clear information. Clarity has been studied in the communication discipline in regards to teacher clarity. Teacher clarity can be defined as an instructor's ability to engender a specific meaning of course content to his/her students through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). Research has shown that clarity is important in the instructional process and that students are less apprehensive towards teachers who are clear and use immediate behaviors (such as being person centered). Issues of teacher clarity are appropriate for Scarleteen since it essentially serves a teaching or instructional function for teens (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001).

Scarleteen's use of clarity is most noticeably depicted within the length of articles on the site. Within my data sample, it was common for articles to consist of 2,000 words or more. Even though the article topics varied greatly, the length of the articles was consistently extensive. The detail of the articles serves a strategic purpose: Because the authors of the articles do not have to limit their word count, they are able to write clear, nuanced articles that cover many of the components within the cores values of

Scarleteen's construction of sex-positive sexuality education. They provide enough detail to probably address any issue a teen might be wondering about and thus serve to lessen users' apprehension towards issues because they are well defined and explained.

For example, the article, "Love the Glove: 10 Reasons to Use Condoms You Might Not Have Heard Yet," by Corinna (2010d) is over 8,000 words long. However, within this one article, every component of the core values are mentioned and discussed. Corinna stresses the health and safety risks users take when not protecting themselves, the importance of communication by explaining to users that, "Silence doesn't bring people closer: communication does" (p. 2), offers suggestions for how to maximize pleasure while using condoms, encourages users to view sexuality from a holistic approach, emboldens them to use their agency in regards to handling their sexuality with "care and maturity" (p. 5), normalizes people who have STIs as something that is "rarely the end of the world" (p. 7), and never making assumptions about readers' sexual experiences or identities. Corinna refers to intercourse as "partnered sex," for instance, instead of assuming gender or sexuality norms constitute intercourse (Corinna, 2010d). When authors are allowed to write extensively enough so they can be comprehensive and clear, Scarleteen's values around sex-positive sexuality education are enhanced and communicated.

Scarleteen also employs clear communicative strategies by explaining unfamiliar terms to users of the website. As in one example, within the message-board topic, "Gender and Relationships," Corinna uses the word *genderqueer*; however, she does not assume that users understand this term. She writes, "To make sure I'm clear, someone who was assigned male sex, but who identifies as a woman or as a genderqueer and

wears clothing they feel is reflective of them which someone identifies as ‘women’s clothing,’ isn’t ‘dressing up as a woman.’ They’re dressing as themselves. Do you understand what I’m saying” (“Gender and Relationships,” 2011, p. 4)?

The authors writing on Scarleteen also clearly explain that their perspectives may not be ideal for everyone. This also contributes to clarity because the authors are being upfront and honest with users that the information they present is subjective. This is important because younger readers may not realize that the articles on Scarlteen are not necessarily objective in the same way as Internet sites that give health information such as how many days there are in a menstrual cycle. In the article, “The Etiquette of Entry,” for example, Turett and Corinna (2010) discuss respectful penetration of a partner. Throughout the article, they discuss many topics, including their dislike of the term *penetration*, followed by a discussion of how penetration should be a mutually respectful experience. However, because clarity is something that Scarleteen values, they clearly explain that their perspective may not always be the experience someone is seeking. Turett and Corinna (2010) write:

You and/or your partners may indeed experience times when penetration, in the most literal sense, is what is wanted and what is going on. Sometimes people really want a partner to kind of force their way in, and that may or may not be about an unhealthy powerplay or a desire for pain. (p. 6)

This example demonstrates that while the authors on Scarleteen may have an overarching belief, such as penetration should be gentle, they strive to be clear that at times people may desire other things, and they strive to legitimize those options.

Lastly, another resource that Scarleteen offers its users to aid clarity is pictures or diagrams. Clarity helps reduce apprehension, so the use of pictures and diagrams to help explain issues visually may help users conceptualize information differently or more effectively and thus lessen their concerns about it (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). One particularly interesting and useful graphic that was made to lessen apprehension was a chart Corinna designed to give a visual representation of the size of different parts of the female anatomy like the labia minor, clitoris, and vagina. Unfortunately, there is a cultural myth that a woman is more desirable if she has small genitals, so women can be apprehensive about having larger labia or vaginas. Corinna recognizes this concern, and her chart helps to lessen this apprehension. This chart, seen in Figure 5.6, is a resource for users because it provides a way to understand complex information in a user-friendly manner. Instead of just listing the numerical sizes, Corinna used a bar graph, different colors, and even a comparison of size to her pug dog to explain how the size of female anatomy varies (Corinna, 2010j).

Through the use of detailed articles, explanations of terms, respect for multiple perspectives, and diagrams and graphs, Scarleteen clearly expresses its approach to SPSE within the articles and message posts on the site. Similar to Chesebro and McCroskey's (2001) findings in regard to teacher clarity, Scarleteen's use of clear information to educate users also may serve to lessen users' apprehension toward the material. Since users receive information that is well defined, extensive, honest about its subjectivity, and includes visual learning, they are more equipped to understand topics. And when a topic makes sense to a user, it may appear to be less scary, confusing, or troubling, and thus the user will feel more confident about it and less apprehensive.

However, it should be recognized that while Scarleteen offers a clear approach to disseminating its messages, certain aspects of this clarity—extensive articles—may at times be a burden for users. A reader who is looking for key facts about a topic may be intimidated by an article that is 8,000 words long. Furthermore, since this site is aimed at adolescents, adolescents may lack strong reading skills that allow them to expertly skim articles in order to find relevant information; consequently, they simply may stop reading the article. Therefore, while Scarleteen deserves credit for providing such in-depth articles to its readers, they may run the risk of turning off some readers with this level of detail.

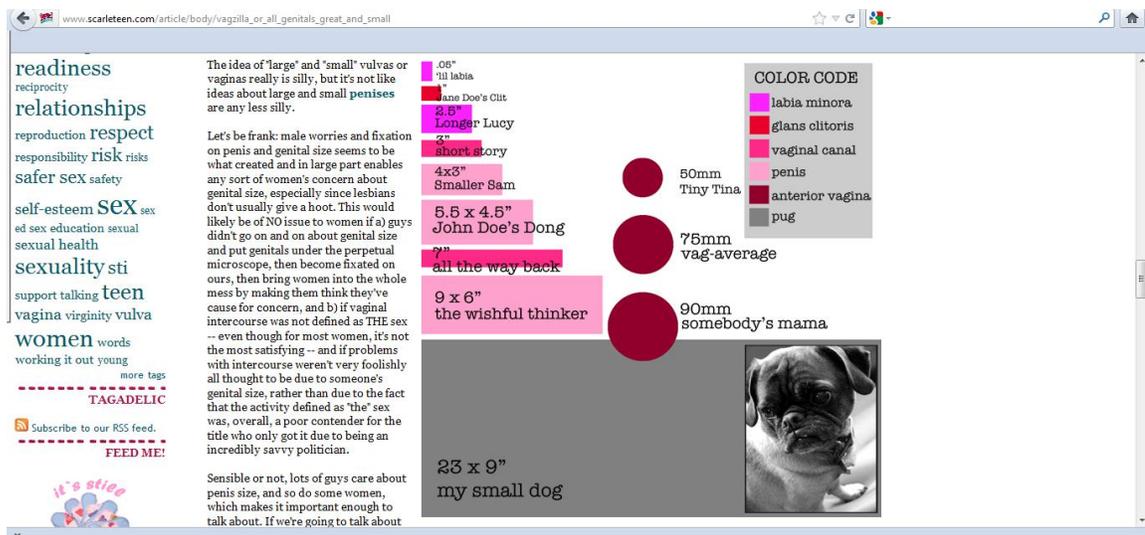


Figure 5.6. Screenshot of a Graphic on Scarleteen.com (source: Scarleteen.com)

Person-Centered Communication

The core values at Scarleteen also are transmitted through Scarleteen's use of person-centered communication. Person-centered communication recognizes and acknowledges a partner's feelings and emotions (Kim, 2012). Heather Corinna, volunteers, and even fellow members on the message boards work hard to legitimize and value each other. In a response to Midnightmoon who was dealing with his mother's

homophobic jokes toward him, Corinna writes, “I’m really sorry your mom has been making these sorts of comments. In particular, mean jokes about your sex life just aren’t okay—that’s sexual shaming, which is a type of abuse, most definitely... To boot, yelling isn’t nice to hear at any time, and I’m sorry she’s making you hear a lot of it” (“My Mom,” 2011, p. 1). In other posts, Corinna gives person-centered messages such as, “In the meantime, big hugs your way, gal,” “I’m so sorry that you’re feeling that way, Dee. You’re right, it is incredibly hurtful and painful,” and “I had no idea you did finally wind up asking your Mom for help (yay!) and that DID make a big difference (double-yay!). That’s fantastic” is another response offered to users’ struggles with homophobic family members (“Homophobic Family & Friends,” 2011, pp. 1-20).

In addition, within my sample, every message that a user posted seeking help and assistance was answered in a timely fashion. At times, multiple Scarleteen volunteers would reply to the same question. In addition, the Scarleteen volunteers extensively check back with the users. For example, on July 13, 2011, at 6:26 a.m., the user SnapperJack posted a question to the message boards seeking advice on gender identity and dating relationships. By 7:26 a.m., Corinna wrote back with some advice and also asked more probing questions. Throughout the morning, Corinna and SnapperJack exchanged eleven more posts culminating in Corinna’s concluding post in the thread at 12:40 p.m. (“Gender and Relationships,” 2011). This example demonstrates the high level of person-centered communication Scarleteen provides on the message boards. By posting messages back and forth until there is some sort of resolution on the topic, Scarleteen engages in an extremely high level of personalized communication with users that is completely free of charge and available at all times.

Although the most person-centered information is given within the correspondence between user and volunteer in the message boards, Scarleteen also communicates its core values by personalizing many of its articles. For example, within numerous articles, the authors work to include portions where readers can find out more information about themselves and how they relate to the topic under discussion. One of the best examples of this approach is an article by Corinna and Turrett (2011) entitled, “Yes, No, Maybe So: A Sexual Inventory Stocklist.” This article begins by explaining to the reader that “Clear, truthful and open communication is a must with partnered sex” and then proceeds to offer users a “Yes, No, and Maybe” checklist that can be used individually as a self-evaluation tool or taken with a partner to help determine the body boundaries, sexual activities, health and safety practices, and comfortable communicative responses. That Scarleteen incorporates personalized activities, such as this checklist, is another way they use person-centered communication. They do not expect everyone to be comfortable with the same aspects and practices in regard to their bodies and sexuality, and they communicate this by the use of activities that individuals can reflect on and decide for themselves if they want to participate in.

Likewise, a person-centered approach is also communicated on the site by the authors directly speaking to the reader. For example, in the article “About That ‘Talk’ with Your Parents...,” Rayne (2010) speaks directly to the reader as if they were having a conversation. Some examples of this person-centered tone are, “If you ask your mom for birth control, she will probably suspect that you and your boyfriend are having sex,” “Here’s the most important thing to remember about parents: They usually want you to be the happiest, healthiest person you can possibly be,” and “That you want to open this

conversation with your parents shows a great deal of maturity on your part” (pp. 1-3).

Scarleteen authors speak directly to website users, most often using a second-person pronoun. This gives the sense that the author is speaking one-on-one to each individual user, addressing the issues about which s/he is most concerned.

Lastly, Scarleteen employs a person-centered approach to communication by actively seeking the assistance of its users. Scarleteen employs surveys and asks users what they need in order to provide the best person-centered communication possible. For example, Corinna posted a message in the message boards that asked users why they do not get tested for STIs. She explained in the post “Why DON’T You” (2010) that she was asking because,

as sex educators, we know a lot of common reasons why people don’t [get full STI screenings], but these reasons change sometimes, and we can only find out what they are based on what people report for themselves. In order for us to do our best to help young people with protecting their health and the public health, we need to understand as best we can why you aren’t or can’t right now, or haven’t been able to in the past. We could use your help. (p. 1)

This post is indicative of how Scarleteen actively seeks to find ways to improve how it approaches issues by directly asking users for help.

To review, articles and message posts that acknowledge users’ feelings and emotions are written in a timely manner, allow for users to reflect on their own personal relationship to the topic, speak directly to users, and solicit users’ opinions to better the site are ways that Scarleteen demonstrates its person-centered approach to

communication. This approach helps the site to transmit its core values to its users on its website.

Self-Disclosure

The authors on Scarleteen also communicate sex-positive sexuality education through the use of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure occurs when people reveal private information about themselves to others (Wheless, 1978). Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) found that self-disclosure, along with humor and narratives, helps educators convey information. A recent study by Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) investigated teachers who posted high levels of disclosure visible to their students on the social media site Facebook. They found that students were receptive to this disclosure, and students felt self-disclosure positively impacted their anticipated motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate. These research studies highlight the importance of self-disclosure in an educational setting and through the use of computer-mediated communication in particular.

Messages of self-disclosure are prominent throughout Scarleteen. Self-disclosure serves two functions on the site. It lends insight to inexperienced users on common topics and offers a new perspective on taboo or marginalized issues with which users might be unfamiliar. First, the authors of the articles at times use very personal information to inform users about topics to which they may not yet have been exposed. For example, in an article on condom use, Corinna is able to challenge men's common excuse for not wanting to use a condom during sex—they say it changes the sensation—by using her own personal experience. Corinna (2010d) explains:

as someone who has had a barrier over a much more sensitive part than a penis (the clitoris) and has also used hormonal medication can tell you...a latex barrier, when used properly doesn't change sensations more than most methods do for women. (p. 6)

Furthermore, Corinna also offers personal examples to add support to her argument that there is an average genital size. She tells users, "I wear a smaller-average [*sic*] diaphragm size (I'm a 65 these days), and given the clitorises I have seen up close and personal and via photos, I'd say my clit is right in the middle" (Corinna, 2010j, p. 4). Similarly, in response to questions from user LostYellowPages, including "Why do most lesbians have short hair and have numerous piercings and seem to be really...kind of creepy?," Corinna responds by explaining "That's a hard question to answer, because to be honest, I've never found lesbians as a whole group to be any more or less creepy than anyone else." She continues using personal references by explaining she has a "couple piercings in my own face, and I'd have short hair myself if I didn't look like such a dope with it and/or could be sure I could afford regular haircuts to keep it looking decent. ☺" ("Homophobic Family & Friends," 2011, p. 5).

In addition to offering personal examples of experiences, at times the personal illustrations the authors of the articles use are framed as supportive in order to help transmit their messages. In the article on unique reasons to use condoms, Corinna explains that she wants the users to use protection because she loves them. She explains, "Because I love you, if and when you want a sex life with others, I want you to have one that is wonderful and enjoyable, but also as safe as it can be so that it can keep ON being wonderful and enjoyable" (2010d, p. 7).

In another example, Corinna (2011k) tells users that she is against their relationships with older men because as she explains:

I get so angry about him because I know you deserve so much better, and I know he's nothing close to as good as it gets for you: not in a partner, not in the sphere of the whole of your life, and all your life could offer you, especially when you're not held back by some jerk like him. (p. 3)

Corinna's anger towards users who are dating older men is displayed through her person-centered tone and supportive approach she takes towards the users. Using personal examples that are rooted in past experience and/or a supportive nature help to add credibility to the topics the authors discuss.

At times, too, self-disclosure fulfills another function for Scarleteen. It serves to explain topics with which users may not yet have come into contact. By including first-person accounts of topics such as asexuality, homosexuality, abortion, diseases, or disability, Scarleteen authors serve to de-stigmatize certain topics. To explain issues of gender, performance, and expressions of masculinity, Heather Corinna shared a story from her youth in the message boards ("Gender and Relationships," 2011):

When I was growing up, my Dad carried a bag that people always interpreted as a purse. Like him, I never quite got what makes a bag a bag and a purse a purse: isn't a purse a bag? But despite that, and people giving him crap about this purse/bag he LOVED (it was a thing of serious art, I remember) around masculinity, my father never took the bait, in large part because unlike some people who thought differently, he didn't see how what kind of bag her carried had anything to do with his masculinity. (p. 5)

On the Scarleteen website, authors also discuss personal examples as members or allies of marginalized communities, and this is another form that self-disclosure takes on the website. Corinna (2011d) writes about her disabilities—a hand disability and chronic pain—in detail and the subsequent problems she faces because of them, and Buchheim (2010) writes about her experiences with a friend who has AIDS. These expressions of self-disclosure about topics that some people may not have experienced serve to provide identification with users. Since the users of Scarleteen trust the information they find on the site, they also may be more willing to be less judgmental of marginalized communities or commonly stigmatized topics after they have read personal examples from people who have experienced or are experiencing these situations.

Overall, then, one of the ways that Scarleteen provides credible information to its users is by sharing instances of self-disclosure. Since this site is targeted toward adolescents, personal examples allow the older or more experienced authors of the site to share experiences they have already had with inexperienced young users. As prior research (Downs, et al., 1988; Mazer et al., 2007) suggests, the self-disclosure from educators on Scarleteen appears to help the authors convey information and potentially increase user motivation, learning, and creation of a positive climate on the site.

Critical Approach

Scarleteen communicates its core values by taking a critical approach with its users. The site is realistic with users, debunks incorrect information, takes an authoritarian or “tough love” approach, and challenges users to be more critical consumers of information or ideas. I also use the term *critical* to describe this communication strategy because it is similar to principles of critical pedagogy. Critical

pedagogy encourages educators to challenge students' beliefs, critique oppressive structures, aid students in creating a dialogue about such oppression, promote the interrogation of hegemonic forces, and create a safe space for the negotiation of multiple identities (Hendrix, Jackson II, & Warren, 2003).

Scarleteen uses many of these principles in its communicative interactions with users. In an article titled "Your First Gynecologist Visit," Corinna (2010k) tells readers who feel their mothers are "punishing" them by requiring them to see a gynecologist, "Your mother most likely isn't punishing you, she's probably trying to help care for your health" (p. 1). Scarleteen's realistic approach towards users' concerns may provide perspective for them. In an article examining if users are ready for sexual debut, Corinna advises users who are feeling pressure from their friends to have sex that, "If your friends are saying you should, with no understanding of your relationship, or your own needs, they're being crappy friends" (2010g, p. 2). As these examples demonstrate, Scarleteen is not afraid to be honest with its users in order to give them realistic advice.

Scarleteen is also realistic because the authors and volunteers understand that not every user has the option to make decisions they feel are the most sound. For example, in an article about talking about sex to parents, Rayne (2010) writes:

Whether your parents are the right adults or not [to talk to about sex] has a lot to do with your relationship with your parents, what their beliefs are about sex, what your beliefs are about sex, and whether all of those things put together comes out to good, deep, meaningful conversations or angry fights. (p. 3)

By offering a realistic perspective, users likely perceive that Scarleteen authors understand their situation and thus increase identification with teens. In addition, this

means Scarleteen works to incorporate a broader range of resources for users whose experience may stray from the norm. For example, after Rayne's discussion that parents are not always the best people to discuss sex with, she offers many other resources and organizations available to teens who want and need someone to talk with about sexuality (Rayne, 2010).

Furthermore, Scarleteen challenges its core values by debunking incorrect information rather than allowing myths about sex and sexuality to endure. For example, Scarleteen addresses the cultural myth of the vagina as women's primary sexual organ: "Our cultural understanding of the vagina as THE sexual organ of women is deeply flawed, most likely due to male sexual experience and male desire and fantasy writing the female genital script through most of history" (Corinna 2011j, p. 7). Gender-role stereotypes are also debunked in Scarleteen. Scarleteen promotes the idea that women are not naturally a passive sex, but they also discredit male sexuality stereotypes by explaining, "Men are NOT "supposed to" be in charge of or dominate everything with sex: partnered sex is supposed to be mutually active and engaged" (Corinna, 2011e, p. 5). In sum, Scarleteen is critical of the hegemonic cultural narratives about sexuality that are reinforced through "movies, books, porn or friend's accounts of their relationships (which can often be exaggerated)," and the site's writers debunk the expectations that are created from those forces because if not, "we're pretty much bound to end up feeling confused, lost or disappointed and will likely not be able to stay grounded in our very real relationships and sexuality and deal with them appropriately" (Corinna, 2011h, p. 4).

One final example of information that Scarleteen debunks is the idea that sex is purely a physical response. An example of how Scarleteen does this occurs in an article

on navigating consent. Corinna (2011e) tells users that they cannot assume someone is consenting to sexual activity because they see stereotypical signs of arousal. Instead, she explains, “Some of the ways our bodies react with sexual arousal are also the ways our bodies can react when we’re afraid, like flushing, having an elevated pulse, or breathing faster” (p. 4). Scarleteen’s efforts to debunk pieces of misinformation are very important in order to provide users with correct facts and ideas about sex and sexuality.

Third, Scarleteen takes a critical approach in its communication to users of the website by sometimes using an authoritarian/tough love approach. For example, in response to users believing safer sex isn’t “sexy,” Corinna (2010d) explains in a very authoritarian way, “Being all ooh-ahh about giving a blow job or going down on someone, but then recoiling like a kid with mushy peas on their dinner plate about condoms doesn’t tend to be a turn on for a lot of people” (p. 6). Similarly, Corinna (2011d) explains:

Sometimes we also need to accept what our body does totally [*sic*] out of our control, whether we like it or not. That might be ejaculating before we’d like, farting during sex, making certain noises or things like muscle spasms, urinating during some kinds of sex or having certain body parts just stop working when we’re not done using them yet. (p. 2)

Corinna’s tough love approach at times is necessary to explain to users why social stereotypes are incorrect. As an example of why women should not be revolted by their menstrual cycles but indifferent or pleased about men’s bodily fluids, Corinna (2010b) writes:

Certainly, periods can be painful and they can also make a mess, and heaven knows we've all got enough cleaning to do already. But semen is messy, too, and not only do we not hear about the great inconvenience of cleaning it up or the shameful stains it leaves behind, pornography ensures that we will never be short of words or images that praise the glory of that great, masculine goo. (p. 3)

Similarly, an authoritarian, tough love approach also may help users, particularly female ones, understand double standards and have the language to respond articulately when they encounter these double standards because they have read about it. For example, Deidara wrote an article about hormonal birth control for men. In it, she addresses that men explain that they are not interested in this product because it is not *natural*. Deidara (2010) passionately critiques this excuse:

What angers me the most, though, is that the majority of men don't want to go onto birth control because it's not natural. Are you kidding me? You don't want to go on birth control because *it's not natural*? As a woman, I was expected to mess up MY hormones and MY cycle so that WE can avoid having a child. Men's hormones certainly aren't any more important than women's hormones. (p. 1)

Deidara uses an authoritarian approach in this article; by doing so, she may be able to inspire other users to speak out against double standards. In addition to inspiring them, she also may be modeling how to speak for oneself against these double standards.

Young users may not yet have the vocabulary to articulate their concerns about a double standard; therefore, this article provides them with language for how it can be done.

Lastly, in addition to providing an authoritarian approach to sexual stereotypes and double standards within its articles, Scarleteen also offers tough love within its

replies to users on the message boards. While the volunteers always answer users' questions, they are not afraid to also ask tough questions and challenge users as well. For example, a Scarleteen member, lydia147, wrote in asking if she can get pregnant from no direct genital contact. A Scarleteen volunteer, KatWA, responded by telling her, "Sometimes being irrationally scared over pregnancy can be a sign we are not ready yet for sexual activity" ("Pregnancy Caused by Precum," 2011, p. 1). In addition to pushing users to reflect on their own experiences, authors sometimes directly challenge users' thoughts or language choices. For instance, in response to a user posting about what someone "should" feel about gender, Corinna wrote, "(Hey blush, just a quickie: how important gender is or isn't to people is very individualized and personal, so we'd like for everyone here to try not to put 'shoulds' on people around this. Thanks!)" ("Gender and Relationships," 2011, p. 2). In another example, Corinna challenged a user who used the word *clean* to describe someone who does not have an STI. She explained to the user, "Just FYI, we ask users here to please not use clean are [*sic*] terminology within illness. It implies people with STIs are dirty, basically, which both isn't true or kind. 'Negative' or 'clear' are better options that don't stigmatize. Thanks" ("Why DON't You," 2010, p. 13)!

In conclusion, Scarleteen takes a critical perspective in the way it responds to users. The site transmits its approach to sex-positive sexuality education by being realistic, debunking misinformation, providing tough love, and challenging users' ideas. Using a critical approach to communicating information can be particularly useful for an adolescent audience because adolescence is a time of confusion and misinformation about sexuality; therefore, teens may need to read articles that come from a trusted

authority that are realistic, debunk their fears or misinformation, and at times offer tough love or challenge them.

However, at times this critical approach may end up working against Scarleteen's goal to value inclusivity. Scarleteen's value of inclusivity sometimes contradicts the critical, tough love approach in some of the articles. Scarleteen needs to be able to manage the tension between inclusivity and a critical, challenging stance so that it still comes across as a supportive and not an alienating site for information. Scarleteen manages this tension in a way that stays true to its approach to providing "real" sex education that is informed by critical pedagogy.

Figurative and Descriptive Language

The next way that Scarleteen communicates its detailed, personalized information is through creative linguistic devices and techniques—metaphors and descriptive language in particular. Metaphors are useful because they are explanatory structures that can help a user organize and create realities (Krippendorff, 1993). These functions are exemplified on the Scarleteen website. For example, in an article on the site, Dreyfus (2010) explains that the U.S. should not use baseball as our cultural metaphor for sex. Instead, she argues that we should be using a pizza-eating metaphor. As she explains, "People have varying appetites for pizza. Some people are happy with a single slice once or twice a year, and others eat a whole pizza for breakfast every day. And that's okay" (p. 2)! In this article, Dreyfus explains numerous comparisons about why pizza eating is similar to sex and sexuality. This new metaphor thus allows for users to have an explanation for an alternative view of sexual acts and sexual identities that embraces individualized preferences about the amount and kind of sexual activities in which to

engage; ultimately, it provides more freedom to organize thoughts and creates a less judgmental view of sexuality.

In another article about women's genital sizes, Corinna employs the metaphor of a "Vagzilla" to describe why women should be happy and proud to have a large vagina instead of ashamed or worried if their vagina does not fit a cultural standard of being "tight." Corinna makes use of figurative and descriptive language throughout the entire article; however, one of the best examples of her creative writing is her explanation of Vagzilla:

I am wholeheartedly enjoying this image of Vagzilla, much like a very large sea creature of some kind, pulling its pink, fleshy feet (which totally make a noise, it's like "scholp, schlop") across the earth. It waves its VERY HUMONGOUS labia around like big, flappy, sea-anemone hands, and it makes a huge whooshing sound, like wind through trees in a storm when it does. (Corinna, 2010j, p. 4)

The Vagzilla is a metaphor used in this article to encourage women to understand large genitals as a positive experience rather than as something about which to be ashamed.

In addition to having complete articles based around a metaphor, creative metaphors are also routinely used within the articles and message posts on Scarleteen. For example, in an article on vaginismus, or painful penetration, Corinna (2011j) organized the article to read like an FBI case file. The title of the article is, "The FBI File: Vaginismus," and throughout the article, headings such as "Wanted For," "Known Accomplices," and "Weapons" are used to explain this difficult and painful condition (p. 1). In addition, to describing the reproductive cycle, Storm (2010) explains, "The ripe and fertile egg runs to the fallopian tubes and waits for its phone to ring. If sperm doesn't call

within 24 hours, the egg dies and is reabsorbed into the body” (p. 1). By using a common scenario, waiting for the phone to ring, users can more easily understand how an egg will expire if it is not met by a sperm. Similarly, Corinna (2010b) uses a metaphor to describe the menstrual cycle. She writes:

She’s not just the flow: she’s the undertow. She’s timely in her own way, but she hates a 9-to-5 schedule, and she’s going to take a week off when she bloody well wants to, whether we like it or not. She’s not a good girl, and she doesn’t deal at all well with authority...: **our menstrual period** [*sic*]. (p. 1)

In yet another example, Corinna (2010a) uses a metaphor to explain how sex is best when both partners are equally eager to participate in the act. She writes, “When it’s tender, it’s not tender like a Hallmark card, but like a cookie fresh out of the oven: steaming, moist, delectable and melt-in-your-mouth” (p. 4). Corinna uses two metaphors in this example—a Hallmark card and a warm cookie. As Krippendorff (1993) explains, metaphors serve to explain to users what the authors mean, but they also can help users organize information—such as about reproductive knowledge—in new and different ways, thus creating the possibility of different realities for users of the website.

In addition to using metaphors to communicate its core values, Scarleteen incorporates the use of descriptive language. I define descriptive language as techniques used to make language come alive. This can be created by adding modifiers or adjectives to nouns or verbs, adding thick descriptions to examples, or incorporating humor. In an article that explored the risks to falling in love, for example, Corinna (2010c) encourages users not to be afraid of heartbreak that may happen as a result of falling in love. She says, “My advice? Light up that exploding cigar, agree to aid and abet love, crawl out

from your hiding place and love big. Grow your own heart and feel those growing pains” (p. 6). In another article, Corinna describes what enthusiastic consent looks like between sexual partners: “Consent is a yes a million times over, for the love of all things sparkly, awesome and delicious, and not a minute longer if you want to do it too, *please, yes* [*sic*, bold and italics in original]” (2011e, p. 1).

Descriptive language is used in all types of articles, including one on the history of virginity. Corinna (2010e) writes that there are “infinite myths that have been floating in the aether [*sic*] for centuries” about virginity (p. 1). In another example, Corinna (2011b) uses a light-hearted description to explain what sex can feel like when both partners are not ready. She explains:

Female-bodied people engaging in genital sex when our genitals aren’t very responsive is a whole lot like someone trying to run a five-mile race when they have blisters on their feet: they may be able to do it, but they’re not likely to enjoy it very much. (p. 1)

In one last example of a descriptive approach to language, in response to negotiating birth-control options, Corinna (2011b) writes, “It’s particularly tricky when some methods make corporations the big megabucks; advertisements for those methods usually make them sound like the best thing since sliced bread, and like all other methods stink” (p. 1). These instances of descriptive language bring the articles to life. As I mentioned, some of the articles are extremely long. By adding descriptive language, the authors energize the articles and keep teens interested in the content.

Although humor was not found often enough throughout the entire website to classify it as one of the main communicative strategies used on the site, humor was used

in small doses within the descriptive language. Not only can humor help relieve tension about a serious topic, it also can help readers relate to the story they are reading (Dziegielewsky et al, 2003). The staff at Scarleteen often use funny references; an article (2011k) in which an author refers to someone's boyfriend as, "Mr. Wonderful" is an example. Or an author might poke fun at an unimpressive boyfriend by joking that he must not have "gotten off the couch and logged off World of Warcraft for days" in order to transmit their messages of advice in a descriptive, light hearted, and relatable way (p. 1).

Scarleteen's use of metaphors and other descriptive language makes complex information easier to understand. Such language also allows users to create new schema for organizing or constructing their realities; they can put information into categories with which they are familiar. Light-hearted descriptions also are helpful on the site because it enlivens the text, can help broach serious or sensitive topics more easily, and can serve as a conduit of identification between authors and users. Scarleteen's language choices, then, are especially appropriate for the teen audience to which the website is directed.

Comprehensive Information

The last way that Scarleteen communicates its detailed, personalized information is by providing users numerous links and resources to further information or services. As Kreps (2012) explains, health communication interactions are "often fast-paced, highly charged, intense, and emotional," and "consumers and providers also depend on communication to encourage complex collaborative efforts between a broad range of health system participants" in order to provide the best care (p. 249). Scarleteen serves as a provider of health information and communicates this function by listing in-text

citations to multiple types of sources, providing source recommendations, and referring users to direct services all in order to provide users the best information.

The first way that Scarleteen communicates links and resources is by placing them within the text of its articles. Many articles have in-text citations to a variety of outside sources. Scarleteen makes use of articles from the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* or the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, often including a complete article citation in parenthesis after making a claim in an essay. An article written by Corinna (2011k) illustrates this practice:

In contrast...lower parent education, nonintact family structure, less connection to parents, substance use or having peers who used substances, and having older peers were associated with increased odds of having sex with an older partner, compared with not engaging in sexual intercourse. (*Risk and protective factors associated with the transitions to a first sexual relationship with an older partner, Journal of Adolescent Health, 40(2), 135-143*) [italics in original] (p. 2)

In addition to citing scholarly articles, Scarleteen cites non-profit organizations, such as the Alan Guttmacher Institute, or advocacy organizations such as Planned Parenthood. Such citations, references, and referrals not only increase the amount of information available to readers, but they enhance Scarleteen's credibility. In an article written by Stephanie (2010) on misconceptions of sexual health, the author goes so far as to include a "Check the research" section after each one of her claims. The sources listed in her "research" range from governmental websites to the *Vagina Monologues*—all of which serve the purpose of explaining to users where Scarleteen has found its information and allowing users to investigate additional sources (p. 1).

At times, Scarleteen also will link readers to other Scarleteen articles that may be useful for them to read and to share with loved ones. In a side bar within the “About That ‘Talk’ with Your Parents...” article, Rayne (2010) explains, “You and your parents might benefit by your bringing some of the pieces from Scarleteen to the table in your talks with them. For example, our Sex Readiness Checklist is a great one to go through with parents” (p. 2).

In addition to offering in-text citations, Scarleteen also provides source recommendations within or at the end of articles. At the end of some articles, there is a section entitled, “Related Books” that link the user to books such as Corinna’s *S.E.X.: The All-You-Need-To-Know-Progressive Sexuality Guide to Get You Through High School and College* or *The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do* by Lynn Ponton (Corinna, 2011h). In addition to recommendations at the end of articles, Scarleteen refers users to sources within the articles. For example, in an article entitled, “Start Your Sexuality Canon,” Corinna (2010i) tells users, “Need a place to start in building your sexuality canon? Start at the bookstore or your local library, and get your read on with these books we suggest as cornerstones for a holistic, informed sex education” (p. 1)! The article then lists books such as *The Hite Report: A National Study of Female Sexuality* by Shere Hite, *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality* by Deborah L. Tolman, and *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book: A Passionate Guide for All of Us* by Felice Newman. The sources recommended within and at the end of these articles are varied in terms of both established and edgier authors and a mix of younger and older authors, which provide users with different perspectives as well as simply more information on topics of interest.

Lastly, Scarleteen communicates personalized, detailed information to its users by encouraging them to seek direct services for issues they may be facing. Referrals to direct services were most commonly seen in the message board posts. This is most likely due to the fact that the volunteers want to ensure that users who are dealing with health crises or problems get immediate care. For example, the user music2myears612 posted a message to the board entitled, “Bump Inside Lips Down There,” where she questioned whether a bump on her labia was something harmful or just her urethra. After a Scarleteen volunteer sent her a diagram of the female anatomy, and the user was still uncertain, another Scarleteen volunteer instructed the user, “If you’re sure that the bump isn’t a regular pert [*sic*] of your anatomy (or if you just can’t figure that out for sure), the best person to talk to is a gynecologist” (“Bump Inside Lips,” 2011, p. 1). Recommending that users visit a doctor is common on the message boards because, as Scarleteen volunteer, KittenGoddess, told a user concerned about her cracked nipples, “However, since we aren’t doctors and can’t see exactly what you are describing, you may wish to consult your doctor just to make sure everything is as it should be” (“Cracked Nipples?,” 2011, p. 1). In another message thread, Corinna wrote to user beholdsara, “Do you need help finding health care? We’re always happy to help our users with that as we can” and later in the thread, “Do you need/want to talk about planning a family or contraception (or both)? Or negotiating these things with your partner actively and well? If so, always glad to help you think and talk it through” (“3 Negative Tests,” 2011, pp. 2-3). Although Scarleteen feverishly works to provide its users with adequate information, since it cares about its users’ health and well-being, Scarleteen believes at times that it is imperative to direct users to visit health-care professionals.

In conclusion, Scarleteen provides links and resources to its users in multiple ways. Within their articles, they cite a variety of sources including academic and activist texts, recommend many different outside sources for users to read, and encourage users to get direct health-care services if an issue warrants it. These methods of linking resources to the users help to ensure that sex-positive sexuality education is accessible for its readers.

To review this section, Scarleteen uses many varied communication strategies on the site. Even though their communication is computer mediated, the staff at Scarleteen competently communicate with users because they employ useful strategies like clarity, person-centered communication, self-disclosure, a critical approach, figurative and descriptive language, and comprehensive information.

Summary

While Scarleteen may not communicate and construct sex-positive sexuality education flawlessly on its site, they are still executing SPSE in an exemplary fashion. To summarize, my textual analysis of 40 articles and 15 message board postings on Scarleteen.com provided answers to my research questions. The model, “Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education on Scarleteen.com” provides an answer to how Scarleteen enacts sex-positive sexuality education. They do so by transmitting core values—a holistic approach, inclusivity, normalization, pleasure, health and safety, communication, and autonomy/agency—adequate use of physical environment, and competent communication strategies to their users. These communication strategies, explained in Element Three of the model, answer what communication strategies are used at sex-positive sexuality education organizations to communicate sex-positive sexuality

education. On Scarleteen.com, clarity, person-centered communication, self-disclosure, a critical approach, figurative and descriptive language and comprehensive information disseminate sex-positive sexuality education.

Scarleteen.com is effectively communicating and enacting sex-positive sexuality education. The site provides competent core values of sex-positivity that inform the articles on the site and interactions with users. Although its physical environment could be improved, Scarleteen still employs effective communication strategies; Scarleteen.com provides an example of an online organization specifically targeted towards adolescents that is providing excellent sex-positive sexuality education.

Chapter Six: Summer Institute

This chapter presents the results from my observations and interviews from the 2011 National Sexuality Resource Center Summer Institute (SI) on “Culture, Sex, and Pleasure.” The Summer Institute is a two- and four-week academic institute sponsored and accredited by San Francisco State University. Leading and junior scholars within sexuality studies teach courses to participants from various academic and practitioner backgrounds. As with the previous two cases, the results of my data analysis are best presented in the model I constructed, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education. This model explains how, across all three sites of my study, sex-positive sexuality education is constructed through a commitment to core values, optimal use of their physical environment, and competent communication strategies. I first offer a brief description of the model at the SI and then describe how the core values, physical environment, and communication strategies used answer my research questions on how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed and communicated at the SI.

Model of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at the Summer Institute

From my observations and interviews at the Summer Institute, I found that the SI uses the same elements as the prior organizations to enact sex-positive sexuality education. As seen in Figure 6.1, the SI does have core values, an effective open atmosphere, and competent communication strategies in common with the other two organizations; however, during my observation and interviews I uncovered issues with the institute that contributed to it not realizing, to the same degree as the others, sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE). Since SPSE still was transmitted at the SI, I did not

alter the model; however, I do discuss what the SI could have improved on within my descriptions on the elements.

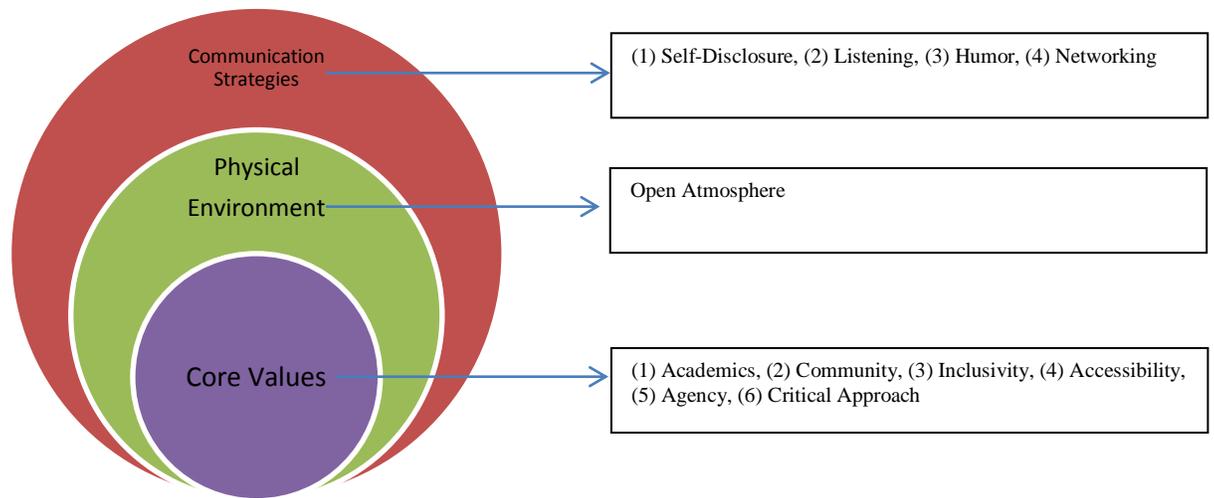


Figure 6.1. Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at Summer Institute

Element One: Core Values at the Summer Institute

The core values at the Summer Institute (SI) are comprised of six components: academics, community engagement, inclusivity, accessibility, agency, and a critical approach. The six components were displayed numerous times within my sources of data. Based on this research, I argue that the SI deems these elements as their core values and as an imperative to their formation of sex-positive sexuality education.

Academic

The first core value of sex-positivity demonstrated at the SI was academics. Academics are valued at the SI because participants receive academic credit for participation in the institute, the instructors generally are involved in academia, and instructors and students used academic references in their discussion about sexuality. The SI is sponsored by the Sexuality Studies program at San Francisco State University, and students receive course credit for the successful completion of the Institute. Because

students earn course credit, they know they must be engaged with the course material and instructors in a competent fashion, or they will not receive credit. Since this is an academic institute, the values of the academy are present in its basic structure—most of the courses at the SI are conducted as graduate seminars. The instructors have a course calendar, assigned readings, and assignments, a structure that explicitly shows that the SI values an academic approach to teaching and learning about sexuality.

Second, the instructors, chosen by the SI administration, generally are involved with academia or have extensive academic credentials. With the exception of Samhita Mukhopadhyay, all of the other speakers I observed—Bethany Stevens, Chris White, Don Romesburg, Sonny Nordmarken, Charlie Glickman, Thomas Samson, Patrick Wilson, and Amy Schalet—all had or were finishing their PhDs or JDs. The administration's decision to choose instructors who are working toward or already have doctorate degrees reveals that the SI values academic credentials. Inviting a majority of academics as instructors sets the agenda for the kind of education that will be presented at the SI. By choosing academic scholars rather than practitioners to teach courses, it is almost assured that academic pursuits such as dissertation or research projects will be discussed heavily during the courses.

The third reason I identify academics as a value at the SI is because it was common to observe references to academic sources. For example, during Samhita Mukhopadhyay's class, she encouraged students to read the well-known transnational feminist M. Jaqui Alexander's work and discussed issues such as privilege and disembodiment (author's data, 2011). Also, Thomas Samson's lectures referenced theorists such as Freud and Lacan, and at times he briefly reviewed theories such as

structuration theory (author's data, 2011). During Amy Schalet's discussion on children's negotiation with their parents about their sexuality, she said, "as scholars we call this *sexual subjectivity* or *sexual agency*" (author's data, 2011). Don Romesburg discussed queer theory and assigned readings for his students from academic journals like *Signs*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *Social Text*. Sonny Nordmarken discussed the work of Arlie Hochschild, Judith Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Susan Stryker in his lecture, "Emotions, Politics, and Transness." Charlie Glickman and Chris White also discussed scholarly activities like presenting at conferences and/or publishing in academic outlets. In general academic references and terms were used quite often by instructors at the SI.

Along with the instructors citing academic articles and texts, the student participants did so as well. Many students at the SI, in particular students who were currently enrolled in other college programs or were recent higher education graduates, would use academic terminology or reference scholarly resources during class discussions or presentations. For example, during the student presentations at the end of the second week of the institute, Casey, a participant who has an advanced degree in Women and Gender Studies, cited gender theorist Judith Butler as an inspiration to her work. Another student, Kelly, explained how she used neoliberalism to inform and explain her work on current city ordinances (author's data, 2011). Often times, the participants discussed their research areas or papers on which they currently were working. Many of them introduced themselves by explaining their research interests and by seeking advice about their research during the question-and-answer sessions with instructors.

Although academics is a value that the administration, instructors, and most students shared and appreciated, not all students felt comfortable with academics being in the forefront during so much of the Institute because the terminology and references were difficult for participants without advanced levels of academic training to understand. In my interview with SI student Chelsea, she explained how these academic references at times were a barrier to her learning. She explained, “so many terms are just being thrown out there that I’m like, what?” and was frustrated because “you can’t facilitate a conversation when there [are] words you don’t know”(Chelsea, personal communication, June 28, 2011).

Yet other participants I interviewed were expecting the Institute to be even more academically rigorous. Tabitha, a participant who is a high school sex-education practitioner, explained to me during our interview that she was at times disappointed with the material at the SI because it did not feel “academic” enough. She explained she came to the SI specifically for an academically rigorous curriculum because, “I want to feel like I’m learning something and I’m challenged” (Tabitha, personal communication, June 29, 2011). Whether students wanted more of an academic challenge or less, all recognized the academic values present in the Summer Institute.

Community Engagement

The second component that I observed throughout the SI was a promotion of community. Community engagement was conceptualized as both a commitment to activism or support of the community and as encouragement to engage with the San Francisco community. First, many of the speakers and instructors discussed the importance of community activism. For example, Bethany Stevens had very strong words

for scholars who do not appreciate the community. At one point during her lecture, she discussed an example of a scholar admitting that he “stole” an idea from an activist. She explained that she appreciated this recognition of community activists because she has had people take her ideas and publish them, which she found to be “very oppressive” (author’s notes, 2011). Stevens also encouraged participatory action research, a research method that encourages collaboration between community and researchers on a community-based research project, because it supports the well-being of the public. Correspondingly, she also discussed why researchers must listen to the needs of community members rather than imposing their own research agenda on an environment (author’s notes, 2011).

In another example of valuing the community, Patrick Wilson promoted support for community during his discussion of the responses of black churches to gay congregants and AIDS prevention. Wilson explained that the community is an important factor in prevention and management of sexual health issues, and his presentation on the responses of black churches in regards to AIDS prevention demonstrated the important role the church community plays in congregants’ lives. He shared with the class themes from his focus groups done with church officials from communities in New York. Wilson privileged the opinions of community members, even when these opinions seemed narrow minded to the class, because he recognized the importance of respecting and learning from a community rather than imposing one’s views on them.

The value of community surfaced when disagreements arose between SI participants and the speaker. In Wilson’s case, he referred to focus-group participants who saw being gay as a *lifestyle*, a perspective which angered many of the SI participants

(author's notes, 2011). Some SI participants were upset that Wilson didn't challenge the use of this term as derogatory during the focus groups. But Wilson continued to defend the community, regardless of the term they chose to use. He explained that these are "warm people" and that it is inappropriate to call them "crazy" (author's notes, 2011). Although his defense of his research participants did not eliminate the anger some the SI participants felt over his research, Wilson's support for his research participants demonstrated respect for community members' knowledge and attitudes even in the face of considerable opposition.

Another example of how community was supported as a value at the SI was during Samhita Mukhopadhyay's class. During her lecture on June 28, 2011, Mukhopadhyay focused considerable attention on the work of bloggers and hackers, who often do not have academic credentials. Mukhopadhyay also lead a discussion about not assuming that technology users are "white, male, and Western citizens" (author's notes, 2011). She explained that in reality, technology users, including bloggers and online activists, are from all backgrounds and walks of life. This discussion suggested to me that Mukhopadhyay privileges a community with access to technology use. She supported the rights of all people to have access and opportunity to technology and the right not to be stereotyped. In this sense, then, she privileged community over academics in how she thinks about technology users.

In addition to the speakers and instructors promoting community-based research and ideals, the SI formally and informally encouraged participation within the San Francisco community. First, the SI schedule included many activities that allowed participants to engage with the community. On the first day of the SI, participants

completed the “Homo History Scavenger Hunt,” which took them to different neighborhoods throughout the city in order to learn about historical places within the San Francisco gay- and lesbian-rights movement. Participants were also given free tickets to the 35th Annual Frameline Film Festival. This ten-day festival showcased diverse films that highlight the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. Students were allowed five free tickets to various showings as long as they wrote a review of the film. One final way that the SI supported engagement with the community was by encouraging participation in Pride events and by cancelling classes the day after San Francisco’s Pride celebration. Chris White told participants that he hoped they went to Pride events, and that, in fact, one of the reasons they host the SI during June was that so participants could attend Pride events (author’s notes, 2011). In the course calendar for the Monday post-Pride it reads,

“NO CLASS

Recovered from the PRIDE celebration yet” (Information Guide, 2011)?

The administration at the SI intentionally cancels class post-Pride because they want participants to attend and have fun at these community events without feeling anxious about having to attend class the next day.

In sum, the SI is committed to engaging with the community of which it is a part. Speakers and instructors privilege research that is community based, and events within the community are encouraged and required. Through these endeavors, the SI demonstrates that part of their approach to sex-positive sexuality education includes engagement with the community.

Inclusivity

SI's commitment to inclusivity also constitutes a core value for the Institute. Inclusivity is defined here as conscious efforts to appreciate and respect the multiple standpoints and experiences of the participants. Inclusivity was demonstrated at the SI by their structural decisions, the speakers and instructors themselves, and the students. First, the administrators of the SI made inclusive decisions. For example, during the introductions during the orientation on the first day, Chris White asked participants to give their names, hometowns, some biographical information, and what gender pronoun they identify as. Allowing participants to identify what gender identity *they* ascribe to rather than what someone may incorrectly assume provides an example of inclusivity by the SI administration. Secondly, the SI administrators renamed a bathroom on the 6th floor of the San Francisco State University Downtown Campus to be gender neutral. Instead of having bathrooms that are designed for cisgender persons, a gender-neutral bathroom allowed transgender individuals to have an inclusive experience.



Figure 6.2. Gender neutral bathroom sign. (source: author)

Inclusivity also was demonstrated by the presenters at the SI. Bethany Stevens lectured about how persons with disabilities can be included in conversations about love

and sexuality. To express these ideas, she discussed information such as the need to change the stereotypical image of representative member of the disabled community. She explained that for a long time, white men who had spinal cord injuries were seen as the face of disability; however, this is slowly changing. Her desire to change the face of the disabled community—to have it be seen as more than just white men—exemplified the inclusivity that was common at the SI.

Lastly, the student participants at the SI demonstrated numerous instances of inclusivity during their research presentations. Sara's presentation on female ejaculation included a commitment to inclusivity because she explained that female ejaculation, despite its surge in popularity (perhaps because of pornography), is not possible for all women. Another participant, Joy, demonstrated inclusivity by warning her fellow students that her presentation on "Mommy play," when adults role-play mother-and-son sexual relationships, might be "triggering" to them; thus, she gave ample time for participants who may have been uncomfortable to leave the room while she was getting her PowerPoint presentation ready (author's notes, 2011). By issuing a trigger warning, Joy made sure that her fellow participants were comfortable and not emotionally harmed because of her presentation.

While the administrators, educators, and students participated in actions and spoke in ways that communicated a strong belief in and practices that valued inclusivity, in fact, these commitments were not always realized. This exclusion can create problems related to actualizing sex-positive sexuality education. I offer two examples where inclusivity was not fostered.

First, Chris White told me during our interview that he does not worry about students not knowing some of the language used at the SI. He explained, “it’s okay if they get a little lost, they will survive” (C. White, personal communication, July 19, 2011). However, since the SI values both academics and practitioners within the community who do not have advanced degrees, use of scholarly terms and theories can be a barrier to the dissemination of their values because certain audience members may not understand the message. I believe the SI should make an effort to remedy this oversight by providing participants with a list of suggested readings or terms with which they should be familiar before attending the institute. This would not deter from the SI’s commitment to academics but would improve inclusion and accessibility—the fourth core value I discuss in the next section.

Along with White’s indifference to being inclusive with the language used at the SI, Bethany Stevens was not always inclusive in her approach to students. During the first day of class, Stevens discussed her work on disability rights, explaining how the media pushes an ablest narrative. She then mentioned a character from the television show *Glee* to illustrate her point. She explained that although this character is in a wheelchair, at times during the dance numbers on the show, he will get out of his chair and dance. Stevens explained that she felt this practice was similar to blackface and should be illegal.

One of the students in the class, Tony, disagreed. He said that he had read that the show used an able-bodied person because the insurance to cover a person with disabilities would have been too much for the show to handle financially, and that in his opinion, it was simply important that a disabled person be represented on TV. Stevens tried to listen

to Tony without interrupting him; however, the class could tell she was visibly upset by his point of view. Stevens attempted to be inclusive of his opinion, saying, “I hear what you are saying.” Ultimately, however, she ended up criticizing his point of view rather harshly when she told him, “the first part of your argument makes my skin crawl” (author’s notes, 2011). Their exchange was a bit heated as he tried to defend himself and his point of view, and ultimately he deferred to her position.

Since this was the first day of class, this adversarial communicative episode made an impression on some of the participants. During my interviews with students, several brought up this incident. According to Tabitha, Stevens’s communicative style with Tony was patronizing and created a defensive climate within the Institute (personal communication, June 29, 2011). Sara also felt that this interaction cast a “negative tone” on the Institute and made people anxious (personal communication, June 29, 2011). This example demonstrates that although Stevens disseminated information that supported the core values of the SI—accessibility for people with disabilities—her approach in the encounter with Tony was such that participants did not feel diverse views truly were welcome. Generally, however, inclusivity was demonstrated throughout the SI, and it clearly is an ideal to which the Institute is committed. Therefore, I consider inclusivity a core value of the SI.

Accessibility

Accessibility is the next component that helps make up the core values at work at the SI. I observed numerous occasions where a commitment to accessibility was enacted and discussed as an important concept in sex and sexuality studies. A representative example occurred during Stevens and Nordmarken’s presentation on coalition politics. At

the beginning of the class, the speakers had asked participants to individually introduce themselves. One member of the class had severe physical disabilities that prohibited him from speaking. Instead of skipping over the student or just introducing him themselves, they encouraged him to write down what he wanted to say and to have another participant read it aloud. While the class waited for about four minutes for him to write down his information, Stevens explained to the class that waiting for him to write his information down was a teachable moment about the “pedagogy of access” (author’s notes, 2011). This example demonstrates how the presenters at the SI made conscious efforts to create an accessible environment.

Along with demonstrating moments of accessibility, speakers and instructors also discussed the importance of accessibility in the work of sexuality studies. For example, during Glickman’s presentation on how to create effective PowerPoint slides for sex education, he explained that slides must be created rather deliberately. He encouraged students to be “nitpicky” about the design because members of an audience can interpret things in many ways; therefore, he wanted them to make sure that the slides are clear and accessible to all learners (author’s notes, 2011). In addition, during Stevens’s lecture on sexuality and disability, she explained to the class that she would be modeling issues of access during her presentation; therefore, she encouraged the class to speak loudly when they were addressing the class and to feel free to signal her in any way that “is comfortable for your body” if they needed her to slow down during the lecture (author’s notes, 2011). In addition, Stevens’s audio narrated every picture she had on her PowerPoint slides. For example, one of her slides had a picture of a standard gynecological exam room on it. She used this picture to highlight how inaccessible a

room such as this is for a person with physical disabilities—being in a wheelchair, for example. Before making her points about the inaccessibility of the room and the impact this has on the sexual health of women with disabilities, she narrated to the class exactly what was in the picture. These examples of attention to issues of accessibility demonstrate how the SI aimed to model accessibility throughout the institute. Due to this commitment, accessibility is one of the components important to the SI approach to sexuality education.

Agency

Throughout the SI, agency was discussed in various ways by many of the educators and students; therefore, it is yet another part of the core values of sex-positive sexuality education at the SI. I most often observed the notion of agency directly referred to or discussed during instructors' lectures and discussions.

First, both core and elective instructors at the SI discussed agency. Speakers such as Samson and Wilson explained how important it is for marginalized members of the community, such as gay black men or people with HIV or AIDS, to be empowered to take control of their own sexual health decisions. Agency was discussed in Don Romesburg's class, "Queering American History" in numerous ways. One representative example was his discussion of how the gay and lesbian community used their agency to help each other during the initial outbreak of the AIDS virus in the Bay Area in the early 1980s. He explained that because the U.S. government had not helped with any preventative measures or even medical care, the gay and lesbian community joined forces to take care of each other. He explained that the mindset of the community in the wake of the government's silence and inaction was that "equality and freedom will come through

each other not through the state” (author’s notes, 2011). This was an extremely powerful example for the class—most of who were born after the initial AIDS outbreak—to learn about how communities can come together and use their agency to advocate and enact better preventative measures, medical care, and even hospice care in the wake of a tragic epidemic.

Furthermore, Amy Schalet’s lecture on “International Perspectives on Adolescent Sexuality, Health, and Pleasure” included a sex-positive example of how cultural narratives may serve to limit adolescents’ sexual agency. Schalet explained that the United States and the Netherlands do not perceive adolescent sexuality similarly. Specifically, parents from the United States believe that their children have “raging hormones,” and thus their children are bound to have trouble controlling their sexual urges. According to this cultural trope, adolescents cannot fully make independent decisions regarding their participation in sexual activity because they will be swayed by their biological urges. On the other hand, Dutch parents do not feel their adolescents are controlled by their hormones, and in fact the idea of “raging hormones” is not recognized by Dutch parents (author’s notes, 2011). Schalet then suggested that the U.S. concept of raging hormones suggests that adolescents are powerless to control their sexuality, and this powerlessness thus serves to limit U.S. adolescents’ sexual agency. Schalet’s discussion is typical of the speakers and instructors at the SI; they criticized attempts at controlling sexual agency and instead promoted research and/or techniques that empowered people to make their own decisions around sex and sexuality.

In addition to examples of agency the instructors discussed in class, student participants shared examples of when they have exercised their agency or struggles they

feel regarding agency. One example that is representative of the tensions participants described was supplied by Josh. During Nordmarken's discussion on emotional labor and micro-aggressions—intentional or unintentional communicative actions that are derogatory—he discussed his evolving responses to homophobic comments. He explained that at times, “it’s so much shit coming at me,” but as he has gotten older he will not accept people’s micro-aggressions (author’s notes, 2011). Although he did not use the word *agency*, his narrative expressed his realization that he had the agency to tell people to stop communicating with him in this offensive way. However, he also admitted that he needs to make sure he does not get “explosive” when he does use his agency (author’s notes, 2011). While he disclosed this story, I noticed many other participants nodding in agreement or support of his realization that he can use his agency to create the world he feels comfortable in rather than the world others dictate to him.

To review, the educators at the SI discussed ways that research should empower people; how people often most use their own agency; and how cultural narratives, like raging hormones, work to disenfranchise adolescents. These discussions of agency may have encouraged student participants to share their struggles with agency as well. Sex-positive approaches to education are informed by individuals having the right and power to make informed decisions, and this value was seen throughout the courses and interactions at the SI.

Critical Approach

The final component that I often observed at the SI was the critical examination of information by speakers, instructors, and students. I use the term *critical* to represent this component of the core values at the SI because these interactions were in line with

principles of critical theory such as an interrogation of structural issues. Specifically, this critical lens at the SI involved the interrogation of social inequities; challenges to dominant power structures; and the examination of how identities such as race, class, and sexuality intersect.

First, many of the educators discussed social inequities. During Don Romesburg's class on June 29, 2011, he critiqued a new public health initiative that aims to lessen HIV/AIDS prevention efforts and awareness and instead focus resources on encouraging newly infected people to treat HIV with medical regimes. Romesburg discussed how this approach likely will harm lower income people and racial minorities because they are less likely to have the resources to get tested consistently for HIV or to be medicated permanently.

Schalet's discussion of a new paradigm to promote adolescent sexual health is another example of a critical approach to issues that was common at the SI. One of the components in her model is "D," which stands for diversity and disparities.¹⁷ Schalet explained that the health disparities adolescents face in regard to sexual health, such as access to health providers and protective measures like birth control, limit adolescents' opportunities to be sexually healthy. These disparities, then, are examples of social inequalities faced by adolescents.

In addition to critiquing social inequities, some of the educators and participants I observed challenged dominant power structures. Stevens discussed how systems of power within the disability community need to be altered in what she described as a "revolutionary way" (author's notes, 2011). She explained that the disability community

¹⁷ Schalet's model is "ABCD," "A" stands for autonomy, "B" stands for building good relationships, "C" stands for connectedness, and "D" stands for diversity (Schalet, 2011).

is unique because at any time anyone, regardless of other privileged identity positions, can become a member; therefore, everyone should be invested in changing the systems of power that limit the rights of the disabled community.

Thomas Samson also discussed how imperative it is to challenge assumptions we hold about power. During his lecture on bottom identity among gay men, he argued that his study suggests that there is power in being submissive. Being powerful is usually thought of as being dominant; however, his study showed that gay men who prefer to be a bottom during sexual activity are in fact not powerless and may have more dominance than one stereotypically would assume. This example of challenging dominant power norms and Stevens's example of promoting revolution to change power structures demonstrate how the educators and students at the SI critically worked to challenge traditional notions of power.

Lastly, the participants at the SI critically interrogated identity. Many of the speakers, instructors, and students critiqued racist, sexist, or classist policies or institutions, and some participants discussed struggles they personally face with confronting the intersections of their identities. During Mukhopadhyay's course, she offered a challenging interrogation of San Francisco's Pride celebrations. She explained that although San Francisco is seen as having a very united GLBTQ community identity, in fact, San Francisco is quite segregated by class and race. In another example, during Wilson's class on black gay men and the church, Josh, a student, discussed the pressure black gay men feel to choose one identity over another—black or gay (author's notes, 2011). These examples demonstrate that no topic was off limits to critical interrogation, and the SI clearly sees sexuality education as involving a strong critical component.

The core values of sex-positive sexuality education at the SI thus are comprised of six components: academics, community, inclusivity, accessibility, agency; and a critical approach. I observed many instances where the administration, speakers, instructors, and students demonstrated a commitment to each and all of these components, and many times this was due to the physical environment of the SI.

However, before I discuss the second element to the Model of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at the SI, I must discuss how pleasure, a value of sex-positivity and core value at Good Vibrations and Scarleteen, was regrettably not valued as highly at the SI. The theme for the 2011 SI was “Culture, Sex, and Pleasure.” Many students told me that this theme was an important factor in their choice to attend the institute. However, I observed a lack of discussion about pleasure, and so did the student participants. Pleasure was talked about so little during the SI that, despite being a tenet of sex-positivity, I could not include it as a core value of the SI because I did not observe a discussion of it happening regularly.

The exclusion of pleasure from the courses frustrated many students. When I asked participants what could have been improved upon at the SI or what they felt was missing from the institute, several discussed pleasure. Emily told me that the “pleasure aspect has been really left out,” and Chelsea agreed that she, “didn’t see pleasure at all” (Chelsea, personal communication, June 28, 2011; Emily, personal communication, June 29, 2011). Brecken also mentioned that his expectations were violated because pleasure was not as “embedded” as he thought it would be (personal communication, June 28, 2011). Sara explained to me that she felt frustrated because the only times she felt pleasure was brought up during the SI was when students instigated the discussion, or

students had informal conversations among themselves (personal communication, June 28, 2011). Tabitha also discussed how her expectations were violated due to the exclusion of pleasure within the SI (personal communication, June 29, 2011). She told me she was looking forward to learning how to include information about pleasure in her work, but instead she left without a better understanding of how to do so. The SI's exclusion of pleasure violated many of the students' expectations for what they would learn at the SI. Violation of expectations can cause a person to disengage from a communicative interaction (Burgoon & Hale, 2008); consequently, participants may not have fully realized or appreciated the remaining core values at SI because of this violation.

Element Two: Physical Environment at the Summer Institute

In this section, I outline the physical environment and space created at the SI. My data revealed that the SI creates an open atmosphere, and I will highlight here why I came to that conclusion. Specific details about the classes and events I attended at the SI are discussed in Chapter Three.

San Francisco State University Downtown Campus

The SI courses were held on the 6th floor of San Francisco State University's Downtown Campus at 835 Market Street. The building in which the SFSU campus is located shares floors with the National Centers on Sexuality, SFSU's College of Extended Learning, and various businesses, and it is also attached to the Westfield Centre shopping mall. The purple banner of the campus blends in with the classy decor of the buildings that front Market Street (see Figure 6.3). Market Street is a major hub of tourism for San Francisco as the trolley cars, buses, and BART all connect in this area.

Numerous street vendors selling jewelry or accessories line the streets from morning until night. Street musicians, entertainers, and preachers also congregate on Market Street. Upon entering 835 Market Street, there is a pristine hallway that leads to a front desk with an attendant and elevators. Classrooms in the Downtown Campus are “configured around a vertical glass-enclosed atrium that offers wonderful views in all directions from the historic sky-lit dome,” other classrooms, and the Westfield Centre mall (Welcome, 2010).



Figure 6.3. Outside of San Francisco State University Downtown Campus (source: author)

The 6th floor of SFSU’s Downtown Campus is where all of the SI courses were held. The morning core lectures were always held in room 607, a big room—about the size of two traditional classrooms—with large windows that face Market Street. The desks were moveable tables. In the morning, White would usually adjust most of the tables into a large u-shape, leaving one table in the front for the presenter(s) and one or two rows of desks in the back of the room where he, SI Program Coordinator Nicole Darcangelo, and I would usually sit. The chairs were comfortable, which was beneficial,

because sessions sometimes ran two hours. The classroom had a whiteboard and was equipped with a projector and screen. The instructors usually would stand next to the screen in the front of the classroom and narrate their PowerPoint slides. The only people on the 6th floor during the morning session were generally members of the SI; therefore, this gave a feeling of intimacy to the classes. At times, noise from Market Street, such as ambulances, protest marches, or street musicians, could be heard in the classroom, creating a bit of distraction.

Room 607 was large enough for participants to have ample room for their laptops and notes but also small enough so that they could easily work together. At times, presenters' laptops would have trouble connecting to the projector, but generally instructors and participants found ways to plug in their laptops or log on to wireless Internet. Rooms 612 and 613 were smaller than room 607; these rooms were where the elective courses were held. These rooms had the same moveable desks and chairs, board, and technology as room 607. These rooms also had large windows that overlooked Market Street, but generally the blinds covering the windows were lowered during the courses so the afternoon sunlight would not interfere with presenters' PowerPoint presentations. Students seemed comfortable in these rooms; they had enough room to spread out their materials and belongings but still remain close to each other. Sometimes the tables would be in a u-shape and other times just in rows. The presenters generally closed the doors during the class afternoon sessions because at times, other SFSU students would be in the hallways or using nearby classrooms. Closing the door, then, was necessary to create a safe space for instructors and students to discuss sometimes personal or controversial issues. While the core lectures in room 607 were formal, and the

presenter would usually stand in the front of the room, the elective course instructors used space differently. Often times they sat down, walked around the class, or took a seat to the side or in the back of the room depending on the day's activities.

In sum, using the SFSU Downtown Campus to host the SI was a smart decision. The physical environment and use of space were conducive to learning. The classrooms, spacious but not overwhelmingly large, were in a modern building that had beautiful architecture. Students were able to maintain personal space but also interact closely with their classmates and instructors. During breaks, students could stand in the hallway and look at the sky-lit dome above them or look outside at one of the most well-known streets in the city and see and feel natural sunlight. The furniture was comfortable and practical, and students' and instructors' technology needs were met.

Physical Environment: Open Atmosphere

I classify the physical environment of the SI as an open atmosphere. Communication research has defined *openness* in many ways. McCrae and Costa (1997) explain, "Openness is seen in the breadth, depth, and permeability of consciousness, and in the recurrent need to enlarge and examine experience" (p. 826). Openness usually includes such facets as aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values (McCrae, 1992). Interpersonal communication research often promotes openness as a relational maintenance technique and is described as being willing to participate in self-disclosure and an open discussion about a relationship (Stafford, 2003). Organizational communication research also has investigated the importance of openness and determined that factors such as being receptive and listening are important within organizational settings (Jablin, 1992).

The classrooms at the SI were large spaces and had large windows that opened to the community and made it feel connected to the community at-large. When students exited the classroom and stood in the hallway, they were exposed to a glass-enclosed atrium that was open to a skylight above and a bustling shopping center below. Symbolically, then, the windows, glass atrium in the hallway, and the placement of the building in the midst of Market Street contributed to SI's open atmosphere. San Francisco is known as a very liberal city that is open to new ideas. This energy was transparent on Market Street. When students walked into the building or looked down from the classroom windows or hallways, they interacted with movements such as pro-union protests, community members selling goods, international and local businesspeople, shoppers, and tourists. The physical location helped to transfer some of the adventurous and open aspects of the city into the physical environment of the SI.

The open floor plan and architecture of the 6th floor classrooms also were conducive for students and instructors to be open with each other. The desks were usually arranged in a u-shape, so that everyone could see each other. Many times, the instructors sat down while presenting, which served to lessen the power dynamic within the classroom. Also, doors were often closed and lights were turned off or dimmed, which helped create an intimate and safe mood within the space. All of these strategies aided being open with one another and open to learning and sharing of new ideas. This open atmosphere also created a space to implement effective and supportive communication strategies, which I describe as the third section of the model that emerged from my analysis of the Summer Institute.

Element Three: Communication Strategies at the Summer Institute

An open atmosphere at the SI is produced by the use of four communication strategies: self-disclosure, listening, humor, and networking. I observed numerous occasions throughout the SI when these strategies were used and heard from the participants during my interviews about the importance of these elements in their experience at the SI.

Self-Disclosure

I observed many different examples of self-disclosure at the SI. From a communication perspective, self-disclosure is defined as revealing private information about yourself to others (Wheless, 1978). Self-disclosure can be especially useful in educational contexts as it helps facilitate learning (Downs et al., 1988).

Generally, the self-disclosure I observed revolved around two categories: intimate stories and expressions of vulnerability. Starting on the first day of the institute and throughout the entire time I was there, both educators and students felt comfortable enough to share experiences that were often times extremely intimate, even though they had generally known the rest of the participants for sometimes only a few hours, days, or weeks.

Some acts of self-disclosure became a way to bridge gaps in understanding. One example of a very emotional moment of self-disclosure occurred during Don Romesburg's class. The topic for that day's class was AIDS and shame. He explained to the class that discussing AIDS with young people today is particularly emotional because they only understand AIDS from a global context. He informed the class that he wanted them to understand his positionality in regards to AIDS, and then proceeded to share what he faced when he relocated to San Francisco in 1993. He recounted one story of

when he and his friends would go to garage sales; they were shocked by the wonderful treasures they would find. He explained what an emotional realization it was for him when he realized that these sales were not garage sales but in fact estate sales from all of the “fabulous” men that had died from AIDS (author’s notes, 2011). The mood in the class was extremely somber after Romesburg’s disclosure, and he realized this shift in the climate because he observed that the class was starting in a “really heavy place” (author’s notes, 2011). However, his acts of self-disclosure may have helped students become serious and engaged with the day’s topic. After his self-disclosure, the students seemed to be more attentive, quiet, and reflective.

Throughout the SI, many participants self-disclosed personal stories as a way to explain conditions or experiences. Examples of self-disclosure, such as what it feels like to be transgendered, to be a wheelchair user, to undergo gender re-assignment hormonal therapy, or to be a member of a sexual orientation that is fetishized, were common to hear at the SI in order to provide understanding and explanation of the core values the SI upholds.

Other acts of self-disclosure created bonds among participants at the institute. Educators and students alike shared episodes of self-disclosure that discussed their personal romantic lives and/or insecurities they feel. In Samhita Mukhopadhyay's class, she gave an example of how she was in a relationship that occurred primarily through the use of technology. Despite only knowing the students in the class for under a week, Mukhopadhyay offered details about her relationship that were extremely personal in nature. In another example, a participant discussed how she broke up with her boyfriend the previous night because he made homophobic comments during their Skype session.

The class was extremely supportive during both of these examples of self-disclosure. These acts of self-disclosure about personal and intimate moments seemed to bring the class together in a supportive way.

The last type of self-disclosure I observed during the course of the institute was expressions of vulnerability. Although both students and educators discussed issues they felt inadequate or unsure about, I was most struck by how often the educators disclosed issues of vulnerability. In Stevens and Nordmarken's lecture, Stevens disclosed numerous examples of when she had made mistakes and/or hurt people with her actions. She recounted how she continues to “fuck up” even though she knows better (author’s notes, 2011). One example of her self-disclosure of vulnerability was when she said she had recently referred to her writing partner and friend Sonny using the pronoun “she” instead of “he.” This was a very emotional moment for her, and the class experienced how awful she felt that she had insulted her friend in a way that they both felt was oppressive. What made Stevens’s vulnerable self-disclosure so important was that the day before, she had been very defensive with Tony, a student at the institute, whom she felt was being oppressive toward her. For her to admit that she too, quite recently, was oppressive to her friend allowed the class to feel a connection with her and to learn that all people will make mistakes despite the best of intentions.

During Chris White’s class, he also self-disclosed information that highlighted his weaknesses. White admitted to the class full of students, all currently enrolled in or interested in graduate studies, that writing is a very hard process for him. He admitted that he intuitively knows that he should be able to write scholarly articles or reviews, but he struggles when it is time to produce a manuscript. Many students in the class then

discussed their same struggles to write and how it was helpful to hear him admit his weakness.

In sum, the participants and instructors used self-disclosure throughout the Institute in many ways. Some examples of self-disclosure served to teach others about issues they are uninformed about, others brought people together through the use of sharing similar experiences or concerns, and yet still others exposed vulnerabilities participants feel in order to relate to one another on a more equal basis. Consequently, self-disclosure allowed the participants to build an open atmosphere that helped them communicate the sex-positive sexuality education core values of the SI.

Listening

Listening is an important communication strategy because it can provide mutual understanding and improve the depth of a communicative interaction (Campbell, 2011). Petrie (1961) defined listening as “the composite process by which oral language communicated by some source is received, critically and purposefully attended to, recognized, and interpreted in terms of past experiences and future expectancies” (p. 329). I observed many times when students appeared to be actively and critically listening to instructors and to their peers, and I also observed instructors seeking advice and subsequently listening to responses from students.

Stevens and Nordmarken led an activity that demonstrated the importance of listening; that they incorporated an activity that focused specifically on listening suggests its importance to the SI staff and participants. Students were asked to write a statement to a person that they had previously introduced to the class. Once the students gave their statements to their partners, their partners had around five minutes to reflect on the

statement, and then write a statement back to the person. This activity went on for about 45 minutes. The choice to devote a lengthy activity to listening, followed by ample time for reflection, demonstrated SI's commitment to this core value.

In addition to activities that taught students about the importance of listening, I also observed students practicing active listening techniques, such as offering feedback or back-channel cues. During students' presentations, I observed participants nodding their heads in agreement with the speaker's ideas, shaking their heads in response to a troubling situation, or making a verbal remark in support of a speaker. For example, during Josh's presentation, "LGBTQ, Transitional Age Youth Therapy Program Model," he began by showing a clip of the television show *60 Minutes* (author's notes, 2011). In this clip, correspondent Lesley Stahl interviewed children whose gender identity is nonconforming to traditional gender roles. I observed the class shaking their head in what appeared to be disgust or laughing at the way Stahl interviewed some of the children. During the segment, Stahl explained that children who are extremely gender nonconformist often grow up to be gay. This explanation made the class break into laughter. When the report showed a young boy giving a tour of his bedroom that was furnished in pastel colors and included dolls, toy unicorns, and a purple canopy that the boy said was made by the same company as the other furnishing in his room, Chris White shouted out, "Oh God, I love him!," and the class riotously laughed (author's notes, 2011).

After the report was finished, the participants discussed how they felt Stahl did not appropriately interview the children, and they offered other specific feedback on the report. They gave specific examples from within her report where she may have seemed a

little too interested in the child that was gender non-confirming or critiqued the way she said certain words with perhaps too much emphasis like “*gay*” or “*nail polish with stars*” (author’s notes, 2011)! These verbal and non-verbal reactions to the report demonstrated the active listening skills of the participants. They appeared to have actively listened during the clip, they offered nonverbal feedback, laughed at remarks they thought were funny or ridiculous, and offered precise critiques of the information they heard during the report.

Sometimes the instructors stopped and purposively listened to feedback offered by students. During one of Amy Schalet’s presentations, she stopped lecturing and told the class that before she went any further, she wanted to stop and listen to their comments, feedback, and questions. Wilson and Samson also made statements throughout their lectures that expressed that they were interested in the feedback of the class and were eager to listen to their comments. Glickman also discussed that in order to be a skilled presenter or educator, it is important to listen to the needs of the audience. He encouraged the class to find ways to learn more about their audience and critically listen to their concerns and feedback.

Lastly, listening was demonstrated at the SI by the fact that many of the participants sought clarification or took advantage of opportunities to paraphrase the information from the speakers. One example of how Wilson used paraphrasing during his lecture on the use of the term *lifestyle* took place in relation to the black church. Tony, a student, paraphrased what he understood Wilson to mean by the term *lifestyle*, and they continued to have a dialogue, which other students joined, about what the term meant. Another example of paraphrasing came during Mukhopadhyay’s class. In response to

Mukhopadhyay's comments that the San Francisco Pride celebrations may be an example of commodification of gay culture and othering, Joy, a participant, responded by asking if she meant it was an example of chasing the *pink dollar*. Mukhopadhyay was unfamiliar with this term and asked Joy to explain it. Joy explained that it is a term used to describe the commodification of gay culture. Mukhopadhyay then asked Joy follow-up questions about the term and then said how much she loved this term. These examples are reflective of how often the students and instructors at the SI would critically and actively listen to the material presented.

Overall, the participants at the SI often used active listening skills. Being engaged listeners allowed them to better comprehend and analyze the information presented. In sum, listening contributes to the transmission of sex-positive sexuality education in the SI, because it helps create an open atmosphere where ideas and thoughts are interpreted and evaluated.

Humor

Humor played an important role in communicating the SI's core values in an open atmosphere. Humor has many functions; however, the function that humor best served at the SI was to release tension (Lynch, 2002). Since the core values at the SI include elements such as academics, agency, and critical approaches to information, the ideas discussed at the SI at times could create a tense atmosphere. However, to alleviate this tension, participants at the SI—both instructors and students—used humor: “When a joke or laughter is used to reduce tension or stress, humor can be considered to provide a relief function” (Lynch, 2002, p. 427). Humor was so prevalent during the SI that during the final group and research presentations of Session I, Chris White remarked, “This isn't

just the Summer Institute of Sexuality, it is the summer institute of stand-up comedy” (author’s notes, 2011). White made that comment because most students had some sort of intentional or unintentional humor in their presentations. For example, Joy started her presentation on “Mommy Play” by singing a melody of songs that ironically referenced mother-child relationships such as “Baby Love” by the Supremes and “Wild World” by Cat Stevens. This a cappella performance had her fellow student participants quite amused.

Other times, humor was used between instructors and participants to manage tensions. For example, during the class presentations, White joked that with the way Joy talks, the class won’t be over until 8:00 p.m. Joy responded back that she wanted to “snap his bowtie” that he was wearing. White looked back at her with a sarcastic facial expression and said, “HA!” and pulled his what-the-class-did-not-realize-was-a-snap-on-bowtie off (author’s notes, 2011). Another example of how often humor was used to reduce tensions between instructors and students was during Casey’s presentation of her research to the class. She was discussing the concept of “psychic dick,” which refers to people believing or having the sensation that they have a penis when in fact they do not, or it has been removed. To reduce any tensions about her presentation she said, “I’m gonna point to my crotch, so just look at it now! And you can look at it later” (author’s notes, 2011)! Casey understood that during her presentation, some participants might be wondering if she has a penis or if she feels like she does; therefore, she used humor to try to address this issue.

In another example of humor during class presentations, one group led an activity that was supposed to be a simulation of how they would teach a class of adults how to

embrace sexual fantasies. The students participated in this lesson as if the group were actually presenting it to a class. At one point during their lesson, the facilitators asked each student to take out a piece of paper, and write down a sexual fantasy on the paper. One of the group members then walked around, collected the papers, and then redistributed them to the class. The facilitators told the class that they were now going to read aloud the fantasy that was in front of them. Chris White stopped the presentation and told the presenters that the students were unaware that these would be read aloud, and that perhaps this would make some uncomfortable. The group facilitators then said that the entire exercise could be skipped if that was the decision of the class. In the course of this activity, the climate in the classroom had changed to one rife with tension. People seemed not to want their fantasies read aloud; however, neither did anyone want to be the one to stop the activity. In an attempt to reduce this tension, Joy, a student, exclaimed, “Oh look, I’ve come up with a better fantasy!” in order to try to encourage the group to stop the activity and let students either re-write their fantasy or abstain since the fantasies were going to be shared with the class (author’s notes, 2011). Joy’s use of humor did help reduce the tension in the room. The students started to chat with one another, and finally the group decided to let the activity continue as originally planned.

One example of how the instructors used humor to relieve tension occurred during Bethany Stevens’s presentation on disability. She explained a story about how at times men will come up to her and say, “Isn’t it weird? I find you attractive, and I’m not even drunk” (author’s notes, 2011). This story was obviously uncomfortable for the class to hear since it was so demeaning and embarrassing; however, Stevens lightened the mood by using humor. Immediately after she told that story she said in a sarcastic tone, “Maybe

he liked me because of my necklace,” a statement that made the whole class laugh (author’s notes, 2011).

Generally humor was sprinkled into discussions and lectures every day. Communication at the SI always seemed to have an element of humor in it. Humor was institutionalized, such as calling the scavenger hunt on the first day of class the “Homo History Scavenger Hunt.” Jokes also were frequent on instructors’ PowerPoint slides as well. During Wilson’s discussion of the black church, he had a graphic on a slide that said, “Jesus called, he wants his religion back” (author’s notes, 2011). During Samson’s talk on gay male bottom identity, he included a picture on his PowerPoint slide of advertisement of a theatrical performance of a faux-reality show playing in Los Angeles called, “America’s Next Top Bottom” (author’s notes, 2011).

Stevens’s attempt at making light of her embarrassing and insulting story, Joy’s use of humor to redirect the focus of an uncomfortable class activity, and the numerous other ways instructors and students incorporated humor are examples of how the educators and students at the SI successfully use humor to reduce tensions within the SI. Although humor has many positive functions, at the SI, it specifically helped lighten what at times could be very serious or uncomfortable situations.

Networking

The last communicative component I observed at the SI that aided the transmission of their core values in regard to sexuality is networking. Networking is connecting with other people, and it can provide participants with the opportunity to make business contacts, develop mentorships, solve problems, and spread information

(DeWine & Casbolt, 1983). Instructors encouraged networking, and the participants were eager to use their SI experience as a networking tool.

First, some of the instructors encouraged their students to network with them. In Stevens's and Mukhopadhyay's classes, they discussed how they use Facebook, and both invited students to Facebook friend them. Many students did become Facebook friends with both the instructors and their fellow classmates. In the interviews I conducted with students, most of them said one of the most important aspects of their time spent at the SI was "the connections with other people" (Julie, personal communication, June 28, 2011). Chelsea also agreed that the SI was a "great networking experience," because it was "great to talk to people from different levels" (personal communication, June 28, 2011).

Institutionally, the SI also promoted opportunities for networking. After the scavenger hunt on the first day of class, Chris White and Don Romesburg invited all of the participants to a bar next to the GLBT History Museum. White described this get-together as an opportunity to meet all of the participants and to get to know one another better (author's notes, 2011). White and Mukhopadhyay organized a joint event between Mukhopadhyay's organization, Feministing.com, and the National Sexuality Resource Center. The "Feministing/NSRC Happy Hour" took place at the Lexington Club in San Francisco on June 30, 2011, an event that was open to all members and friends of both organizations and advertised on both organization's social media outlets. Lastly, on the final day of Session One, White invited all participants to go out for drinks and appetizers to celebrate the session and to connect with participants one final time before many left San Francisco.

The participants also informally networked throughout the SI. Some examples of these informal networking experiences were as simple as grabbing coffee together in the morning before the session started or making plans to try different restaurants during the lunch break. The classrooms of the SI were located next to the Westfield Centre shopping mall. Often times during the lunch break, I observed groups of participants go to the food court together and eat lunch there or bring their meals outside to the patio area. Informal networking also took place on the weekends. Many of the participants made plans with each other to attend Pride celebration events, such as the Dyke March or Pride Parade, together. I also observed participants coordinate their schedules so they could attend the same showing of a film at the Frameline Film Festival. The interactions the participants planned with each other during the week and weekends of the SI demonstrate their commitment to networking with each other.

Participants frequently mentioned they looked forward to keeping in touch with fellow students. As Sara explained, the “conversations I’ve had outside of the classroom” were vitally important to her, because her peers taught her about topics to incorporate into her research (personal communication, June 29, 2011). Furthermore, Emily explained that she feels she *has* to network with her fellow participants because the field of sexuality studies is so small (personal communication, June 29, 2011). Overall, the participants showed excitement about the opportunity to connect and even collaborate on projects with their contacts from the SI.

Networking was something that the SI participants already had begun doing and were invested in continuing to do even after they left the institute. The participants started networking immediately by becoming Facebook friends, planning interactions with their

fellow students, and looking forward to maintaining personal and professional bonds. This desire to keep in contact and learn from one another consequently contributes to an open atmosphere at the SI.

To review this section, although I observed the communication strategies of self-disclosure, listening, humor, and networking throughout the institute and these were useful ways to transmit SPSE, I noted the ineffective presentation skills of some of the instructors that interfered with the transmission of sex-positive sexuality education. In the next section, I outline some of these presentation issues.

Throughout both Chris White's graduate research seminar and Charlie Glickman's class on tips for sex educators, both instructors taught their classes to use effective presentation skills. During White's discussion on the need to be engaging, he said, "We all have been in classes where the person reads everything on the slide, and I want to kill myself" (author's notes, 2011)! However, although White and Glickman taught their SI students to use effective communication techniques, the speakers at the SI generally gave very poor presentations.

Instructors, mainly core lecturers, generally used PowerPoint very ineffectively. Instead of using an extemporaneous delivery, speakers often just did what White and Glickman told students not to do—to read directly from their PowerPoint slides without making eye contact with the class for extended periods of time. Some speakers also had not made good choices in terms of the content to put on their slides. Entire quotes would sometimes take up the whole slide, and the type was too small or too cluttered to read easily. At other times, presenters felt they had to cover every point that was on their slides, so they would race to discuss everything. This made their rate of speaking

extremely fast, or there would be information on the slides that they needed to skip over because they did not have the time to discuss it. Yet other core lecturers seemed chained to the desks in the front of the classroom and missed out on opportunities to visit with students. One time, a core lecturer read an autoethnography to the class. While this piece was moving, having it read without many performative functions took away from its significance. Overall, although these speakers discussed SI core values during their presentations, such as agency or why it is important to take a critical approach to research, their messages were sometimes hindered by poorly constructed presentations.

Summary

In conclusion, my observations of the SI courses and interviews with SI participants and review of SI artifacts provided answers to my research questions. The process of sex-positive sexuality education enacted at the Summer Institute is constructed through the model, Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education at the Summer Institute (Figure 6.1). First, the SI has a clear set of core values. These values—academics, community, inclusivity, accessibility, agency, and a critical approach—create SI's philosophy of sex-positive sexuality education. Openness was created at the SI through organizational and pedagogical decisions. These choices also facilitated the use of four communication strategies. The communication strategies I observed at the SI also offer an answer to my research question examining what communication strategies are used at sex-positive sexuality education organizations to communicate sex-positive sexuality education. At the SI, self-disclosure, listening, humor, and networking were used to communicate SPSE. The administrators, instructors, and participants all participated in these communicative strategies. Even though at times the instructors

struggled to transmit SPSE because they had poor presentation skills, these communicative strategies allowed the members of this organization to generally communicate this philosophy.

Overall, the SI as an organization has a clear set of core values and creates an open atmosphere in their physical environment, and participants used effective communication skills. In the future, if the participants of the SI make a conscious effort to communicate and use language that is inclusive and accommodating to all participants, and if students, instructors, and administrators share the same expectations for the Institute, sex-positive sexuality education could be constructed and communicated even more successfully at the SI.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how sex-positive sexuality education is constructed, communicated, and defined at three organizations that practice this approach to sexuality education. Through observations and interviews at Good Vibrations and the Summer Institute and a textual analysis of Scarleteen.com, I determined how three diverse organizations—which serve varying populations—conceptualize and enact sex-positive sexuality education. While sex-positive sexuality education is not yet a mainstream approach to teaching sexuality education, it provides the opportunity to be more effective than traditional approaches, such as abstinence-only and comprehensive methods. This chapter summarizes the findings to the research questions, discusses theoretical and practical implications of the findings, and offers directions for future research.

Summary of Research Findings

The research questions asked: How do organizations construct, communicate, and define sex-positive sexuality education (SPSE)? I used my observations, interviews, and analysis of texts as data to create a three-level definition that answers these questions. The first level of the definition is the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model that I used to outline my results in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. This model demonstrates how people at my sites of study enacted SPSE through their core values, physical environment, and verbal and nonverbal communication strategies. This model is also the foundation for understanding how SPSE is defined and understanding what sets this approach apart from traditional methods of sexuality education. The second level in defining sex-positive sexuality education involves relational pairs of SPSE that emerged

across my findings at each of the organizations. These relational pairs—inclusivity and normalization, pleasure and health and safety, accessibility and a critical approach, open environment and agency, and clarity and comfort—inform the third level to this definition, a dynamic that sets SPSE apart from other approaches to sexuality education. This dynamic balances and embraces tensions found within the relational pairs and thus transcends SPSE into a holistic approach to sexuality education.

Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education Model

The first level in defining SPSE is the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model. This model (Figure 7.1) is a necessary foundation for SPSE and answers how SPSE is constructed at these organizations. Based on my research of organizations that employ a sex-positive approach to sexuality education, I learned that they all employed three elements—core values, physical environment, and communication strategies—that I have placed in concentric circles to indicate the interconnections among these elements. Thus, in order to define SPSE, I identified a context that includes these basic elements. An organization or practitioner using this approach has sex-positive core values; creates a physical environment that is open, welcoming, and effective for the audience; and is skilled at using competent communication strategies. If an organization or practitioner does not have a clear set of sex-positive core values, create a physical environment that is conducive to learning, or communicate effectively, they will not create an understanding of SPSE. This composite of values, environment, and strategies create a necessary foundation for the definition of SPSE. However, many organizations that teach sexuality education also may have these elements; therefore, in order to define sex-positive sexuality education and understand

why it transcends other sexuality-education approaches, I studied the data from the three organizations to understand how the elements functioned together.

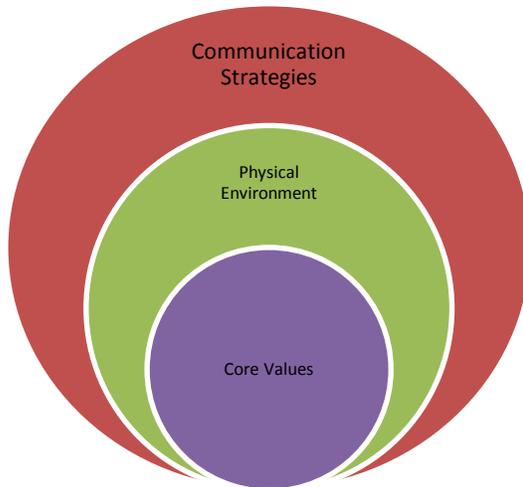


Figure 7.1. Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education

Relational Pairs

The second component of the definition of SPSE is relational pairs. Since I used a case-study approach, I compared and contrasted these organizations. My comparisons of these organizations revealed similar elements across the organizations, captured in the model of Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education. Since these organizations were quite diverse in their contexts and audience, it is significant that they all had similar values, physical environments, and communication strategies, which confirms that SPSE has a consistent definition in dissimilar organizations.

My analysis of these similarities showed that they form relational pairs that highlight how the similarities and differences across organizations work in tandem, in contrast to traditional approaches. For example, in a public school setting where an abstinence-only approach advocates abstinence as the only choice a student can make,

and a comprehensive approach provides them students with options, but often frames the options within a false dilemma (e.g. it is dangerous to have sex, but if you must, use protection; explaining sex but promoting abstinence; describing male orgasm as necessary for sex but avoiding a discussion of female orgasm; and presenting heterosexual sex as normal but homosexual sex as risky). These approaches create dissonance for the learner. SPSE, however, presents unified options for users in the balance it offers (Epstein et. al., 2003; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006). I outline five relational pairs that explain how this approach balances disparaging components to create a dynamic and holistic approach to sexuality education. It is important to note that this may not be an exhaustive list of relational pairs; rather these pairs were most apparent within my data.

Inclusivity and Normalization. The first relational pair that I uncovered was inclusivity/normalization. Inclusivity, a core value at all three organizations, is what scholars (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Kulwicki, 2008) discuss as a component of sex-positivity. Inclusivity embraces people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and performances of these identities but also people of all races, classes, and backgrounds. I pair inclusivity with the value of normalization. Normalization occurs in SPSE when educators teach learners that fears, concerns, or stereotypes they hold about bodies, experiences, thoughts, or sex acts are indeed common and normal. Inclusivity and normalization form a relational pair in SPSE because the components work together instead of against each other.

An abstinence-only approach views inclusivity and normalization as based on the assumption that nothing is normal except for heterosexual sexual relationships within a

heterosexual marriage defined by rigid and traditional gender roles. Even if a comprehensive approach discusses multiple sexual orientations, it ultimately promotes abstinence, and it stigmatizes sexually active students rather than normalizing their experiences. SPSE, however, transcends these approaches and instead embraces the dynamic between the two.

This relational pair surfaced in all of my sites of study. For example, when Carol Queen explained that there are no sexual acts that are normal or abnormal for people of certain sexualities to want to participate in, or when Corinna addressed a section of an article to a “person with a penis” versus “men” because she knows that some of her readers will not identify as a man if they are transgendered, but still provides them with the same information (Corinna, 2011d), the normalization/inclusivity pair is evident. Overall, inclusivity/normalization is an important relational pair within SPSE because it embraces rather than marginalizes diverse standpoints and treats them as ordinary.

Pleasure and Health and Safety. Previous explanations (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Helmich, 2009; Kulwicki, 2008) of SPSE address pleasure as a key element to the approach, and my work also showed pleasure to be a core value at GV and Scarleteen. Although it was not addressed as much at the SI, it was an implicit value at the institute. Pleasure forms a relational pair with health and safety in an SPSE approach. Health and safety was an important value at GV and Scarleteen; it also was evident at the SI during their transmission of information about participating in sex acts. Again, traditional approaches to sexuality education do not associate these components. Abstinence-only approaches ignore that a function of sex is pleasure and choose only to focus on the reproductive function of sex, and comprehensive approaches are more focused on health

and safety as demonstrated by the amount of time spent discussing STIs, unintended pregnancies, and offering information about protection (Askew, 2007; Fields, 2008).

In my research, I found that pleasure and health, and safety were not at odds within organizations that use an SPSE approach. At times, these two values converged in the contexts within these organizations. For example, Knöfel (2011) explains that for a woman to feel sexual pleasure she needs to be adequately vaginally lubricated or sex can be painful. GV materials and representatives often discussed how addressing health and safety needs still could be pleasurable like using flavored condoms during sex or taking breaks during performing kegel exercises in order not to over exert oneself. The pairing of pleasure with health and safety is part of SPSE because it focuses on the importance of pleasure in sex but also stresses the necessity of understanding the health and safety risks involved with sexual activities.

Accessibility and a Critical Approach. Another relational pair balances the core values of accessibility with a critical approach. Accessibility means creating a space where everyone can be equal learners. Often this means redesigning content or the space in a room so that it is accommodating to all. A critical approach, which challenges the learner and connects sexuality studies to broader contexts, is a value that not only was demonstrated at my sites of study but also was called up by scholars (Epstein et al., 2003; Farrelly et al., 2007; Hayden, 2001; Trimble, 2009; Welles, 2005) as a dimension to be incorporated into sexuality education.

Not only do abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education approaches fail to combine these values into a relational pair as SPSE does, they generally do not discuss either of these aspects of sexuality. Abstinence-only approaches to sexuality are not

accessible to learners of varied backgrounds nor are learners encouraged to critically examine the information being offered about sexuality or the inequalities and disparities present in the larger community and world in which that information is offered.

Abstinence-only approaches would rather their students maintain traditional ideas and norms around sexuality and gender (Collins, et al., 2002; Fields, 2008). In order to receive funding, abstinence-only approaches cover content related to the eight-point definition of abstinence education found within the government mandated A-H guidelines that schools are required to follow. This leaves no room for adapting to learners' needs and interests or critically investigating and reflecting on the world in which learners live. A comprehensive approach aims to be accessible to learners; however, these approaches do not value a critical approach and instead often work to enforce problematic social and cultural norms. For example, even comprehensive programs privilege heterosexual sex and marriage, despite the fact that some individuals may never want to get married or by law are prohibited from getting married due to their sexual orientation (Askew, 2007; Epstein et. al, 2003; Fields, 2008). Combining these values, as SPSE does, thus creates a dynamic that transforms traditional approaches to sex education.

At the SI, Glickman's instruction to the class that they be "nitpicky" about what information and design elements they put on their PowerPoint slides, because they never know from what perspective an audience member will be viewing them provides one example of the accessibility/critical approach in action. Scarleteen's advice that at times a user may need to search for a trusted adult to talk to about sex because sometimes a parent may be a harmful and unsafe choice also demonstrates how SPSE encourages the merging of these values.

Open Environment and Agency. In addition to core values, the physical environment created at the organizations contributed to SPSE. GV had a welcoming environment, the SI had an open atmosphere, and Scarleteen provided many opportunities within their website to openly discuss issues. Community, a core value at Good Vibrations and SI, is also understood as part of an open environment because community approaches within these organizations were open, welcoming, and encouraged engagement with community members. A positive physical environment enabling learning was an important part of SPSE.

The component that pairs well with an open environment is agency, a core value of the SI and Scarleteen and promoted in multiple ways at GV. Agency is discussed by scholars (Corinna, 2009; Farrelly et al., 2007; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Welles, 2005) as a necessary component of SPSE that is missing in traditional abstinence-only and comprehensive approaches to sexuality education. Open environment and agency work together within a sex-positive approach to sexuality education because an open environment creates a milieu for a positive learning experience that establishes a foundation for learning. Unless learners choose to exercise their own sense of agency, however, they will not receive the best sex education possible.

For example, since SI's environment encouraged open expression, I witnessed students practice and learn about how to stand up to injustices they encountered when they may not have felt comfortable doing so in another environment. Or on the Scarleteen website, volunteers would probe message-board users to get more details about issues that were bothering them and then equip them with the resources to make their own decisions. The open environment/agency relational pair highlights how various

components within the three element Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model can work in tandem to inform the dynamic nature of SPSE.

Clarity and Comfort. The last relational pair was clarity and comfort. The communication strategies of clarity, self-disclosure, humor, and person-centered communication were evident in at least two of the organizations. Therefore, a common thread in all of the organizations was utilization of clear communication strategies that increased participants' comfort. While clarity and comfort easily surface at organizations that practice SPSE, this process is different from traditional approaches to sex education. Although research studies from a communication perspective—studies that center communication rather than simply seeing it as a vehicle for the transmission of content—have not investigated specific communication strategies used in abstinence-only or comprehensive sex education classrooms, I argue that these strategies rarely are in harmony in these classrooms. Educators often fear repercussions if they speak with too much clarity or stray from the abstinence-only guidelines, which jeopardizes the clarity and comfort within the classroom. If instructors are fearful they may lose their jobs if they mention the “wrong” information, they may keep silent in the classroom and thus be unable to use comforting communication styles.

A sex-positive approach to sex education centers the tensions between clarity and comfort into a productive combination. Throughout my research sites, the organizations offered clear information but communicated it in a way that put the learners at ease. At Good Vibrations, SESAs use supportive nonverbal cues to the patrons while offering instructions or recommendations. Similarly, authors from Scarleteen use self-disclosure to create a bond with the user when they convey sensitive information. This relational

pair offers a dynamic example of the excellent combinations that can occur within a sex-positive approach to sexuality education.

In sum, these relational pairs inform the second level of my definition of SPSE. Emerging from a comparison of the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model I constructed from my data, these relational pairs conceptualize a second dimension that is necessary for sex-positive sexuality education. This approach uses multiple components, many of which have typically been seen as divergent, but which are balanced and dynamic within a sex-positive framework.

Dynamic

The balance formed in the five relational pairs—inclusivity and normalization, pleasure and health and safety, accessibility and a critical approach, open environment and agency, and clarity and comfort—demonstrates the dynamic of SPSE. While the pairs may appear to be contradictory, in SPSE they work together to create a balance. This perspective is unique from other approaches to sex education—abstinence-only and comprehensive—because whereas those approaches stay muddled in tensions over appropriate values, contexts, content, and communication strategies, SPSE embraces the natural tensions inherent in sexuality education. This dynamic of multiple concepts thriving together forms a holistic approach to sexuality education. SPSE transcends approaches that enforce an either/or or wrong/right dichotomy and instead brings divergent perspectives together in an all-inclusive approach to sexuality education.

The dynamic relational pairs constructed from the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education models create a definition of SPSE that offers a holistic approach to sexuality education that is important to our universal health. As the Social-Ecological

Model of Health Promotion Programs (McLeroy et al., 1988) explains, a person's health is nested in individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and ultimately public policy contexts. Therefore, if a SPSE perspective for educating people about their health is implemented, this could positively impact the communication in many contexts in ways that would improve the well-being of the community at large.

To answer my research questions, then, sex-positive sexuality education is defined as an approach to sexuality education rooted in the values, physical environment, and communication strategies demonstrated in the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model. From this model, relational pairs of important concepts of SPSE ultimately create a dynamic in which divergent ideas can co-exist to provide a holistic perspective for teaching about sexuality. All three dimensions—the foundation, the relational pairs, and the overall dynamic created—are necessary for SPSE.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Social Ecological Approaches to Health Behavior

Ecological models of health behavior and promotion are useful because they outline multiple levels of influence—intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy—on an individual's and community's public health. Social-ecological models explain how multiple determinants of health work together; therefore, they aid practitioners and scholars who strive to develop effective health promotion campaigns or to understand how and why health interventions—such as approaching sexuality education from a sex-positive approach—are necessary (Oetzel, et al., 2006; Sallis et al., 2008).

The Ecological Model of Health Promotion Programs (McLeroy et al., 1988) provided a useful theoretical framework for this study. First, it is aligned with my paradigmatic assumptions for conducting and presenting research in a collaborative methodological approach using the interpretive, critical and feminist perspectives. Second, social-ecological approaches provide a way to understand how SPSE influences and is determined by environment causes. Thus, my study adds to the literature about how one type of health behavior, sex-positive sexuality education, can be framed from a social ecological approach. Additionally, it explains the influences SPSE can make at each level within an ecological model. My study theoretically contributes to this approach in conjunction with principles of a social-ecological approach outlined by Sallis, Owen, and Fisher (2008).

First, a social-ecological perspective specifies how several factors influence health behaviors and offers a way to understand how SPSE can influence health and wellness at multiple levels. Intrapersonally, SPSE promotes agency; equips learners with knowledge about the negative consequences of risky sexual behaviors; and protects them from acquiring STIs, unplanned pregnancies, abortions, or traumatic experiences. But it also encourages individuals to have sexual pleasure, which studies have shown can relieve stress, physical pain, boost immunity, and promote sleep (Doheny, 2008). At the interpersonal level, SPSE can help sexual partners communicate their needs and wants with more clarity, help parents and children discuss the benefits and risks to sexual behaviors, and explain strategies that providers can implement to create a more comfortable climate in which to discuss sex and sexuality with their patients. Organizationally, SPSE offers ways for community-based organizations as well as

federally funded organizations to disseminate messages about sex and sexuality in a more productive way. From a community level, SPSE has the potential to transform community health. For example, according to the SIECUS (2009) state profile, New Mexico ranks 2nd in the nation for teen pregnancy, 18th in the nation for abortion among young people, and 24th in the nation in cases of HIV/AIDS diagnosed among people ages 13-19. If a sex-positive approach to sexuality education promotes agency, safe sex methods, and communication skills in an inclusive and accessible manner, then it potentially can rectify the grim sexual health statistics of a community like New Mexico. Finally, from a policy level, if legislators, public health administrators, and health-care organizations approached health from a sex-positive approach, they could craft bills and initiatives that would fund and support traditionally marginalized communities such as women, LGBTQ individuals, minorities, adolescents, and sex workers.

Finally, this research about sex-positive sexuality education can be transferred to other health issues, because the same tensions cited here can be resolved in other health education contexts. I believe if people were educated about SPSE, they could transfer the model, definition, and its competencies—such as agency, communication skills, inclusivity, or using a critical approach—to other health behaviors such as risky alcohol and substance abuse, bullying, or domestic and intimate partner violence. In sum, this study contributes to social-ecological perspectives on health promotion and behavior change because it conceptualizes sex-positive sexuality education from this perspective, something that has yet to be seen in scholarly research; it also offers examples of the benefits to using an SPSE approach within the multiple levels of factors that influence health and wellness.

Grounded Practical Theory

As discussed in Chapter Two, the purpose of grounded practical theory (GPT) is to “provide reasoned normative models—rational reconstructions—to inform praxis and critique” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 265). GPT explores the nature of communicative problems, investigates communicative techniques and strategies, and offers situated ideals to help resolve the problem. GPT is especially useful in health communication because it bridges the gap between theory and practice often faced by scholars and practitioners working within this field. This study adds to the list of communicative practices from all fields that are influenced by grounded practical theory. The communicative practice of educating young people and adults about sexuality is a practice that scholars, practitioners, and lay people face daily. Although people may want to talk about sexuality from a sex-positive approach, they also may face problems such as feeling uncomfortable, nervous, unprepared or embarrassed that force them to avoid or poorly manage the communication interaction.

I uncovered communicative strategies and situated ideals within my data that can help solve this problem. The dynamic formed by relational pairs that emerged as the essence of SPSE represents the situated ideals privileged in grounded practical theory; these encourage people who are struggling with discussing sex and sexuality to embrace the holistic perspective that SPSE offers. First, it presents them with multiple values, options, and strategies to use to communicate. Second, it allows for people who are struggling with communicating about sex to acknowledge that they may feel comfortable with some components and feel tensions over others, but overall realize that for effective sexual communication to occur they must learn to embrace all elements. In sum, my

study contributes to GPT because it helps to explain the communicative situation of sex-positive sexuality education, identifies specific techniques that participants can use during this practice, and clarifies situated ideals that can help scholars, practitioners, and lay people discuss sexuality more easily.

Sexuality Education Implications

Sex-Positive Sexuality Education in Practice

The results of this study contribute to public knowledge about how to construct, communicate, and define a new approach to sexuality education. First, this study contributes to literature on sex education because it provides concrete examples of sex-positive sexuality education. This is significant because although many scholars (Corinna, 2009; Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Kulwicki, 2008; Patton, 1996; Perry, 2008) have called for the reformation of sexuality education, and organizations claim they support or practice sex-positive sexuality communication, no prior research has investigated the demonstration of this approach. Phillips and Fine (1992) state that the greatest gift educators can give their students is “the invitation to interrupt the structured silences that deprive them of the critical sexuality education they so desperately need and deserve;” however, no prior research has established what this re-conceptualized sexuality education looks like in practice (p.249).

This study rectifies this problem and offers concrete examples of how to teach sexuality education from a sex-positive approach. The Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model clearly outlines how SPSE is transmitted. Organizations have clear sex-positive core values, appropriately utilize space within their physical environment, and communicate with competence. However, besides advancing this

explanatory model, this study provides numerous explanations of abstract concepts. For example, I explain how these organizations' instilled agency within their users, created accessible learning environments, defined terms, explained concepts, highlighted female sexual desire and pleasure, and critically interrogated heteronormativity, ableism, racism, and sexism. This study, therefore, moves beyond public arguments calling for bettering sexuality education or theoretical musing regarding what sexuality education should look like to instead defining and demonstrating how sexuality education can be done innovatively.

Second, this study is significant because it investigates a range of contexts. By analyzing an organization that is geared for the general adult public, an organization that is geared for academic and practitioners in the sexuality field, and an organization that is web based and for adolescents, I generate knowledge about how sexuality education should be communicated from multiple angles and for multiple audiences. Three organizations, then, offered a unique opportunity to compare and contrast findings across contexts. As a result, the owner of a small-town adult sexuality retail store may be able to garner just as much useful information from this study as a government-funded research team developing a sexual health website for adolescents.

Ultimately, I found that despite having vastly different target audiences and channels to disseminate their messages, SPSE organizations use similar strategies. While their values may differ slightly depending on the organization, such as the SI valuing an academic approach more than GV due to their different missions and audiences, all sites enacted sex-positive values, created a welcome and open environment regardless of the constraints of technology, and privileged communication strategies that were clear and

produced comfort. Furthermore, SPSE places these various elements in a dynamic that makes use of rather than dismisses or avoids the natural tensions involved in sexuality education. These findings are significant because they aid educators in designing curriculum, practitioners in creating health campaigns, retail owners in bettering their business practices, and the general public in talking about sex with greater ease.

Also, this study reiterates the usefulness of delivering sexuality education in a computer-mediated context. Despite not having any face-to-face interactions, the strategies used on Scarleteen to communicate sex-positive sexuality education were equal to and at times exceeded the strategies used by Good Vibrations and the SI. This is important to note because it lends support to previous research that has called for the use of computer-mediated communication as an approach to sexuality education (Beck et al., 2004; Oden & Brown, 2010; Sprecher et al., 2008). In a time where school-based sexuality education faces challenges and resistance from parents, school boards, and the general public, perhaps computer-mediated approaches are more useful and offer a more pragmatic context for sexuality education.

In addition, this study refines existing knowledge on what principles and practices can assist investigators in evaluating other organizations. By using the elements within the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model, the relational pairs, and the dynamic, a practitioner, scholar, or member of an organization can determine if an organization is enacting this philosophy. There are many reasons why health programs need to be evaluated, including measuring the program's impact, determining if the program worked, using evaluation data to plan future activities, developing theory, and

funding the health programs (Valente, 2002). For these reasons, this study offers a way for sex-positive sexuality education programs to be evaluated.

Along with evaluating health programs, this study offers qualitative researchers insight on how to analyze and report their data. Grounded theory proved extremely useful while in the field to make sense of the events I was observing; however, importing my field notes and interview transcripts into the data-analysis software program, NVivo was an equally important step. By using NVivo I was able to easily decipher themes and make connections across my extensive data set. This study is an example of how multiple levels of data analysis may be necessary in order to fully understand one's dataset.

Finally, this study has social and political implications. As the famous feminist slogan states, "the personal is political," and that is certainly the case with sexuality education. The debate about the "right" approach to teaching sexuality education rages on. For example, despite the overwhelming evidence I have outlined against abstinence-only approaches to sexuality education, in April, 2012, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walked signed an abstinence-only bill into state legislation, repealing the state's current comprehensive approach to sexuality education (Ujifusa, 2012). Such stubborn adherence to ineffective approaches to sexuality education only highlights the importance of this study. It is vital for studies, such as mine, to consider the success of new approaches to sexuality education and to be disseminated into the hands of policy makers— such as state legislators and school board committee members—but also to parents and concerned adults. The public must address the social ramifications—unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, abortion, and poverty—that can be correlated with ineffective sexuality education and start to politically demand that we do better for

our communities. This study may provide a small step toward realizing the importance and necessity of finding a better way to teach sexuality education.

Definition of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education

Using concrete examples from the three varied organizations, then, I was able to define sex-positive sexuality education. The term *sex-positive sexuality education* emerged from the philosophy of sex-positivity, started by feminists, and now is used by scholars and activist in a range of fields including health education and sexuality studies. However, since communication scholars are interested in understanding and defining communication phenomena, it is appropriate that this study, conducted from a communication standpoint, has developed a definition for a widely used term that is not well understood (Craig, 1999). The definition of SPSE presented in this study and constructed from my case studies explains that SPSE is constituted at three levels:

1. *Foundation*: Constructed from the elements within the Enactment of Sex-Positive Sexuality Education model, SPSE depends on certain core values, a particular type of physical environment, and certain communication strategies.
2. *Relational Pairs*: A combination of traditionally divergent key constructs that emerged across the dataset also is necessary to SPSE. These pairs include inclusivity and normalization, pleasure and health and safety, accessibility and a critical approach, open environment and agency, and clarity and comfort.
3. *Dynamic*: The balance achieved within SPSE manages and productively makes use of the tension between pairs to offer a holistic perspective on sexuality education.

These interrelated levels offer a definition of SPSE that practitioners and scholars can use to extend their knowledge, develop a SPSE program, or evaluate an existing program.

Directions for Future Research

This study offers many possibilities for future research. First, this study can be a springboard for additional scholarly research of other contexts that implement a sex-positive approach. Scholars can use this model and my definitions of sex-positive sexuality education to investigate and further evaluate the nature and benefits of these programs. Also, future research would benefit by talking with those who have access to sex-positive sexuality education. I was unable to talk with patrons at Good Vibrations or those who use the Scarleteen website, and had only a few interviews with students at the Summer Institute. It would be useful for scholars to investigate SPSE from the standpoint of the users.

In addition, scholars could undertake a longitudinal study in regard to the impact of sex-positive sexuality education. In order to understand the influence an approach like this may have on its users, it would be helpful to study sexual health across their lifespan for those who have access to SPSE. For example, perhaps users of Scarleteen are more sexually healthy or make smarter sexual health decisions than their peers who do not seek out sex-positive sexuality education. Longitudinal studies would help clarify the significance to using a sex-positive approach.

Finally, research should be conducted that incorporates this approach into health campaigns or promotion pieces or sexuality-education curricula. There are many opportunities for health promotion practitioners to use this research to design better sexual health and education campaigns. It is also important that future research develop

these findings into a curriculum package, and I see this as a logical next step in my own research. Based on the information I gained about sex-positive values, how to create an open and welcoming physical environment, strategies necessary for effective sexual communication, and embracing the holistic dynamic created in sex-positive sexuality education, I would like to create an age and culturally competent sex-positive sexuality education curriculum to be used in middle or high schools. I believe that research is most beneficial when it is in the hands of the people who need it the most, and this study provides an excellent opportunity to do future research that can disseminate these findings and help revolutionize our nation's sexual health.

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