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Separate, but Not Equal: A Content Analysis of Sexuality Education Curricula

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This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Heather Jaffe as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

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Comprehensive sexuality education is important to the healthy development of adolescent during the identity formation process, especially for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents. For sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents, the identity formation process can lead to fluctuations in both sexuality and gender identity (Steensma et al., 2013). If sexual minority adolescents struggle to integrate their sexual identity, they may have greater psychological adjustment issues (Rosario et al., 2011). The inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum, lowers rates of bullying and creates a safer school environment. The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze the content of sexuality education curricula to see if they are meeting their intended purpose of promoting healthy sexual identity formation for all adolescents. The overarching research question was, *what do current sexuality education curricula say to promote identity formation for adolescents who are sexual minorities or gender nonconforming*? A content analysis was done on two sexuality education curricula examining for comprehensiveness and inclusivity. From the analysis, four major themes emerged: *inconsistent approach to sexuality-related terms*, *multi-modal instruction/active learning*, *a developmental approach*, and *a false sense of inclusion*. Sexual minorities and gender nonconforming students

can be made to feel less than their peers by how LGBTQ information is covered by the curricula. This is due to an omission of relevant information, the information that is taught and how it is delivered. The implications are suggestions for changes in terminology, inclusion of more information on different subjects, and ways to create equality in the information.

Keywords: LGBTQ, adolescence, identity formation, sexual minority, gender nonconforming, sexuality education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the term "sexuality education"? Do you think of a formal class in school, a parent having "the talk" with a pubescent teen, a popular Netflix series, or something else entirely? Sexuality education is a term that has been used in many ways and can convey different meanings depending on the context. In this research study, the term will be used to refer to formal educational courses offered within schools.

Forty-eight states across the United States mandate some form of sexuality education in order to teach adolescents about the basics of sexual health (Garg & Volerman, 2020). The content varies widely, but often includes topics such as pubertal development, conception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), abstinence, and healthy relationships (SEICUS, 2021). How the topics are taught depends on the approach within the curriculum (Donovan, 1998). The two main approaches for sexuality education are sexual-risk aversion, which has a focus on abstinence and avoiding unplanned pregnancies and comprehensive, which has a focus on giving students the knowledge and skills to make appropriate and healthy choices (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). While the two approaches have very different goals, they both focus on heterosexual relationships. Adolescents learn about relationships, STIs, sex and more within the context of heterosexuality. This helps most adolescents understand what is happening to them and what to expect as they form their sexual identity.

But what happens to individuals who do not see themselves represented in their education? How do they process what they are experiencing and what it means? To illustrate the consequences of feeling excluded or not represented, I share the experience I had with sexuality education when I was a teenager.

I grew up in Massachusetts, a state that is often considered to be liberal and highly committed to social topics. We had health class for one semester per year in high school where sexuality education was somewhat weaved into. I remember learning more from the book on puberty my parents left for me than that class. LGBTQ+ topics were not discussed in the sexuality education I received. The sexuality education I had in public school as an adolescent was considered comprehensive, and yet there was no inclusion of topics related to LGBTQ+ issues. I never felt "touched" by the information, but I did not understand why I was unable to relate. It just did not make sense to me why I was not feeling the same things as everyone else. I did not feel like I belonged or even fully fit in with my friends and I often felt compelled to pretend that I thought or felt the way(s) they did. I overcompensated and forced myself to crush on guys I logically knew were attractive, even though I was never actually attracted to them. I was not being authentic, but I did not understand why until later in my life when I was exposed to information beyond the heterosexist education I received in my adolescence.

It took me until my sophomore year of college, when I found a group of friends who made me feel safe and who could see the hidden gay girl inside of me, before I could see her. If I had not met them, I do not know how I would have started navigating, learning, and exploring my sexual identity. It happened after I had dropped out of college and was in my late twenties, long after the teen years of taking a sexuality education class in high school. Before meeting these friends, I was lost, confused, anxious, and depressed. I had no idea who I was as a person because I had no idea what my sexuality was and how to handle what I was feeling. Once I was able to come to an understanding of my sexual identity, I was able to start learning who I am as a person. This process typically takes place in adolescence, but because I did not understand my sexuality, I was unable to start the process until my late twenties. I felt like I was far behind most

of my heterosexual peers with finding a partner and career path going into my thirties because of this.

My experience was situated in the late 1990s, early 2000s. It has been over 20 years since I left high school, and yet many teens are still exposed to only limited information in their sexuality education. Laws focused on exclusion are continuing in states like Florida. Two such laws are a 2021 ban of transgender girls in sports and a 2022 "Don't Say Gay" bill limiting the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in public schools. These bills are attacks on the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, but the impact also negatively affects their heterosexual peers. If only negative messages about LGBTQ+ individuals are reaching students, they have a very limited and damaging view of the variety in human experiences (McNeill, 2013). Instead, it can encourage misunderstanding of and even a sense of hatred for LGBTQ+ individuals. Those who identify as LGBTQ+ may develop mental health issues that can lead to severe depression, anxiety, and even suicide (Toomey et al., 2013). For heterosexual adolescents, the messages can escalate into bullying because the lack of knowledge turns into a fear of LGBTQ+ individuals and what interacting with them could mean (Toomey et al., 2012). This can lead to an environment where it is unsafe for LGBTQ+ individuals to be themselves for fear of being harassed, ostracized, or even killed. Eventually, this has the potential to create a mental health crisis for LGBTQ+ individuals because they start to feel like something is wrong with them and that they do not fit in.

The Problem

During adolescence, the identity formation process is considered to be a central developmental task – this includes exploring and testing out what versions of themselves are accepted or rejected by those around them (Erickson, 1985). This exploration happens in the

environments they most frequent such as in the home or in school. One of the major aspects of identity explored during this time is sexuality (Steensma et al., 2013). For adolescents who identify themselves as sexual minority or gender nonconforming, the ability to explore safely leads to positive mental health outcomes (Rosario et al., 2011). In a school setting, this means creating a climate that feels open and welcoming to this exploration.

Seventy-five percent of gender nonconforming and sexual minority adolescents identified an inclusive curriculum as a key component in creating a school climate that feels safe for their sexuality identity exploration (Proulx et al, 2019). Having representation in English and History classes can help in this process but seeing themselves represented in sexuality education curriculum can have an even bigger positive impact (Russell et al., 2021). Having LGBTQ+ topics in sexuality education helps sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents normalize what they are experiencing and creates an atmosphere of acceptance (Snapp et al., 2016). Unfortunately, there are numerous barriers to accessing LGBTQ+ topics, including a lack of information or misinformation in the sexuality education curriculum (Snapp et al., 2015).

This lack of information goes directly against the intended purpose of sexuality education, which is to promote healthy sexual identity formation for all adolescents (Leung et al., 2019). Sexuality education is especially important because it plays a dual role in the identity formation process for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents. It starts by playing a large role in the normalization of being a sexual minority or gender nonconforming (Russell et al., 2021). This happens by introducing and discussing the topics as just another part of the curriculum, not a one-off lesson that is never discussed again (Snapp et al., 2015), and by explaining that sexual orientation is biological, not a choice someone makes (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). This creates an environment where sexual minority and gender nonconforming

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adolescents feel safe to explore their identity. They also feel safe because they see themselves represented in the curriculum (Snapp et al., 2015) which leads to better long-term psychosocial outcomes (Toomey et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the content of sexuality education curricula to see if they are meeting their intended purpose of promoting healthy sexual identity formation for all adolescents. To accomplish this sexuality education curricula needs to include certain areas I have identified using a developmental framework created for this study through the combination of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model and Erikson's Eight Stages of Man.

Research Questions

I used a content analysis to answer the following overarching research question: w*hat do current sexuality education curricula say to promote identity formation for adolescents who are sexual minorities or gender nonconforming?* To answer this question, I had four specific research questions to ask while examining each curriculum. The specific research questions for the content analysis are:

(1) How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?

(2) What educational methods are used in each curriculum?

(3) How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?

(4) How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-
nonconforming youth?

Significance of the Study

There are three levels this study will contribute to, theoretical, methodological, and practical. The first level this study contributes is with the theoretical framework. A

developmental theoretical framework was created through the combination of the Bioecological Model and the Eight Stages of Man. The creation of this framework gives researchers a comprehensive approach to study development by showing the significance of environmental context to an individual's development. Using this framework for the methodological level creates a set of theoretical-based topics outside of the topics identified by state mandates and SEICUS to examine curriculum for.

The third and final level of this study is the practical level. By identifying the gaps in sexuality curricula this study will help schools and practitioners choose appropriate sexual education curricula where all adolescents, including sexual minority and gender nonconforming feel represented. Practitioners will be better equipped to help students struggling with understanding their sexual identity by utilizing the criteria to choose curricula. It will also help create a safe space where every student will feel represented in the curricula.

In the following chapters of this dissertation, I discuss the importance of inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education as well as outline the study I conducted. The literature review in chapter two examines sexuality education and its importance to the healthy development of adolescents. This chapter includes a developmental theoretical framework that combines Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model and Erikson's Eight Stages of Man. Chapter three describes the methods I used in my study, including the choosing of curricula and the data analysis process.

<center>**Chapter 2: Literature Review**</center>

Comprehensive sexuality education is important to the healthy development of adolescent sexuality (Rosario et al., 2011), yet it is often nonexistent in schools. In this literature review, I will examine current sexuality education in the United States and formulate an argument for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in schools using a developmental framework with a focus on sexual and gender minority students.

The impact and importance of sexuality education on adolescents has been studied by researchers since the 1800's (Oliphant, 1900; Rosenkranz & Brackett, 1880). The research has ranged from abnormal sexuality in the 1800's to what topics should be covered in today's schools. This literature review, which is divided into two sections will synthesize the importance of comprehensive sexuality education to the sexuality identity process. The first part of the literature review will do this by exploring research on sexuality education, adolescent development and identity formation, state mandates on sexuality education, content of sexuality education, education methodological approaches, the hidden curriculum, and school climate and LGBTQ+ adolescent mental health. The second section of the literature review will present a developmental theoretical framework describing the importance of comprehensive sexuality education on the identity formation process.

Sexuality Education

There are two main categories sexuality education curriculum can fall into, sexual-risk aversion or comprehensive. Sexual-risk aversion curriculum is the modern version of abstinence-only curriculum. These curricula focus on teaching adolescents to wait until marriage and that sexual abstinence is the only way until a heterosexual marriage (Donovan, 1998). The second category is comprehensive sexuality education, and these curricula include:

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"…the sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals. Its various dimensions involve the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system; identity, orientation, roles, and personality; and thoughts, feelings, and relationships" (SEICUS, 2018).

These curricula, depending on the state mandates include information that is relevant to all students, not just those who identify as cisgender and heterosexual (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).

As children make their way through the education system, they receive multiple messages on how to behave through the formal curriculum as well as through informal means. One of the primary messages directed at students in many schools is that individuals should adhere to the societal norms of being straight and cisgender. The message comes from the societal assumption, known as heteronormativity, which means being straight and cisgender is the normative way of life (Jackson, 2006). The building blocks of the majority of sexuality education curricula rely on this assumption of heteronormativity (Elia, 2000). Heteronormativity is taught in multiple ways through our education system. For example, in the books chosen for English classes, in how teachers present/approach topics, in the content of social studies and sexuality education curriculum, which in most schools do not address LGBTQ+-related topics. This can create a minoritized and marginalized mindset, which can lead to psychological distress and mental health problems for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents coming to terms with their identities (Castro & Sujak, 2014). The informal curriculum of heteronormativity includes messages about sexuality and gender (Cobanoglu & Engin Demir, 2014) that are communicated through social interactions with peers and educators throughout

their education (Musto, 2019). This is often communicated through the behavior modeled by the adults in their lives and the heteronormative culture in schools.

Heteronormativity in schools can begin in preschool and continue throughout the K-12 system (Gansen, 2017). It starts with the assumption that every child has a mom and dad and evolves into things like the exclusion of sexuality when discussing James Baldwin or Sylvia Plath. Heteronormativity being weaved into the curriculum throughout K-12 effects the way students view their own sexuality as well as their peers, creating issues for adolescents struggling with their sexual identity.

Adolescent Development and Identity Formation

As we are considering what a good curriculum is, one thing it must be is developmentally appropriate while meeting the needs of all adolescents (Leung et al., 2019). To accomplish this, what is happening developmentally during adolescence should be considered. This work centers around ones' identity and all of the different components of it where adolescents test and explore aspects of their identity in order to have a better sense of self as they move into young adulthood (Erickson, 1985).

According to Erikson (1985), identity formation is an ongoing process throughout our lives, and during adolescence it is the major life crisis being worked through. Adolescents work towards an understanding of who they are and their place in the world by examining and assessing their different identities. They do this through things like experimenting, modeling behaviors they see from peers and family, and through the education provided to them by school, the media and more. Elisabetta Crocetti (2017), proposed a three-factor identity model that includes commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment to describe how this process happens. Children enter the stage of adolescence with some personality

commitments such as being an introvert or extrovert, loyal, or angry. Adolescents then take the time to explore and reflect on the choices they have made by doing things like make sure their friends are loyal and can be trusted or seeing their friends' reactions to their angry outbursts. Finally, they compare their present commitment to alternate commitments because the current is no longer satisfactory such as a friend breaking their trust and now unwavering loyalty does not work for them (Crocetti, 2017). Through this trial-and-error process adolescents start to firm up aspects of their personality.

As adolescents are going through the trial-and-error process with their personality, they are going through something similar with their sexual identity. Similarly, sexual fluidity during adolescence is a way to explore their sexual identity and development (Stewart et al., (2019). 20% of adolescents experience fluctuations in their sexual identity, and by the end of the third year of adolescence 22% of girls and 10% of boys identified themselves as something other than 100% straight (Stewart et al., 2019). With so many adolescents experiencing this fluctuation and sexual fluidity, it is important for sexuality education curricula to address what these adolescents are feeling and experiencing.

Exploring their sexuality and experiencing sexual fluidity while in the identity formation process helps with the resolution of the identity formation crisis happening in adolescence. Becht et al. (2016), developed a classification system to understand how adolescents experience the identity formation crises. The classification system focuses on an adolescents educational and interpersonal identities and whether they have synthesis or crisis with their identity. The four classes are: *crisis-like educational identity class, crisis-like interpersonal identity class, educational identity synthesis class,* and *interpersonal identity synthesis class*. Those who fall into the synthesis classes claim certainty in their identity, whereas those who fall into the crisis

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classes experience high identity uncertainty with higher rates of anxiety (Becht et al., 2016). Specifically for interpersonal identity, 53% of adolescents have identity synthesis while 47% have a crisis-like interpersonal identity (Becht et al., 2016).

Adolescence is a crucial period for gender identity development because it either becomes a place where a consolidation of existing gender development happens, or it may include a developmental path that leads to gender dysphoria. For sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents, the identity formation process can lead to fluctuations in both sexuality and gender identity (Steensma et al., 2013). If sexual minority adolescents struggle to integrate their sexual identity, they may have greater psychological adjustment issues (Rosario et al., 2011). One of the big factors in their psychological adjustment is their social support (McDonald, 2018). If the people around them are supportive of their sexual identity process, it will be easier for sexual minority youth to integrate their identities and feel positive about their sexual identity. When they do not have social support through family, peers, or school (including teachers and curricula), they tend to have a much harder time integrating their sexual identity (Rosario et al., 2011).

As adolescents are exploring their identity, school can have a major impact in how safe they feel while exploring (Toomey et al., 2012). School is often one of the first places adolescents begin exploring their different identities. The climate of the school will directly influence how members of the school community receive this exploration (Russell et al., 2021). The way the exploration is received by those in the school directly affects how a student feels about themselves and their sexual identity (Watson et al., 2020). Unknowingly, states also play a large role in this through the mandates they have in place regulating sexuality education curriculum.

State Mandates in Sexuality Education

Sexuality and gender exploration within the classroom occurs within the context of state mandates on what should and should not be included within sexuality education (Garg & Volerman, 2020). Currently, 48 U.S. states mandate sexuality education content and standards for their public schools (Garg & Volerman, 2020). Each state has its own set of mandates and guidelines regarding what topics should be covered and how they are to be taught creating quite a bit of variation from one state to another.

According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS, 2021), the current mandates and guidelines for sexuality education can be organized into three categories: 1) requirements and quality of education, 2) additional requirements for sex education or Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Sexually Transmitted Infections instruction such as abortion, consent, and LGBTQ+ topics, and 3) healthy relationships instruction.

The first component refers to what specific content is included in the curriculum (requirements) and then the curriculum is assessed for age-appropriateness, the extent to which the information is evidenced-based, culturally appropriate, and medically accurate (quality).

The second category has to do with what schools should or must cover in sex education and HIV/STI lessons. The following topics are addressed: abstinence and contraception, LGBTQ+ topics, and abortion as a pregnancy outcome. And in some states, it is required to promote heterosexual marriage as the only option.

The third component is healthy relationships instruction. This includes the following topics: communication skills, decision-making skills, violence prevention, and consent. How consent is covered can differ based on the legal definition each state has as well as mandates that states have on what they name the lesson and how it is taught to the students.

Below is a table adapted from SEICUS information from the most recent policy analysis showing the wide variety in state guidelines:

Current State Guidelines
33 states and the District of Columbia mandate sex education
38 states mandate HIV education
34 states require schools to stress abstinence when sex education or HIV/STI instruction is provided
16 states require instruction on condoms or contraception when sex education or HIV/STI instruction is provided
13 states do not require sex ed or HIV/STI instruction to be any of the following: age-appropriate, medically accurate, culturally responsive, or evidence-based/evidenced-informed
13 states require sex education or HIV/STI instruction to include information on consent
9 states require culturally responsive sex education and HIV/STI instruction
10 states have policies that include affirming sexual orientation instruction on LGBQ identities or discussion of sexual health for LGBTQ+ youth
8 states explicitly require instruction that discriminates against LGBTQ+ people

SEICUS, 2021

This table highlights the great variation in state guidelines and shows how many adolescents are not getting a comprehensive sexuality education. Comparing the states of Illinois, California, and Florida highlights how different state mandates can be. Illinois has the most inclusive mandates, giving their students every identified requirement for comprehensive sexuality education (SEICUS, 2021). California has similar mandates but does not include evidenced based as a requirement. California also promotes heterosexual marriage as the goal even though they include LGBTQ+ topics in their sexuality education (SEICUS, 2021). In Florida sexuality education is mandated along with HIV/STI content and some healthy relationship content. Sex education and HIV education should be age appropriate. Additionally, abstinence is stressed, discriminatory language regarding LGBTQ+ people is required, as is the promotion of heterosexual marriage as the only option (SEICUS, 2021). Depending on which of these states you live in, your sexuality education can look very different.

The range of mandates and the lack of high-quality standards that are evidence based makes it hard for adolescents to get a full understanding of what is happening to them and what it means (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). In states like Florida that mandate discriminatory practices towards LGBTQ+ individuals, students who identify as sexual minority or gender nonconforming can suffer mental health repercussions for being told their identity is not okay (Proulx et al., 2019).

It is important to look beyond state mandates to examine what a school decides to teach. This is highly influenced by the community in which the school exists (Rabbitte & Enriquez, 2019). The mandates for the specific issues a curriculum need to cover are broad, leaving the details at the community level. States with discriminatory mandates create geographical barriers for sexual minority and gender nonconforming students who are trying to access information essential to their identity formation.

Along with the mandates, the two biggest factors related to what sexuality education curriculum is taught are access to curriculum and the values of the teacher (Woo et al., 2011). If a teacher is not comfortable teaching about LGBTQ+ topics, even if it is required, this can lead to inaccurate information or only select information being taught, especially if the state does not mandate evidenced-based or medically accurate curriculum. Most schools do not have a large budget; therefore, their sexuality education curricula maybe outdated or may consist of whatever resources the teachers are able to find for free online.

Even with every state having its own approach to sexuality education, there are four overarching objectives behind every sexuality education curriculum (Leung et al., 2019). These objectives include:

1. Providing accurate information about human sexuality

2. Helping youths develop healthy attitudes, values, and insights regarding human sexuality

3. Equipping youths with communication, assertiveness, decision-making, non-coercive in relationships

4. Encouraging adolescents to make responsible choices by practicing abstinence, postponing sex, practicing safe sex (Leung et al., 2019)

The way sexuality education is currently being regulated with each state setting their own mandates, these standards are not being met for every student. Instead, students who are cisgender and heterosexual see themselves reflected in the curriculum and those who identify as a sexual minority or gender nonconforming rarely do. Even when cisgender and heterosexual individuals see themselves reflected in sexuality curriculum, research has shown they are not receiving a truly comprehensive sexuality education.

Many states are not meeting these overarching objectives because they are lacking a comprehensive, developmental approach to their sexuality education curriculum. What the United States has instead is a variety of approaches based on what each state mandates and the values of the teachers and their comfort determining what they cover (Leung et al., 2019). This leads to curricula that cover only some parts of the core content areas of sexuality education.

When LGBTQ+ topics are included in sexuality education, multiple positive outcomes begin to take place at the school (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). These changes occur on both the school level and the individual level. The first of these positive changes is with the school climate. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum, especially in places like sexuality education, history, and social studies lowers the rate of bullying and school victimization for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). This

happens because these topics become normalized once they are introduced in an inclusionary fashion. Students no longer stigmatize and bully sexual minority and gender nonconforming peers because they develop an understanding of who they are and what they are going through. With studies showing a range of 59% to 84% of LGBTQ+ students experiencing verbal abuse and 63% feeling unsafe (Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, et al., 2015) introducing LGBTQ+ topics into the curriculum is an important part of lowering these numbers. Proulx et al. (2019), found that 75.2% of sexual minority and gender nonconforming felt peer supportiveness when their school had both a GSA and inclusive curriculum.

The normalization not only creates a safer school environment for sexual minority and gender nonconforming students it also provides them information and references for what they are going through. The positive impact this has on the mental health of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth is important with 53.8% of gay/lesbian students and 62.8% of bisexual students suffering from depressive symptoms and 36.7% of gay/lesbian students and 44.6% of bisexual students having suicidal thoughts (Proulx et al., 2019). In states that have LGBTQ+ inclusive sexuality education there is a 20% decrease in reported suicidal plans for every increase of 10% in schools teaching LGBTQ+ content in sexuality education (Proulx et al., 2019). This is a notable positive change in the mental health of sexual minority and nonbinary students and shows how inclusion can aide in changing students' experiences and mental health outcomes.

Content of Sexuality Education

The mandates discussed above are often used as a framework for the development and implementation of sexuality education. Both sexual-risk aversion and comprehensive sexuality education curricula have content that is intended to meet these mandates. However, researchers

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have identified that high quality sexuality education should include a wide list of topics

(Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Leung et al., 2019). A concise and

encompassing version of this content list developed by Future of Sex Education (FoSE, 2020)

includes seven content areas: *consent and healthy relationships, anatomy and physiology,*

puberty and adolescent sexual development, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation

and identity, sexual health, and interpersonal violence. See the table below for definitions of

each content area.

Content Area	Definition
Consent and Healthy Relationships	Outlines the functional knowledge and essential skills students need to successfully navigate changing relationships among family, peers, and partners. Special emphasis is given to personal boundaries, bodily autonomy, sexual agency and consent, and the increasing use and impact of technology within relationships.
Anatomy and Physiology	Outlines the functional knowledge students need to understand basic human functioning.
Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development	Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills students need to understand pivotal milestones for every person that impact physical, social, and emotional development, and that sexual development is normal and healthy
Gender Identity and Expression	Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills students need to address fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to gender, gender identity, gender roles, and gender expression as well as how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, and the importance of advocating for safety and equity.
Sexual Orientation and Identity	Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills students need to address fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to sexual orientation and identity as well as how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations and the importance of advocating for safety and equity
Sexual Health	Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills students need to understand STDs and HIV, including how they are prevented and transmitted, their signs and symptoms, and testing and treatment; how pregnancy happens, decision-making to avoid a pregnancy, and pregnancy prevention and options; and the personal and societal factors that influence sexual health decision-making and outcomes.

Interpersonal Violence	Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills students need to understand interpersonal and sexual violence, including prevention, intervention, resources, and local services; emphasizes the need for a growing awareness, creation, and maintenance of safe school and community environments for all students.

FoSE, 2020

Information covering each of these content areas should appear in any comprehensive sexuality curriculum, depending on state standards as well as school-level variables. The content also should use inclusive and broad language, allowing all students to feel represented. By learning this culturally relevant information, adolescents' positive outcomes extend beyond social acceptance to academic achievement (Snapp et al., 2015).

Consent and Healthy Relationships

When a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum is being developed or discussed for use, one of the first things that is brought into the conversation is healthy relationships. The importance of the topic stems from sociocultural norms, such as traditional gender roles and toxic sexual scripts that can lead to unhealthy sexual practices (Grose, Gabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). Women are not treated as equals when this happens, leaving them susceptible to outcomes such as pregnancy or STIs (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). The negative consequences affect sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents as well by perpetuating a heteronormative culture inside the school that can lead to homophobic and transphobic bullying (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). Introducing healthy relationship topics into sexuality education curriculum can help turn comprehensive sexuality education into a population-level intervention for dating and intimate partner violence by teaching adolescents how to prevent harm and develop healthy relationships throughout the life course (Kantor et al., 2021).

Part of the prevention of harm includes conversations regarding consent. Both men and women need to learn the importance of consent to sexual interactions to help break down

stereotypes related to traditional gender roles and to create an awareness of gender equity and to avoid discrimination (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). There is a sense of empowerment that comes with learning how to speak up and with the expanded notion of gendered behaviors (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). Additionally, when men's views of women evolve beyond the traditional gender roles, communication skills improve and there is a reduction in sexual coercion (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). To fully understand the nature of consent and healthy relationships adolescents should also have knowledge about what is happening to themselves and their peers biologically.

Anatomy and Physiology

The first step in understanding what is happening to their bodies is for adolescents to learn about human anatomy and physiology. Learning about the human body helps adolescents develop positive socio-emotional outcomes as the full knowledge can empower them to understand and accept their own bodies and make healthy sexual choices (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014; Santelli et al., 2021). Not only is this information important for adolescents' socio-emotional health it is also their right to learn medically accurate information to help protect their sexual and reproductive health (Kantor et al., 2021). As adolescents turn into adults and go through life changes, this will provide them an understanding of what changes are happening to them as they age.

By teaching adolescents how to protect their sexual and reproduction health, schools foster a supportive environment that translates to better academic achievement (Bridges & Alford, 2010). Additionally, the rates of risk-taking behaviors decrease, and the instances of healthy relationships increase (FoSE, 2016). Knowledge gives adolescents an understanding about their bodies, which in turn gives them the ability to make healthier and safer choices. This

is especially important as adolescents go through puberty and experience the changes that come along with it.

Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development

As the body begins to change, it is important to provide developmentally appropriate information, so that adolescents understand what is happening to them (FoSE, 2016). This knowledge is linked to a positive self-image (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). One reason for this is adolescents do not have to question what is happening to them. They consider it a natural phenomenon because they have been given accurate information relevant to their development. This is an especially important factor for adolescents who experience fluidity in their sexuality during this time (Stewart et al., 2019). Adolescents can and do make wise decisions when they are given the right information and teachers foster decision-making around sexual practices (Santelli et al., 2021), leading to lifelong healthy sexual practices (FoSE, 2016).

Lifelong healthy sexual practices include lower rates of unplanned/unwanted pregnancies and STIs (Bridges & Alford, 2010). They come from knowledge and its ability to empower adolescents into fewer risks-taking behaviors. It also comes from the knowledge of gender differences and what individuals experience as they go through puberty and sexual development (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Gendered bullying, sexual violence, and violence in relationships diminishes when traditional gender roles are examined critically (Szydiowski, 2015). These positive outcomes happen because gender norms and stereotypes begin to break down, creating safer environments for gender exploration (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).

Gender Identity and Expression

Including gender identity and expression in sexuality education is important for adolescents who might be questioning their own gender, but it also is helpful to recognize what

peers may be experiencing. Students who are questioning turn to peers, romantic partners, or online media to learn about what they are experiencing, if the information is not included in the sexuality education curriculum (Haley et al., 2019). This can lead to things like learning unhealthy sex practices and getting STIs (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). On the other hand, there is a decline in mental health issues when transgender and gender nonconforming adolescents see themselves in the curriculum (Toomey et al., 2013).

One of the reasons there could be a decline in mental health issues is the positive changes to a school climate. When information about transgender or gender nonconforming individuals is included in the curriculum, understanding and acceptance increases (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). This understanding and acceptance can lead to less bullying and school victimization, which creates a safer and better school climate (Russell et al., 2021).

Sexual Orientation and Identity

The positive changes associated with the inclusion of transgender and gender nonconforming topics in sexuality education also applies to information regarding sexual orientation and identity (Snapp et al., 2015). Questioning and sexual minority adolescents have better long-term psychosocial outcomes when sexual orientation information is addressed in the curriculum (Toomey et al., 2013). Part of the reason for this can be learning that sexual orientation is not a choice or something that can be influenced by learning about different identities but is biological and something you are born with (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). This refutes one of the key arguments against LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum.

The inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics creates the normalization of sexual minorities, a reduction in stereotyping, and in homophobic bullying (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Normalization then creates an environment where questioning and sexual minorities feel safe to

explore their sexuality (Toomey et al., 2012). The ability to openly explore their sexuality in a safe environment makes it easier for questioning and sexual minority adolescents to make positive sexual choices while utilizing information learned in school instead of online. Making these choices can reduce the instances of STIs as well as HIV/AIDS and improve the overall sexual health of sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents (Haley et al., 2019).

Sexual Health

Knowing how to take care of oneself sexually is important not just for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents, but for all sexually developing individual. The inclusion of sexual health in sexuality education delays first sexual intercourse, reduces the number of sexual partners, and increases the use of condoms or other contraceptives during intercourse (Barr et al., 2014). For example, changing the attitudes towards contraceptives by making them not just the woman's responsibility, but that of each member of the sexual encounter, leads to healthier decisions for individuals regardless of gender (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). In turn, this reduces the number of pregnancies and abortions for adolescents (Donovan, 1998), there is a 31% reduction in STIs (Hall et al., 2019), and rates of HIV/AIDS decline (Mustanski et al., 2015). Learning about safe sexual practices and having the ability to ask questions and explore in the open leads to better mental health outcomes for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents (Haley et al., 2019) and can help all adolescents recognize warning signs related to sexual interpersonal violence (Leung et al., 2019).

Interpersonal Violence

Learning about interpersonal violence in sexuality education is important to the development of healthy sexual practices and healthy relationships (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020). With 67% of female survivors and 45% of male survivors of intimate partner violence

first being victimized between the ages of 11 to 24 (Hall et al., 2019), it is relevant and important to include the information in sexuality education for adolescents. By learning relevant information, adolescents begin to feel empowered and able to speak up and get themselves out of potentially dangerous relationships (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). The inclusion of discussions about interpersonal violence in sexuality education helps adolescents feel empowered to speak out and is important given the societal concern regarding sexual violence, intimate partner violence and population-level strategies to prevent them (Kantor et al., 2021).

Each of these content areas are part of both sexual risk aversion and comprehensive sexuality education curricula. While the messages that are coming across to the students differ depending on the intended purpose of the curricula, the basic content areas are the same. The difference between the two types of curricula is in the interpretation and delivery of the content areas. This is where the teachers and their teaching practices come in and begins to influence how adolescents feel about the topics being covered (Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018).

Educational Methodological Approaches

Effective teaching practices have evolved from the old, rote model of a teacher merely standing at the front of the room and talking at the students. Recent studies have shown that this method does not benefit all students. Instead, we now know that students learn best when their learning style matches the teachers' teaching style (Gilakjani, 2012). Therefore, information must be presented in multiple ways for every student to learn. When a teacher moves away from rote learning and adopts multiple teaching practices, students see them as caring more about their education and there is a positive correlation with student achievement outcomes (Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018). This highlights the importance of the teacher's role in engaging and motivating students.

Teaching styles and approaches can either motivate or demotivate students' outcomes (Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018). Four of the main teaching styles include autonomy support, structure, control, and chaos (Aelterman et al., 2019). The eight teaching approaches that go with styles are, participative, attuning, guiding, clarifying, demanding, domineering, abandoning, and awaiting (Aelterman et al., 2019). Within each teaching style there are two types of approaches teachers can adopt to utilize the style. Below is a circumplex model designed to show how the teaching approaches and styles are related (Aelterman et al., 2019).
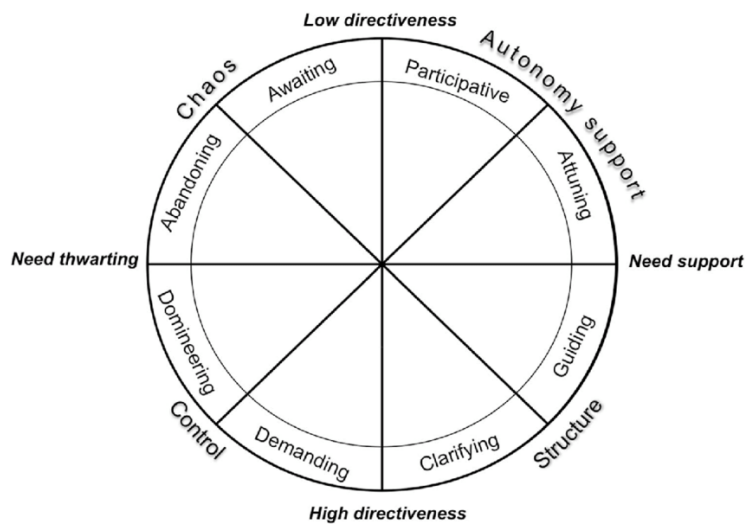
Of the four styles, autonomy, support, and structure were found to be the most motivating for students (Aelterman et al., 2019). The model shows that both styles fall on the needs support side where the focus is on supporting students and encourage them instead of controlling everything or letting the students control the classroom and chaos ensuing.

Using structure and autonomy support styles creates an active learning environment in which students can engage with the material and participate in their education. For most students in sexuality education this can create situation interest because it is new, real information that applies directly to the students' lives (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009). Creating an active and safe

learning environment for students is an essential part of the process. Ways teachers can do this include:

1. Identify their own teaching styles as well as their learning styles in order to reflect about classroom practices to obtain better results in the classroom.

2. Provide challenging and novel problems to students.

3. Use examples that require analysis and synthesis.

4. Require application of information and concepts.

5. Encourage questions and discussion.

6. Combine visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic techniques.

7. Balance the teaching styles and adapt activities to meet students´ style.

8. Assign open-ended activities encouraging creativity.

9. Encourage tasks variation and creativity to enable learners to challenge the beliefs in the way they learn and acquire knowledge (Gilakjani, 2012).

Teachers who use multimodal instruction create an active learning environment in which students feel motivated to learn and that their teacher cares about them and their outcomes (Aelterman et al., 2019; Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018). Sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents, even with the active learning style, will quickly lose interest if little of the information is relevant to them. When this happens, sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents are subject to a hidden curriculum that teaches them their sexuality or gender does not count via exclusion (Steck & Perry, 2016).

Hidden Curriculum

There are two types of curriculum students encounter while in school, the official and the hidden (Giroux, 1979). The official works towards achieving cognitive goals through formal

instruction while the hidden comes through via the underlying structures of meaning in the formal instruction and the social relations in the classroom and school as a whole (Giroux, 1979). When sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents are exposed to a curriculum that is not inclusive or is discriminatory, they struggle with the identity formation process which leads to poor mental health outcomes, as described above. Included in these experiences is exposure to the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum can be viewed as the "set of norms, customs, beliefs and language forms that are manifested in the structure and functioning of an institution" (Navarro Hernandez et al., 2013, p. 90). Students receive these messages inside the classroom, from both the curriculum and how the teacher approaches the topics. Three of the biggest messages that affect sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents are 1) that sexuality is dangerous, 2) heteronormativity, and 3) gender. When the messages surrounding sexuality are not inclusive, sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents receive a message telling them their identity needs to remain hidden (Klein et al., 2011).

Sexuality is Dangerous

The first negative message adolescents, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, may receive in sexuality education is that being sexual is dangerous (Klein et al., 2011). When children are exposed to sexuality or start exploring their own sexuality, some adults believe that they lose their innocence (Klein et al., 2011), leading to them wanting a delay in when the information is taught or a sexual-risk aversion curriculum. Adolescents who live in the states that promote abstinence only or require discriminatory language when discussing LGBTQ+ topics are receiving messages that tell them they are wrong or bad for wanting to be sexual. Taking a sexuality-is-dangerous approach to sexuality education restricts the information

being taught and creates an environment in which students are passive learners instead of applying critical thinking skills (McNeill, 2013). As passive learners the information will be learned in the classroom, but not retained, leaving students open to unhealthy sexual practices (McNeill, 2013).

The restrictive sexuality education taught in most schools sends negative messages to both cisgender, heterosexual students, and their sexual minority and gender nonconforming peers. For gender nonconforming and sexual minority students the messages lead them to think of themselves as nonnormative and to feel isolated from their peers, creating a feeling of being different or othered (Steck & Perry, 2016). When sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents are othered in these situations they feel isolated and like they need to remain hidden and silent (Klein et al., 2011). If they do not remain hidden, they leave themselves open to bullying and victimization in part because their peers have not been taught about LGBTQ+ topics, leaving them with a lack of understanding (Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, et al., 2015).

Heteronormativity

Treating sexuality as dangerous is also seen in comprehensive curriculum when sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancy are discussed only within the context of heterosexual relationships. In these situations, students receive messages that exploring their sexuality outside of heteronormative expectations is wrong and can lead to negative outcomes. Examples of this includes the state of Virginia where they list being gay as a risk factor for HIV (McNeill, 2013) and the state of Florida and its "Don't Say Gay" bill limiting the use of the term gay inside the classroom. These messages can create fear and significant mental health issues for sexual minority and gender nonconforming students (Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, et al., 2015).

Heteronormative messages sent to students "promote a normative form of monogamous, marital, middle-class, normatively gendered, and in many implicit and explicit ways, white, heterosexuality" (McNeill, 2013, p. 827). These standards are very limiting, and most adolescents and their families do not conform to this model (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Not being able to meet the traditional heteronormative standard causes sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents, along with their peers who do not meet these standards, to feel othered.

In curricula categorized as sexual risk aversion or abstinence based, heteronormativity is the standard. These curricula often ignore LGBTQ+ topics altogether or define sex as when a penis penetrates a vagina (McNeill, 2013). The message from these approaches is where the hidden curriculum of heteronormativity can be learned. For sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth it is this lack of representation throughout the curriculum and sex being defined using male penetration of a female vagina that teach them something is wrong with their identities. This message is also received by their peers, leaving sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents at risk for bullying (Proulx, 2019). Studies done in the United States have shown a range of 59% to 84% of LGBTQ+ students experiencing verbal abuse at school (Snapp et al., 2015). This decreases the chance that the classroom is a safe space for sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents to explore their identities.

Gender

Another negative message students can receive from the hidden curriculum is regarding gender constructs -- how one is supposed to behave based on their sex from social expectations to sexual roles is taught through interactions with this hidden curriculum (Navarro Hernandez et al., 2013). These hidden curriculum messages can shape one's development (Alsubaie, 2015).

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For example, if gender is covered in a binary fashion with specific gender roles for males and females, cisgender, heterosexual adolescents who fit these standards will come away with a positive outcome because the lessons were about them. On the other hand, gender nonconforming adolescents may feel excluded and sexual minority adolescents may learn gender roles that do not always fit how they feel or behave, which can lead to negative outcomes.

Not fitting into the societal standards being taught can once again send the message that something is wrong with sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents themselves or that what they are experiencing is not normal. The message is being taken in by their peers as well, which can lead to bullying issues (or at least exclusion and misunderstanding) within the school (Proulx, 2019). One can see this when adolescents show up to school dressed in ways that do not fit the gender norms of society and end up getting bullied by peers and/or forced to change by the administration. Covering topics such as gender fluidity, instead of teaching about gender as a binary concept, changes this message by removing the hidden curriculum and creates a safe space for all adolescents to explore their identity (Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, et al., 2015). When this does not happen incidents of othering such as transgender students not being allowed to use the bathroom affirming their gender, being blocked from wearing gender affirming clothes or being banned from playing sports happen and negatively impact transgender students mental health (Connolly, 2016.)

School Climate & LGBTQ+ Adolescents' Mental Health

The relationship between mental health and LGBTQ+ social acceptance has been identified in multiple studies (Asakura, 2016; McDonald, 2018; Watson et al., 2020). When people feel socially accepted and that all aspects of their identities are accepted, they are more likely to have positive mental health outcomes such as high self-esteem and confidence in their

abilities (Rosario et al., 2011). Alternatively, those who do not feel completely socially accepted have poorer mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Rosario et al., 2011). The school climate and treatment of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth play an important part in the acceptance of their identities and mental health outcomes. Just under 16% of gender nonconforming adolescents reported harassment at school (Toomey et al., 2012). This correlates with a study by Beam (2018) that found sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents are more vulnerable to adversity. Specifically, gender nonconforming boys are at a higher risk for school victimization than gender conforming peers (Toomey et al., 2013).

Schools can have an impact on mental health and social acceptance through the school climate. There are four identified strategies to improve the school climate for sexual minority and gender nonconforming students: inclusive policies, school personnel support and training, having a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), and by including sexual minority and gender nonconforming topics in the curriculum (Russell et al., 2021). When schools put inclusive policies in place students on the queer-spectrum experience less identity-based victimization, homophobic language and feel safer (Kull et al., 2016). Teachers and administrators going through trainings and learning how to step in when a student is being harassed for their sexuality or gender nonconformity, makes the environment feels safer for students (Toomey et al., 2012). Having a GSA on campus where students can receive social support and use their voice has shown to decrease the rate of suicide attempt in that school (Toomey et al., 2013) and feel more school belonging (Toomey & Russell, 2011). The inclusion of sexual minority and gender nonconforming topics in the curriculum helps in two ways. The first is with the treatment of students who identify as sexual minority or gender nonconforming. When schools include these topics in the curriculum the bullying and school victimization rates drop, creating a safer

environment (Snapp et al., 2016). The second way it helps is with sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents' sense of safety surrounding exploration. When they see themselves represented in the curriculum it feels safer for them to explore and gain an understanding of what their identity means (Toomey et al., 2013).

The research on school climate and its impact on sexual minority and gender nonconforming adolescents highlights the importance of having inclusive and welcoming environment. One of the best ways this can happen is by having inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education curriculum. By utilizing a developmental framework approach to sexuality education curriculum, such as the one I propose below, all students, including those who are sexual minority and gender nonconforming will feel more comfortable exploring and understanding their identity.

Summary

While the research on LGBTQ+ content in school curricula is not vast, enough has been done to show that there are positive outcomes for both the students and the school. One study done by Snapp, Burdge, Licona, et al. (2015), in California looked at student experiences with LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula with results showing a variety of experiences amongst the students as well as a number of areas where schools can improve. Typically, LGBTQ+ content was in social science and humanities classes, but instead of integrating them with social justice frameworks along with other topics, they are in stand-alone lessons (Snapp et al., 2015). This leads teachers to miss opportunities to include LGBTQ+ history or people in their formal teaching or when heterosexism or homophobia happens in the school (Snapp et al., 2015).

The relationship between LGBTQ+ topics and sexuality education can differ widely depending on where one lives. With each state identifying its own standards for sexuality

education and individual schools/districts picking their own curriculum from there, one can find little uniformity to what is being taught (Garg & Volerman, 2020). Students who live in states that does not require LGBTQ+ content or includes derogatory information about LGBTQ+ topics in their sexuality education curriculum face a geographic barrier to the information (Garg & Volerman, 2020).

Relevant topics such as Proposition 8 in California, Don't Ask Don't Tell, or same-sex marriage were taught in classes as they were happening and terminology regarding LGBTQ+ topics happens in health class (Snapp et al., 2015). Often in the stand-alone health lessons on LGBTQ+ topics the focus is on gay men and universalizes the LGBTQ+ experience (Snapp, Burdge, Licona, et al., 2015). While this inclusion is a step forward, it is still leaving out a big part of the LGBTQ+ community and what their experiences are as they come to terms with their gender or sexuality. This study shows that even in a state like California, where the state guidelines mandate inclusivity in sexuality education, things are missing or incomplete.

In the state of Illinois comprehensive sexuality education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, evidenced-based and culturally appropriate is required (SEICUS, 2021), yet students and teachers in Chicago stated that they still did not feel that the curriculum was inclusive (Jarpe-Ratner, 2019). Students reported the coverage of LGBTQ+ topics was not integrated throughout the curriculum, information about identity development was missing, as was a holistic approach to sexuality discussions (Jarpe-Ratner, 2019). Along with what was missing from the curriculum, students felt teachers could be judgmental and unaccepting, making it impossible for the lessons to take place in a safe space (Jarpe-Ratner, 2019). Even when states have all the right mandates in place, inclusivity is still not making its way into the classroom. I believe part of the reason for this is the lack of a developmental theoretical framework that

explains the importance of inclusive, comprehensive sexuality education and why it is the school's responsibility to teach it.

Theoretical Framework Introduction

At the time of this writing, sexuality education is developed based on criteria set by each state. The various sets of criteria include, healthy relationships, HIV/STIs, evidenced-based, sexual-risk aversion, medically accurate, etc. (Seicus, 2021). Knowing that there are many different topics that might or might not be covered based on the standards set by each state brings to light how chaotic sexuality education is. With such vast differences between states, we have some students who walk away with knowledge on aspects of their sexuality development and others who walk away feeling confused about their sexuality development. This could be less of a problem if a developmental-theoretical framework is applied to the creation of sexuality education or is used to create criteria for a developmental approach to curricula. This change would help sexual minority students walk away with an understanding of what they are going through instead of being lost and delaying their sexuality identity formation.

To create this framework, I combined Erik Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* and Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Bioecological Model*. Erikson's Eight Stages of Man is used to describe the identity development process adolescents are going through and what can happen if someone does not successfully accomplish sexual identity development during adolescence. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model focuses on the social context, including explaining the timing of when information is taught and by highlighting the importance of teaching what is relevant to development based on current research. Along with highlighting the importance of timing, it brings the focus into the relationship between the teacher and the student and how important that is to the learning process. The combination of the two theories will explain the

importance of a sexuality education curricula that aligns with the development process of adolescents.

Erikson's Theories on Development

Erik Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* provides a useful lens for understanding the sexual identity formation taking place in adolescence. Erik Erikson studied under Sigmund Freud and due to this one can find a significant amount of Freud underlining the *Eight Stages of Man* and much of Erikson's beliefs about the development process. One of the first connections between the two psychologists in Erikson's book, *Childhood and Society* begins when he discusses how there are three principles of organization that makeup a person, an organism, an ego, and a member of society (Erikson, 1985). The concept of the ego comes from Freud, whereas the role in society is something Erikson builds on throughout the text and his life's work. One's role in society can define how they feel about themselves, especially if it does not fit with the way society views that role (Erikson, 1985). For LGBTQ+ youth the lack of information on their sexuality will make it harder for them to find their place in society.

Theory of Infantile Sexuality

One aspect of development that helps to define someone's role in society is their sexuality. Freud described one's sexual development as occurring in stages where one must positively or negatively resolve a crisis, much like development in the eight stages of man. As one is developing into a sexual being, they learn that their sexuality is normative or not via the reaction of the people around them (Erikson, 1985). When a child has a sexual reaction at what Erikson calls an "inopportune" moment and somebody like a parent is nearby who does not approve of the reaction the child learns their sexuality is not normative, causing sexual identity issues (Erikson, 1985). This can otherwise be known as a crisis in sexual identity. For an

LGBTQ+ child this moment can teach them that their sexuality is wrong while they are still trying to understand what their sexuality even means. It is a pairing of negative thoughts and sexual development than can be hard to get away from.

Pregenitality and Genitality. As one is developing sexually, they are in a phase known as pregenitality (Erikson, 1985). While going through pregenitality one is integrating what they learned in the Freudian pregenital stages as they make their way through puberty to genitality. In order to gain genitality one has to reconcile three specific things: (1) the reconciliation of genital orgasm and extragenital sexual needs, (2) the reconciliation of love and sexuality, and (3) the reconciliation of sexual, procreative, and work-productive patterns (Erikson, 1985). If a child moving through pregenitality does not reconcile one of these three things then their sexual intimacy is disturbed as they try and find a partner (Erikson, 1985). For an LGBTQ+ youth, if someone makes them think the way they are developing is nonnormative then they will not gain all the aspects of genitality and struggle trying to find a partner later in life.

Inborn instincts. According to Erikson, everyone is born with specific instincts that are given meaning through child training and school that vary by culture and the traditions of each society (Erikson, 1985). These instincts include the necessary elements of development including sexuality and a conscience. These two aspects especially are guided by society and can go hand in hand in terms of one's sexuality. For an LGBTQ+ youth, society is teaching them how to develop sexuality by showing them what is considered appropriate and not appropriate sexual expression. What goes along with this is the way one feels about themselves and their sexuality. If they are taught that to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community is wrong, and their sexual expression should be repressed. This will create a negative self-conscience for a developing

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LGBTQ+ youth about something that is considered an inborn instinct and not something that a child can control.

Eight Stages of Man

From the Theory of Infantile Sexuality Erikson evolved his thinking on the ego to the Eight Stages of Man. With this theory of development Erikson began to examine the critical developmental periods of childhood and what one needs to do in order to positively resolve each crisis. Each stage has an ego quality attached to it that an individual is trying to demonstrate. The structure of when the stages take place and how one demonstrates that criteria all take place within the structure of the society where the person is growing up (Erikson, 1985). If one negatively resolves the crisis of the stage, they carry with them the negative effects into the subsequent stages where it can remain or eventually be resolved. If one positively resolves the crisis of the stage, they will keep developing without challenges as they move into the subsequent stages, culminating in a fully formed ego (Erikson, 1985).

Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust. The first stage begins when a child is born and is all about the crisis of learning how to trust. An infant learns to trust through the responses of their mother or primary caregiver. If a child cries and their caregiver responds with comfort, or if they are fed when they are hungry or changed when in a dirty diaper, they learn that when they ask, their needs are met. By learning that their caregiver will meet their needs they develop a personal trustworthiness within the trust framework of their society (Erikson, 1985). This positive resolution of the trust crisis translates into their relationships as they grow up and allows them to develop intimate relationships with friends and partners.

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. In the second stage, that typically begins around the age of one, a child is learning that it is good to try things on their own or they begin to feel

shame or doubt in themself when they want to try because they are continually denied the opportunity or told to stop. As a child is beginning to learn how to feed themselves a caregiver can help by letting them keep trying or they can stop them and respond negatively whenever they try and take the fork or spoon away from the child. If this happens a child will learn that they should not try things on their own, negatively resolving the crisis of this stage. If the parent lets the child try and feed themselves, they will learn it is okay to try and do things for themselves, positively resolving the crisis of the stage. This stage can be described as a balance of freedom of self-expression and its suppression.

Initiative vs. guilt. The third stage begins to take place around the age of three. A child uses the initiative they gained by positively resolving the crisis from the previous stage to initiate new activities (Erikson, 1985). These new activities can be things such as asking to bake cookies or go to the park. If a caregiver encourages these things then a child will learn that taking initiative and wanting to try different things is a good thing, positively resolving the crisis. On the other hand, a child can develop a sense of guilt over the acts they want to initiate or the goals they were trying to achieve if continuously stopped by their caregiver (Erikson, 1985).

Industry vs. Inferiority. During this fourth stage, a child is entering their school years. They are being taught the tools and skills necessary to be a productive member of their society (Erikson, 1985). It is during this stage that a child's identity within society begins to play a role on their ability to apprentice. A child will now notice how society responds to their clothes, skin color, and parents and these messages will help the child determine their worth and identity (Erikson, 1985). Children are taught these lessons and the tools and skills of their society not just from their caregivers and teachers, but also from other children. If this acquisition of the skills necessary for their society is successful, the child has positively resolved the crisis of this stage.

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For some children though they develop a sense of inadequacy or inferiority while going through this stage and trying to learn the necessary skills and gain competence in them (Erikson, 1985). When a child ends up with this feeling of inadequacy or inferiority, they have negatively resolved the crisis for this stage.

Identity vs. Confusion. The fifth stage takes place during adolescence as one is going through puberty and developing physically at a rapid rate. At this stage in development a child is integrating all the skills they gained in the previous stages to form their identity (Erikson, 1985). An adolescent's sexual identity is also developing during this stage. As the adolescent is trying to understand their sexuality and put together all the different aspects of their ego, they look to the outside world around them to help connect all these different aspects (Erikson, 1985). Adolescents are in a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood that is putting together the information from previous stages to help the adolescent transition into adulthood (Erikson, 1985). The guidance, understanding and role modeling from those around them helps an adolescent positively resolve the crisis of identity at this stage. The opposite end of this is role confusion for some adolescents. This comes from things like doubt regarding one's sexual identity or being thought of as "different" by peers (Erikson, 1985). This role confusion is the result of negatively resolving the crisis at this stage.

Intimacy vs. Isolation. While one comes to an understanding about themselves and their sexuality in adolescence, that information is put to use as one becomes a young adult and starts looking to form intimate relationships. If an adolescent was able to positively resolve the crisis regarding their sexual identity, they will be able to reach true genitality in this stage and form an intimate connection with someone (Erikson, 1985). According to Erikson (1985), the characteristics for this include:

1. Mutuality of orgasm

2. With a loved partner

3. Of the other sex

4. With whom one is able and willing to share a mutual trust

5. And with whom one is able and willing to regulate the cycles of

    a. Work

    b. Procreation

    c. Recreation

6. So as to secure to the offspring, too, all the stages of a satisfactory development.

To accomplish this level of genitality is the task of the entire culture and depends on the sexual

selection, competition, and cooperation of the society (Erikson, 1985).

Those who are unable to gain genitality or who negatively resolve the crisis of identity

vs. confusion run the risk of isolation. For those individuals this can be seen with the avoidance

of intimate relationships or with the ones they have consistently failing. Individuals who are

unable to form a lasting intimate relationship in this stage end up in isolation which is the

negative resolution of this crisis.

Generativity vs. Stagnation. This stage is about the mature adult being needed whether

it be guidance or general taking care of (Erikson, 1985). Those who have formed intimate

relationships and have gone on to have children reach generativity by raising their children. One

who does not have their own children can also reach generativity by helping with the guidance of

the next generation through things like teaching. These different activities will help one

positively resolve the crisis of this stage. When someone is unable to positively resolve this

crisis, they reach stagnation (Erikson, 1985). This can happen when someone feels like they are not contributing to the raising of the next generation.

Ego integrity vs. Despair. This final life stage is all about reflecting over one's life and viewing it either positively or with despair. If someone is able to achieve ego integration and positively resolve all of the different crises, they faced during the life stages and have accepted responsibility of leadership then they have positively resolved the final life crisis and can die without fear of death (Erikson, 1985). If someone is unable to positively resolve all of their crises, they can have a sense of despair and feel that life is too short. This will create a fear of death for those who are negatively resolving the final life crisis.

Sexuality Identity Formation in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

The struggle of sexual identity and understanding all the different aspects of who you are in order to try and form a cohesive identity all take place during adolescence and Erikson's fifth stage**.** The information learned in the previous stages, including how society perceives you is being used to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood (Erikson, 1985). As one is bridging the gap and coming to this understanding of who they are, the way they are perceived and treated by those around them can either inhibit or help. For many LGBTQ+ youth sexuality is one of the greater identity conflicts they are struggling with. If this conflict is not positively resolved and they do not accept their sexuality there can be a disconnect between the way the body feels and one's identity (Erikson, 1985). For members of the LGBTQ+ community this can be seen in the attempt at heterosexual relationship and even the formation of heteronormative families.

During the adolescent stage a child is coming to an understanding about who they are supposed to be in the world. What they have gained in each prior stage is all coming together to

help that adolescent learn who they are (Erikson, 1985). Along with this puberty and sexual development is taking place, offering a first foray into love relationships. As all this is taking place, adolescents look to their peers and overly relate to them while trying to develop an identity of their own (Erikson, 1985). Falling in love or forming intimate relationships at this stage is part of one's search for identity. Erikson (1985) describes this as "projecting one's diffused ego image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified (262)". Intimate relationships during adolescence are how one comes to an understanding of themselves and their sexuality (Erikson, 1985).

The role of intimate relationships in the formation of identity places peers directly in the development process. With peers being so essential to the formation of identity it is important that schools create an environment where peers do not judge one another for "otherness". A young person who is not given knowledge about those who are different from them do not understand how their treatment and lack of understanding can cause harm to those that identify as the minority (Erikson, 1985). When a child is struggling with an LGBTQ+ identity at this stage that struggle can be exacerbated by this treatment by their peers and school.

Our education system is currently designed much like our working world, it has teachers and students like there are bosses and machines (employees). This dynamic of autocracy at school and later on at work creates a power imbalance inside of our schools that is furthered as students go off into the working world. This system teaches adolescents that they can judge themselves based on what they can get away with and how they appear to others (Erikson, 1985). This places one's thoughts about themselves directly in the hands of those around them. This makes it especially important that spaces inside the education be welcoming and inclusive.

The lack of a true intimate connection with a partner can leave a young adult with feelings of isolation (Erikson, 1985). The inability to form a complete understanding of one's sexual identity during the fifth stage directly impacts the sixth stage and their ability to find a life partner. The ramifications of not coming to a positive resolution regarding sexual identity can create life-long problems around relationships. A young adult who does not fully understand they are LGBTQ+, just knows something feels off when they try and form intimate relationships might constantly go around thinking something is wrong with them. Another young adult who knows they are a member of the LGBTQ+ community but does not accept that about themselves might find themselves suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts while another might try and force themselves into living a heteronormative life with an opposite sex partner and children. All of these scenarios leave the member of the LGBTQ+ community in a place of isolation because of their inability to be their authentic self.

Erikson in Modern Society

When Erikson originally wrote *Childhood and Society* it was the 1950's and the way people viewed marriage and relationships was different. Both interracial and gay marriage were illegal, schools were still segregated, and women rarely worked outside the home. All of this has changed since Erikson first wrote about the development process and what positively resolving each life stage looks like. Today, the focus of research is on both men and women, schools are no longer segregated and there are no laws about gender or skin-color where marriage is concerned in the United States. Due to this evolution in thinking by society, Erikson's theories on development should be interpreted and updated to reflect these changes and make it relevant to today's society and children.

The first aspect of Erikson's theory that should be modernized is his interpretation of genitality. When the concept was developed homosexuality was thought of as a sin and mental health condition. If someone was attracted to the opposite sex it was believed something was wrong with them that needed to be fixed either medically or through intensive psychotherapy. This is no longer the case. It is now understood scientifically that sexuality and gender identity are not a choice, these things are hardwired into your genetic makeup at birth. One cannot determine their sexuality or gender identity, just how they express them. This understanding of gender and sexuality is becoming recognized by mainstream society as well as doctors and scientists and should be used to help understand the development process. To make this happen, part three of Erikson's definition of genitality to mate with someone of the opposite sex needs to be removed from the definition. Bronfenbrenner's *Bioecological Model* will be used to understand the importance of this removal.

As discussed by Bronfenbrenner (2006) and furthered by Velez-Agosto et al. (2017), the culture of a society is taught to children in everyday interactions. The information is transferred through the people they spend time with the things they watch, and things they read. The chronosystem aspect of the Bioecological Model highlights the influence of the time-period a child is developing in (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Utilizing this aspect of the Bioecological Model means understanding that children are being taught that being a member of the LGBTQ+ community is not a bad thing, that they are accepted and loved by most members of society and religions. The social acceptance of being LGBTQ+ makes relationships and the removal of them as a mental health condition show that coming to an understanding that one is a member of the LGBTQ+ community is a positive resolution to the sexual identity crisis. This

change from positive to negative resolution is cause for the remove of opposite sex to the definition of genitality.

The importance of society in the development process as described by both Bronfenbrenner and Erikson also furthers this point. According to Erikson (1985), society is to help the development process of children, so they are able to positively resolve the crisis at each life stage. For Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), this help takes place via the transfer of knowledge inside of schools. The priority of society is to keep the country healthy through what is taught, which happens in school (Erikson, 1985). According to Erikson (1985), this is essential because "only an identity safely anchored in the 'patrimony' of a cultural identity can produce a workable psychosocial equilibrium (p.412)". The *bioecological model* furthers this by highlighting the historical period a child grows up in and the importance of teaching what is relevant based on that context as well as the relationships that teach the information.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Bronfenbrenner created the bioecological model to explain how a child develops in the world. Essentially, the model is used to study how the world of a child influences who they become otherwise known as developmental science (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Developmental science as defined by Bronfenbrenner & Evans (2000) is "the systematic scientific study of the conditions and processes producing continuity and change over time in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings…". This provides the context for the bioecological model.

Developmental science is used to help understand the development process through a more holistic lens. It provides the ability to look at all the different components that influence how someone develops. For this study, developmental science will help explain the importance

of a comprehensive and inclusive sexual education curriculum by "offering comprehensive models and new information that illuminate the temporal, psychosocial, and biological dimensions of this maturational phase" (Worthman et al, 2019, p.1).

The placement of the bioecological model in the context of developmental science explains how it is used helps with the understanding of a child's development over time and how the society in which the child lives can influence their developmental trajectory (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The influence of society and culture on the development process, also known as the context, is examined in a more thorough manner using developmental science than is seen in other developmental theories. The addition of the PPCT model to the final version takes this a step further by examining the interactions that create a developmental outcome and not just their context. This change creates a more complete lens to examine development through. This study on LGBTQ+ and questioning youth and sexuality education provides a framework for examining their identity formation process and mental health outcomes.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model has been used to understand the developmental process of children since its inception in the 1970s. It has evolved over time as we learned more about development, but the core, nested feature of the model has remained through the evolutions of the model. What has changed is the proximal process describing how information is transmitted, leading to a change in the understanding of what happens during the development process (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Through a combination of this final version of the bioecological model and the eight stages of man, an argument for a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education curriculum for LGBTQ+ and questioning youth will be made.

The Bioecological model looks at the world of a child and how each part influences a child's development through a nested model. The five levels of the model include:

chronosystem, macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and the microsystem. The outer level is the chronosystem with its sociohistorical influences on the development of the child. The current acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community has happened gradually as we have used developments in science to understand the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. This change over time is a sociocultural influence. The macrosystem is the attitude and culture of the society in which the child is being raised. The growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community and lifestyle has been a macrosystem change that has yet to fully make it into the sexuality education curriculum offered in schools. The exosystem includes socializing agents that do not interact with the child but affect their development nonetheless such as a parent's workplace or the media. The mesosystem is the interaction between the different socializing agents in the microsystem, for example, the family and the school.

The inner level of the model is the microsystem where children and their socializing agents who they interact on a regular basis, including their parents and teachers. It is in these interactions that adults transfer knowledge to children (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). Traditionally, studies using the Bioecological model focus on this nested model to describe the influence on development. This study will focus on the interactions in the mesosystem and microsystem that Bronfenbrenner describes with two propositions.

The inclusion or exclusion of information during these interactions shapes the development of children. Specifically for sexuality education curriculum, the information taught or not influences their sexuality identity formation process. For LGBTQ+ and questioning youth, the omission can create or exacerbate mental health problems.

He created three main propositions, or underlying assumptions, to support his theory. Two of these propositions focus specifically on the mesosystem interactions between the school

and the student. These two propositions are discussed in depth below. The first describes the direct interactions (proximal process) while the second describes how interactions occur in the context of a classroom (PPCT model). The inclusion or exclusion of information during these interactions shapes the development of children. Specifically for sexuality education curriculum, the information taught or not influences their sexuality identity formation process. For LGBTQ+ and questioning youth, the omission can create or exacerbate mental health problems.

Proposition 1

Proposition one in the bioecological model is where Bronfenbrenner introduces the concept of a proximal process by saying development takes place through reciprocal interactions between the child and socializing agents that take place regularly over an extended period (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.797). The influence of these interactions and the proximal process on the development process can be seen in the outcomes from interactions with teachers. Teachers are responsible for teaching children the expectations of society, including how they should develop sexually. This is especially important for LGBTQ+ students who are often marginalized if even in the curriculum. Below, the concept of the proximal process will be described along with possible outcomes (competence or dysfunction) for sexual identity formation.

Proximal Process

The concept of the proximal process is introduced in the final version of the Bioecological model and explained in detail in a separate publication. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) describe the proximal process as the reciprocal transfer of energy between the child and socializing agent. Inside of a classroom this happens between the teacher and the students as well as between peers in the class. This definition of the proximal process along with Bronfenbrenner

(2000) calling it the engine of development highlights how important everyday interactions are to a child's developmental trajectory. The dynamic relationship between students and teachers directly impacts the developmental trajectory of the child, making it a proximal process.

Outcomes: Competence vs. Dysfunction. What is taught during the interactions between students and teachers helps determine the outcomes of sexuality identity formation process. Our education system and its teachers have a large role in this process because of the curriculum and how it is being taught to students in the proximal process. Based on these interactions and the information being taught, a child can either gain competence in something or have dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

Achieving competence or dysfunction in terms of sexual identity formation can greatly impact how a child feels about themselves and their sexuality, especially one that identifies as LGBTQ+. When a child is taught the proper information on sexuality through the proximal process, they develop competence in terms of what sexuality means. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) described competence as being able to demonstrate understanding, the development of knowledge and most importantly for a child's sexuality, the ability to conduct their own behavior across situations (2006). When a child is taught sexuality education using an inclusive and comprehensive curriculum, they develop competence and can positively make it through the identity formation process. This is especially important for LGBTQ+ youth who often suffer from mental health issues due to their sexuality (Castro & Sujak, 2014).

On the other side of this equation is dysfunction. This happens when there are ongoing difficulties integrating and controlling one's behavior in different situations (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2006). For a child's sexual identity formation and what is taught to them by their school, this can especially be true. LGBTQ+ youth often know something is different for them sexually,

but they might not understand what it is or means. If there is nothing they can relate to in the curriculum, the sexual identity formation process can end up in dysfunction. Using a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum can help students navigate the sexual identity formation process so they understand their sexuality instead of operating with a sense of confusion and dysfunction regarding their sexuality.

Proposition 2

Proposition Two is where Bronfenbrenner describes the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model and the components that affect development. "The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place…" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.798). The PPCT model is describing the dynamic components that influence developmental outcomes. For LGBTQ+ and questioning youth when the sexuality education proximal process takes place and what it teaches play a crucial role in whether they reach sexual identity competence or dysfunction.

Process–Person–Context-Time (PPCT) Model

Each component helps create the environment where the proximal process takes place. Process describes interactions a child has with their environment. In this study, process is describing LGBTQ+ and questioning youth interacting with the curriculum and their teacher individually, and a combination of the two. Person refers to the characteristics of the people in the interaction, this includes the LGBTQ+ or questioning youth and their teacher. The context is the immediate environment where the interaction is taking place and includes the classroom and its setup, the chosen curriculum, and how the teacher chooses to teach the curriculum. The final

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aspect is time which includes historical period, LGBTQ+ or questioning youth, and the length of exposure to the curriculum (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000). As the proximal process is taking place within the PPCT model (Tudge et al., 2017), each of the model's four components works together to influence developmental outcomes.

Process. There are three factors that influence teachers and students as the learning process unfolds. First, do students read the information and see a reflection of how they are feeling, or do they read the material wondering why they cannot relate to it? Next is how the teacher goes about teaching the material. Do they treat students like they are too young to understand or like they are ready and should know the information? Do they use multiple teaching modalities when presenting the curriculum to students or use supplemental materials to provide additional information? The final factor is how students interact with both their teacher and the material at the same time. Do they listen while the teacher is talking or check out because they cannot relate? What is their level of engagement in the classroom?

Person. The second component of the PPCT model is the person. Applying the model to the classroom puts two people in the process, the student, and their teacher. Both have three characteristics that Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) call force, resource, and demand. These characteristics influence how the information is presented and received.

Force. The force characteristics one has can either initiate, sustain, impede, or interrupt the proximal process. The generative forces are the ones that initiate or sustain whereas disruptive forces are the ones that impede or interrupt. The force characteristics of the teacher are the ones that teach the curriculum. For LGBTQ+ or questioning students force can be adding information relevant to them into the classroom or preventing the teacher from using an incomplete curriculum, they do not see themselves represented in.

Resource. Resource characteristics are the ones that influence a person's ability to engage effectively in the proximal process. For LGBTQ+ or questioning youth it is developing the ability, skills, and knowledge to understand the material in sexuality education and what it means for them. For teachers, it is their skills and ability to teach the material.

Demand. The final characteristic, demand includes characteristics that encourage or discourage reactions from the environment that can either stimulate or disrupt process interactions. For the teacher, the demand characteristics begin with what the students notice about them as soon as they walk into the classroom such as how they carry themselves and their attitude towards students (Tudge et al., 2017). If the energy the teacher gives off does not make the students feel safe the proximal process can be disrupted. The LGBTQ+ or questioning students, demand characteristics can include being vocal and asking questions or refusing to engage with curricula they do not see themselves represented in.

Context. The context in which the proximal process takes place for sexuality education includes both the classroom and the curriculum. In the classroom, the teacher creates the environment where the proximal process takes place. This includes determining the layout of the classroom, the different supplemental materials they might incorporate, and how they treat students while teaching sexuality education. If a teacher talks to the students like they are too young or ignorant it will make it hard for the student to take in the information, but if they treat the students with respect and like they are ready to learn the information it can create a safe learning environment.

The curriculum and what it covers is the second context. The criteria for determining what sexuality education curriculum will include is set by politicians far removed from the classroom and the proximal process. When criteria that are not inclusive or comprehensive are

set, it hinders the proximal process and puts a developing LGBTQ+ or questioning youth at risk for dysfunction in their sexual identity development.

Time. The time component has three influential aspects when placing the proximal process inside the classroom. The first aspect of time is the sexual development stage adolescents are in. It is especially important for LGBTQ+ or questioning adolescents as they are developing and forming their sexual identity to have curricula, they see themselves reflected in so they can understand what is happening and what it means (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). The second aspect is the length of time the curriculum is being taught. The longer a person is exposed to a concept through the proximal process the more likely they are to internalize the message (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). For LGBTQ+ or questioning adolescents, the sexuality education message during their high school career is either helping them gain sexual identity competence or is making them question how they feel causing sexual identity dysfunction.

The third aspect of time is the historical period in which the interactions are taking place. The historical period is crucial to the process because it determines what is being taught. Teachers and their classrooms are the gatekeepers of society and teach the beliefs and values of where the adolescent is growing up (Cobanoglu & Engin Demir, 2014). This includes how society feels about the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. As members of the LGBTQ+ community have become more visible their acceptance by society has grown. According to the latest American Values Survey (2020), 72% of Americans approve of same-sex marriage. While the research shows Americans are more accepting of LGBTQ+ relationships, the curriculum inside schools often does not reflect this.

Bronfenbrenner placed culture in the outer layer of the bioecological model, but with culture evolving over time and being transferred through everyday interactions it is important to

examine it in the context of the microsystem. As culture evolves so does society and how it socializes children. With socializing being done through everyday activities in which one engages, the classroom is considered one of the main places socialization takes place (Velez-Agosto et al., 2017). As society and culture evolve so should what is taught inside the classroom. This evolution has changed what is taught in social studies classes, the books teachers use in English classes, and even the way math is being taught includes LGBTQ+-directed information. With gay marriage being legal and a majority acceptance of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle by society it is important for this acceptance to be reflected in schools starting with how schools treat LGBTQ+ students and including LGBTQ+ content in the curricula.

Classroom Chaos

Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), describe the concept of chaotic systems as one in which the chaos integrates the different elements of exposure and foreshadows its role in the bioecological model. A classroom can be considered a chaotic system. The different elements of exposure include the activity in the classroom, the structure or lack thereof as well as the unpredictability of everyday activities. Within this classroom, chaos is the proximal process. Classroom chaos does not mean teachers do not have control of their classroom. Instead, what is meant by classroom chaos is the constantly moving parts inside the classroom and the design and layout of the room. Students talking to one another, others trying to complete their work, announcements being made over the loudspeaker, and students walking by and talking in the hallway are just some examples of what can be considered part of the classroom chaos. And through all this chaos the teacher and student are participating in the proximal process with knowledge being transferred from the teacher to the student.

The proximal process happens daily in this chaotic environment. Classrooms are full of constantly moving parts and can be different every day. The teachers and students inside the classroom also add to the chaos while experiencing their own internal chaos. For students who identify as LGBTQ+ or questioning, a lot of the internal chaos can come from the sexual identity formation process. For students who are experiencing this the proximal process can be very helpful. If a teacher is using an inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education curriculum the developing LGBTQ+ or questioning adolescent will have an easier time understanding what their sexual identity is and working through the internal chaos related to it.

The proximal process works best in chaotic environments. A classroom plus a developing adolescent creates a chaotic environment where the proximal process works to influence the development of the adolescent (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015). Having an inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education curriculum for this environment is important to the sexual identity outcomes for LGBTQ+ or questioning adolescents. If a school does not have a sexual identity curriculum that reflects all students, then those left out can end up with dysfunction instead of competence in terms of their sexual identity.

Conclusion

The combination of Bronfenbrenner and Erikson creates a developmental lens that explains the importance of inclusive and comprehensive curricula to the sexual identity formation process. When students do not feel represented in the curriculum or that it is lacking information, they are not getting all the information necessary for healthy sexual identity formation during the proximal process in their microsystem. This can lead to adolescents, especially sexual minority, and gender nonconforming youth to seek out resources in their exosystem instead. The main source of information for adolescents seeking sexual identity

formation becomes the internet. While the internet can help them find relevant information, it is also a source of many inaccuracies regarding sex and sexuality. If adolescents do not find healthy, accurate information from their sources, they can learn unhealthy sexual practices or end up thinking something is wrong with them.

For LGBTQ+ youth to remain on a healthy developmental trajectory as described by Erikson, there needs to be an inclusion of LGBTQ+ content in the sexuality education curriculum. By having a curriculum that includes information about being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, those students will feel represented and their treatment in schools will improve because other students will have a better understanding of what it means to be LGBTQ+ (Erikson, 1985). Bronfenbrenner further emphasizes the importance of inclusion in curricula by highlighting the importance of school and teachers in socializing children. It is in the daily interactions with teachers and the curricula where students learn and become socialized. By including LGBTQ+ content in these interactions adolescents who are questioning their sexual identity are better able to work towards a positive resolution of the sexual identity crisis they face during adolescence.

Positively resolving the sexual identity crisis during the identity vs. confusion stage makes it easier for LGBTQ+ young adults to find an intimate partner during the intimacy vs. isolation stage. This is important because as Erikson (1985) said, "only a gradually accruing sense of identity, based on the experience of social health and cultural solidarity at the end of major childhood crisis, promises that periodical balance in human life which…makes for a sense of humanity (p.412)". The only way society can ensure it keeps its balance is by making sure children grow up positively resolving each life stage crisis. This happens within the microsystem during the proximal process as Bronfenbrenner describes. For sexual minority and gender

nonconforming adolescents, schools can help with their sexual identity formation by including

LGBTQ+ content in their sexuality education curricula, allowing sexual minority and gender

nonconforming adolescents to work towards understanding that part of themselves.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

I used a pragmatic approach to do a constant-comparison content analysis of two sexuality education curricula. Taking a pragmatic approach to the analysis process provided the opportunity to analyze based on criteria developed to assess how well curricula meet their intended purpose (Patton, 2015). The selected curricula for this study were analyzed to see if they are providing adolescents who are gender nonconforming or who consider themselves to be sexual minorities with a sexuality education to which they can relate. I will use content analysis to answer the following overarching research question: w*hat do current sexuality education curricula say to promote identity formation for adolescents who are sexual minorities or gender nonconforming.* The specific research questions for the content analysis are:

(1) How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?

(2) What educational methods are used in each curriculum?

(3) How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?

(4) How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth?

Content Analysis Approach

A content analysis identifies, organizes, and categorizes the content of a text to answer open-ended questions (Patton, 2015), such as the one being employed for this study. This approach helped me discover how and what topics are covered, the messages students might be receiving from the content, and whether a variety of students can see themselves positively reflected in the curricula. Based on the developmental framework outlined in the previous chapter as well as the current state standards for California, I created a set of criteria regarding

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what should be included in a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality health curriculum. These

topics include: a lifespan approach, a variety of forms of relationships, sexual identities, sexual

health, body/reproduction parts & cycle, and they should be taught using a multimodal

instructional approach. The specific research questions designed for this content analysis were

developed to get a deeper understanding of these research and theory-based topics. Table 1

shows the connections between the research questions and the topics examined in this study.

Table 1 *Theoretical-Based Topics*

Research Question	Lifespan	Relationships	Sexual Identities	Sex Health	Body/reproduction parts & cycle	Multimodal Instruction
How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?	X	X	X	X	X	X
What educational methods are used in each curriculum?						X
How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?	X	X	X	X	X	X
How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth?	X	X	X	X	X	X

The developmental lens helps to identify the importance of each of the six topics included in this study. The first topic, a lifespan approach to sexuality development acknowledges the fact that one does not start or stop developing sexually during adolescence and that as we age changes continue to happen to our bodies and reproductive system. Relationships as a topic gives an understanding of what options are out there and what different relationships can mean in terms of sexual development. The inclusion of all sexual identities in sexuality health curriculum is important to all students seeing themselves reflected in the content. The exclusion of identities can make students feel othered or something is wrong with them (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017).

Sex health is the fourth topic identified. This topic is important for students to understand things such as STIs, forms of protection & contraceptives, self-awareness, body positivity, consent, and physical discomfort. The body, reproductive parts & the cycle is the fifth topic identified to be in sexuality education. Adolescents need an understanding of what is happening inside themselves and their peers. An understanding can help to them know something is not wrong with them if they are not heterosexual and what to expect as they develop into fully sexual beings. A healthy understanding of sex and its meaning informs the decisions adolescents make for themselves. The final topic identified for a sexuality health curriculum is multimodal instruction. Research has shown that the utilization of multimodal instruction makes it possible for students of all learning styles to develop an understanding of the topic.

The curricula were examined for the depth and breadth of each of these topics. The mere mention of a topic does not indicate whether it is inclusive or comprehensive. Therefore, I appraised both the breadth and the depth of how each topic was covered. For example, is there only a brief sentence of two, or does the curriculum give a full explanation with positive

examples and images? This analysis provided the information to determine if each curriculum is meeting its intended purpose of promoting healthy sexual identity formation for students.

Sampling

According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling includes choosing items that are rich with information to help answer the research questions. To choose curricula for this study, I will use the purposeful sampling technique of matched comparisons. This sampling strategy is used to compare cases that differ on one dimension while they match on others (Patton, 2015).

I have developed a list of four criteria that each curriculum must meet to be included in this study. First, the curricula must be widely used and available to make the study findings relevant for schools across the country. Second, the curricula must be labeled comprehensive since that is a California state standard. By applying this standard, each curriculum should include information I highlighted with the developmental lens. Third, the curricula must be evidenced-based even though that is not a California state standard. This requirement makes sure the information being taught to children is not ideologically or religiously based. The final criterion for the curricula is that they are on opposite ends of the sexuality education approach spectrum. By analyzing curricula that are designed to provide all students a comprehensive sexuality education but utilize different approaches this study becomes a matched comparison to see if either are meeting their intended purpose. To meet this criterion one of the curricula has a sexual-risk aversion approach (often known as abstinence-based) and the other has a sex-positive, comprehensive approach.

From the curricula that match this set of criteria, two were selected for analysis. The first, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility (3R's)* by the organization Advocates for Youth, is a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum designed for K-12. Advocates for Youth (2021) is

working towards the goal of a "society that views sexuality as normal and healthy and treats young people as a valuable resource" (Our Vision section, para. 1). Each R represents how the curriculum helps to meet this goal: *Rights* stands for youth having the right to honest sexual health information, *Respect* is about giving youth respect and authentically involving them in the creation of sexuality health programs, and *Responsibility* indicates that it is society's responsibility to provide all young people with the necessary tools and information to protect their sexual health (About *3Rs* section). The curriculum is available for free, allowing for easy access to the information. Lessons can be accessed individually or as a whole curriculum at once. The curriculum includes a Spanish version as well as adaptions for select states and school districts. The curriculum for California is designed to fulfill the standards set by California's Healthy Youth Act.

The *3Rs* curriculum begins with 11 middle school lessons followed by 11 designed for high school, with each lesson building off the knowledge from the prior lessons. The first lesson in middle school, *Blue is for Boys, Pink is for Girls* provides an understanding of gender and gender differences and the final lesson in high school, *My Life, My Decisions* focuses on decision-making and what/who can influence these choices. This is a curriculum that focuses on empowering adolescents to make the right choices to protect themselves from things like STIs, teen pregnancy, or abuse.

Each lesson works toward the goal of empowerment in different ways. They start with lesson plans that provide teachers with learning objectives, what to say, and how to guide the conversation in class. Lessons include a mixture of YouTube videos, PowerPoints, images of individuals, websites, and handouts to teach the students. Once the information portion of the lesson is presented, an activity takes place. These activities include group work, role-playing

scenarios, matching, describing images/concepts and are designed to further understand the topic of the lesson. The final portion of each lesson is an assessment. The assessments take the form of homework and/or in-class activities. Each lesson has a different form of assessment. They include handouts, role-playing scenarios, putting things into practice, group work, and creating scenarios related to the lesson's topic.

The second curriculum is *Love Notes 3.0 Sexual Risk Avoidance Adaptation Evidence-Based Program* (*Love Notes 3.0 SRA EBP*) by The Dibble Institute. *Love Notes 3.0 SRA EBP* is an evidenced-based sexual-risk aversion curriculum that focuses on relationship building, workforce readiness, and pregnancy prevention (Our programs section). The curriculum was adapted from the original *Love Notes 3.0 SRA* by condensing the program to key information and messages (Our Programs section). The adaption was designed following California's Healthy Youth Act and focuses on how to develop and maintain healthy relationships (Our Programs section).

Love Notes 3.0 SRA includes 13 lessons for high school students that can be adapted for middle school students. A workbook accompanies the curriculum with activities for students that align with each lesson. The first lesson is titled *Relationships Today* and lesson 13 is *Through the Eyes of a Child*. The curriculum focuses on the knowledge and skills considered necessary to build healthy relationships and to avoid unplanned pregnancy. Lessons begin with an overview for the teacher about the importance of the lesson and the reason for why it falls where it does in the curriculum. It is followed by the goals of the lessons and a brief overview of what is in each lesson.

Lessons are broken into multiple sections, with an activity at the end of each section. A script and guide for how to direct the conversation are included for teachers. Tools in the lessons

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include PowerPoints, images, downloads, videos, and activity cards. The activities at the end of each section include class discussions, scenarios, role-playing, skills practice, and workbook activities. The workbook activities serve as informal assessments throughout the curriculum. Lessons also include "Trusted Adult Connection" activities designed to help students build strong connections with the trusted adults in their lives, so they have someone to turn to if they have questions or need advice on a topic.

Data Analysis

Before I could begin the process of analyzing the data to answer question one, *how are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula*, I first had to narrow my focus down to specific sexuality-related terms. A person's sexuality is not just a standalone aspect, it is made up of different dimensions within an individual and can vary based on how these parts fluctuate (Norris, Marcus, & Green, 2015; Savin-Williams, 2014). These parts come together to form the sexuality spectrum and include *biological sex, gender identity, gender expression/presentation (genderqueer), and sexual orientation.* Please see the visual below created by The Trevor Project to highlight the sexuality spectrum.
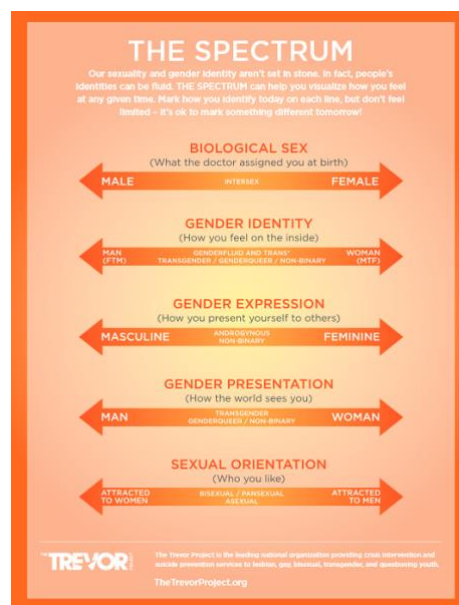
With multiple definitions of these sexuality-related terms in use, this study will use the definitions from the National Sex Education Standards glossary. Their definition of sexual intercourse and how it can differ will also be used by this study. This glossary provides the standard and most comprehensive definitions to be used when teaching sexuality education. This includes a definition of sexual intercourse that includes almost all of its forms. It was developed by the members of FoSE to go along with their core standards for sexuality education (2021).

Table 1 *National Sex Education Standards: Sex Education Terms*

Term	Definition
Sexuality	The components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices, sexual fantasies, attitudes, and values related to sex. Sexuality describes how one experiences and expresses one's self as a sexual being. It begins to develop at birth and continues over the course of one's lifetime
Biological Sex	The sex of an individual is determined by chromosomes (such as XX or XY), hormones, internal anatomy (such as gonads) hormone levels, hormone receptors, genes, and external anatomy (such as genitalia). Typically, individuals are assigned as male or female at birth Individuals are assigned as intersex if they present with variations different from what is typically expected of genitalia at birth have gonadal or hormonal variations and/or are confirmed with genetic testing to have chromosomes different from XX or XY.
Sexual Orientation	A person's romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientations include, but are not limited to, asexual, bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, pansexual, and queer.
Gender Expression	The manner in which people outwardly express their gender through, for example, clothing, appearance, or mannerisms.
Gender Identity	How an individual identifies based on their internal understanding of their gender. Gender identities may include male, female, agender, androgynous, genderqueer, nonbinary, transgender, and many others, or a combination thereof.

Genderqueer	A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.
Sexual Intercourse	Sexual intercourse may mean different things to different people, but could include behaviors such as vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex.
Anal Sex	Sexual behavior involving penetration of the anus by a penis or sex toy.
Oral Sex	Sexual behavior that involves a person using their mouth to sexually stimulate the genitals of another person.
Vaginal Sex	Sexual behavior involving penetration of the vagina by a penis or sex toy.

The analysis process began by analyzing each curriculum on their own. During this initial analysis data points were marked and coded using previously identified topics. A coding sheet was developed to organize the data by curriculum and then by question. Once data was organized, I employed a constant comparison method to analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). With the help of a faculty co-analyst, a constant comparison analysis process was utilized for coding and comparing data in order to create categories, identifying patterns between categories, and to refine those patterns until major themes emerged.

Once major themes were identified and data was organized into these categories, further analysis took place within each theme. Through this continuous theme-focused analysis process subthemes were identified to further organize the data. During points where my faculty co-analyst and I disagreed or needed clarification on how to code and categorize certain data we discussed until coming to a consensus about where or if it belonged. Using a constant comparison allowed for the themes and subthemes to naturally emerge through each round of analysis.

Assumptions

There are three major assumptions I held going into this study. The first assumption was that neither of the curricula will be completely inclusive or comprehensive. I anticipated discovering that both have deficits in how they cover topics, either by the omission of topics or because only minimal information is given. The second assumption takes this a step further. I assumed the SRA curriculum will have multiple negative messages regarding LGBTQ+ issues due to their conservative approach and the history of SRA curricula. The messages may be delivered via omission and/or how topics are covered. My final assumption is that information for sexual minority students and those who identify themselves as non-binary will be the areas lacking the most because there is still not full acceptance of sexual minority or gender nonconforming individuals. Specifically, asexual and gender non-confirming adolescents will have the most difficulty relating to current sexuality education curricula for this.

Positionality of the Researcher

This research study is personal to me. As a young girl growing up, I always knew I was different, but I could not figure out why. It was not something I was able to begin to understand until I went to college and found a community who could help me with my sexual identity formation process. While my high school did have health class where we were taught the basics of sexuality education, this did not include any information on sexual minorities or gender nonconforming individuals. I believe my lack of LGBTQ+ education delayed my sexual identity formation. I had to be helped to understand what I was feeling and experiencing by members of the community. They helped me understand what I was feeling. They introduced me to media where I could see myself represented. They gave me the education my school did not. My experience is the motivation for this research. I want to prevent this from happening to other LGBTQ+ youth.

My positionality and biases come from my sexual identity formation experience. I have an automatic bias towards LGBTQ+ information and how it is addressed. I had the potential to immediately think negatively or too critically about the way and what information is presented to the students. I needed to keep checking in with myself by asking if my findings really meet the developmental criteria set by my theoretical framework for my analysis or are they based on my bias and how I feel about sexuality education. There are things missing from sexuality education curricula that are not important to identity formation. I needed to make sure I stay focused on only that which is relevant by using the criteria list to guide me through the curricula as I looked for relevant information.

Throughout the analysis process, I was expecting to find that both the curriculum that bills itself as comprehensive and the one that is SRA will both be lacking in LGBTQ+ information. I believed the SRA one may even include negative messages on the topic embedded in its curriculum. I believed the comprehensive curricula would include some information on LGBTQ+ relationships, I also thought there would be important information not covered when using a developmental lens. Knowing I needed to lean more towards the critical side means I had to make sure this bias did not influence my findings. I implemented multiple validation methods to make sure my findings are reliable and valid. The first was to develop a set of criteria to use for analysis based on the research questions and the developmental framework. If something did not fit the criteria list, it was not included. I was continuously doing self-check-ins and keeping notes throughout the analysis process. This helped me make sure I stayed focused and minimized my biases effect the analysis process. And finally, I had the help of a faculty co-analyst to analyze the data and examine the findings to make sure they are within the developmental framework.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will provide the findings for the research question for this study: W*hat do current sexuality education curricula say to promote identity formation for adolescents who are sexual minorities or gender-nonconforming?* Four sub-questions guided the data analysis:

(1) How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?

(2) What educational methods are used in each curriculum?

(3) How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?

(4) How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth?

In order to explore these questions, I utilized two design approaches. First, I used a pragmatic analysis approach in order to identify the practical consequences and useful applications of what is currently known about sexuality education curricula. Additionally, I used a constant comparison analysis method (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) to code the content in both of the sexuality education curricula. The constant comparison analysis process involved coding and comparing data to create categories, identifying patterns between categories, and refining those patterns until major themes emerge.

From the analysis, four major themes emerged: *inconsistent approach to sexuality-related terms*, *multi-modal instruction/active learning*, *a developmental approach*, and *a false sense of inclusion*. In the following chapter, each theme is discussed in detail with examples from both curricula.

RQ1: How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?

The definitions of sexuality-related terms from the Sexuality Education Core Standards were used as a reference point when analyzing the curricula's use of comprehensive and accurate terminology. The two curricula handle these terms very differently: 3Rs took a more direct instruction, factual approach while Love Notes focused on sexuality as being part of a relationship continuum that spans throughout one's life. The definitions given by each curriculum were examined in terms of their comprehensiveness, accuracy, and opportunities for further learning and exploration. Upon examining the terms, the theme of an *inconsistent approach to sexuality-related terms* emerged. This is demonstrated by the lack of definitions for terms like sexuality, the framing of sexuality-related concepts, and the exclusion of terms like genderqueer.

Sexuality

The term *sexuality* in itself is not specifically defined in both curricula. Instead, the different parts of one's sexuality are individually looked at during different points of each curriculum. The curricula also differ in how they approach each topic. In 3Rs, the middle (ML) and high (HL) school lessons are designed to help students understand specific topics in age-appropriate ways. The Love Notes curriculum addresses parts of sexuality as they come up during the framework of healthy relationships while also including terms; however, they are presented with no clear definitions.

3Rs Middle School. The middle school lessons begin with a discussion of gender, followed by sexual orientation. These lessons provide the foundation for the rest of the curriculum. Gender is defined as "how we understand our maleness, our femaleness, or a combination of both" (Advocates for Youth [AFY], ML1.1) and how outside messages influence

one's understanding of gender. Being transgender and genderqueer are introduced in this lesson as one's body parts not matching what one feels inside:

> We've been talking during class about messages people get on how they should act as boys and girls—but as many of you know, there are also people who don't identify as boys or girls, but rather as transgender or gender queer. This means that even if they were called a boy or a girl at birth and may have body parts that are typically associated with being a boy or a girl, on the inside, they feel differently. (AFY, 2018)

There is a mention of not feeling like either gender along with being transgender, but the lesson does not explain the difference between the two, which could lead to confusion for the students:

> Think, for a moment, about the experience of hearing these gendered messages and feeling like you were a different gender? If you felt on the inside like you were a girl, but everyone perceived you as a boy and pushed you to be really masculine; or you felt on the inside that you were a boy and people pushed you to be more feminine. Or if you felt like you were both boy and girl, or somewhere in between boy and girl. What do you think that would be like? (AFY, 2018)

Instead, the topic of gender in this first lesson is centered around the messages we receive from the world about how to behave based on gender and what it might feel like if those messages do not match with what one feels inside. The students reflect on this as a class before the lesson is wrapped up with a reminder that everyone has the right to express their gender as what feels most natural to them.

Middle School Sexuality. Once the students are taught the basics of gender, the topic of sexual orientation is explored in lesson two. Before this happens, a yellow flag list of incorrect sexuality-related terms including *sexual preference, sexual lifestyle* and *choice* is introduced.

This list helps keep the conversation focused on positive ways to discuss sexuality and explains why the yellow flag terms could be harmful when used. Providing this context and information before the discussion helps students come to an understanding that people having different sexual orientations is normal. This can translate to an environment where a conversation around sexual orientation is a safe space for questions and exploration.

Sexual orientation is then defined as, "the gender(s) of the people to who [sic] we are attracted, physically and romantically" (AFY, 2.PP) in a PowerPoint. On the slide defining sexual orientation, they also note that it can include more than one gender and that one can know one's orientation without doing something sexual with another person. Once this definition is established, a follow-up slide the establishes three parts of sexual orientation: *orientation, behavior,* and *identity*. While the first definition focused on orientation as exclusively attraction, the is a second definition introduces other aspects of sexual orientation that behavior and identity. There is an incongruence felt by using both these definitions for sexual orientation when there is no explanation of the difference between the two or of how they could exist in conjunction with one another.

Between the two definitions of sexual orientation is a list of sexual orientations, "*heterosexual, lesbian or gay, bisexual, queer, and others"* that students are asked to define. The first missed opportunity to engage students in a conversation about differing sexualities happens here. It happens by excluding certain terms, such as *pansexual* or *asexual* and leaving it to the students to ask about them. If the students ask about being *pansexual* or *asexual* the lesson provides definitions for them as well:

Asexual – If this term comes up, you would define it as someone who does not

have feelings of sexual attraction. An asexual person can still fall in love with and be

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in romantic relationships with other people, but these relationships do not include a

sexual relationship. (AFY, 2018)

While upon initial review this appears inclusive, in truth students may not yet feel ready to ask

questions about orientations not directly covered in the curriculum. This is the first time in the

lesson the curriculum misses an opportunity to engage students in a conversation expanding their

understanding of sexualities.

The second missed opportunity to engage students in a conversation about sexuality

inaccuracies is when a worksheet is used to teach the rest of the information on sexual

orientations. A *myth or fact?* sheet – where myth is the answer to every question -- is how

students are taught about HIV, marriage equality, roles in gay relationships and more. Questions

from the sheet include, *you can tell whether someone is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual*

by the way they look or act, the way parents raise their children determines whether a child is

heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual, if you try really hard, and *you can change your sexual*

orientation—regardless of whether you are heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual. This is a

lot of information on many different aspects of life being taught to students in one activity.

Unfortunately, it is without a real opportunity to delve into what the information means other

than superficially while wrapping up the activity.

The lesson wraps up with homework that asks the students to seek out people and ask

them about what it is like to be their sexual orientation. This is the final missed opportunity to

engage students in deeper conversations about the lesson. Students do not always have people of

multiple sexualities in their life or might not feel comfortable having that conversation with the

people they do know. These assignments essentially replace meaningful conversations between

teachers and students about sexuality and how it can evolve. In fact, from this lesson forward,

sexuality is not truly discussed again until the first high school lesson on gender where it is discussed in relation to a person and their partners gender.

3Rs High School. While the middle school lessons focus on a concrete way of thinking about gender and sexuality, they are further explored in the first high school lesson where a more nuanced approach to both is introduced. The high school lesson *Understanding Gender* begins by asking students, "what does gender mean?" and "how does someone determine whether you're a boy or girl?" (AFY, HL1.2). The conversation is guided towards what it means to be intersex as well as what it may feel like if what one sees in the mirror does not match how one feels inside. The reflective approach to the lesson gives students the ability to connect and relate to something they might not fully understand. While this may not lead to them full understanding, it can lead to acceptance.

High School Gender. The lesson introduces the term cisgender and explains it and transgender using the mirror analogy of feeling inside the same/different than the way one looks in the mirror and distinguishing the terms from sexual orientation:

> Sexual orientation has to do with the gender or genders of the people we are romantically and physically attracted to. This is different from our sense of what our gender is. A person who is attracted to their same gender are [sic] typically referred to as gay or lesbian, and a person who is attracted to both genders are [sic] typically referred to as bisexual. A person attracted to only the other gender are [sic] typically referred to as heterosexual. We all have both a gender identity and a sexual orientation. (AFY, HL1.2-1.3)

This is done before the lesson uses examples to explain how gender identity and attraction work in conjunction to form a person's sexual orientation. The lesson then abruptly shifts to gender

scripts and how they inform individuals how to behave for their gender and then gender expression, which is how they present their gender to the world. Students are then asked to come up with lists of gender scripts for boys and girls. The list is purposely binary so the students can reflect on what it might feel like to face gender scripts as someone who identifies as transgender. The question leads to an activity where students have to describe the person in a picture without using gendered terminology so the other students can guess the gender of the person in the picture.

The picture description activity once again wraps up with a reflective discussion on the feelings students had about the people in the pictures and the activity as a whole. The reflection includes how we perceive certain things as gendered and just because something is perceived as belonging to a certain gender does not make it so. This lesson introduces the concept of those "who do(es) not identify as male or female" (AFY, HL1.5) and how people might feel differently inside than they present outside. This gives a hint of the gender spectrum through the conversation of gender identity, but instead of furthering that discussion, the lesson then turns to a discussion of body image, and how we view people. Taking the discussion in this direction keeps the reflective tone the lesson has used to help students understand the nuances of gender and how we receive messages from the world around us. As important as this discussion is for the lesson, not having a full discussion on the gender spectrum or even bringing up the term non-binary is a missed opportunity.

The strong reflective approach 3Rs takes when teaching gender and sexual orientation is a choice made to help students be more open and accepting of others. As important as this is, so is self-acceptance. By not teaching the gender spectrum or what being non-binary is they prevent some students from identifying with the curriculum. Even though the lesson missed an

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opportunity with non-binary it does touch upon the nuances of gender, unlike in the middle school version of the gender lesson where they stuck to concrete definitions.

Love Notes. While 3Rs directly addresses aspects of sexuality, Love Notes takes an indirect approach by embedding information throughout different lessons. The focus of Love Notes is healthy relationships, so everything is framed within this context. Because of this approach, sexuality and its related terms are not clearly defined in the curriculum. Instead, they define attraction by talking about chemicals in the brain, the effect of hormones on boys and girls, and the six parts of intimacy. Gender as a concept is not addressed in the curriculum and it mostly sticks with a binary way of looking at gender by using the terms boyfriend/girlfriend and girls/boys when discussing concepts such as sex, relationships, STIs, and communication. Every lesson in the curriculum is relationship focused, therefore, all of the terms are framed using this lens. To accomplish this framework, relationships are discussed along with "baggage" and one's "success sequence" for reaching one's highest life potential.

Relationships. The first lesson in Love Notes, *Relationships Today* does not give a formal definition of relationships. Instead, there are three separate components to think about, *planning, pacing,* and *preventing*. Planning for your future relationships starts by learning about yourself and gaining relationship skills. Planning also means making clear sexual choices in order to avoid risk and learning the "success sequence" so you can make and follow your plan. The second component is pacing and involves pacing your relationships slowly. Following a slow pace will help you to make wise decisions today that will give you more choices in the future. The final component, preventing is about not letting anything stand in your way. You need to prevent anyone or anything from being a barrier to your plan and vision for your life. Putting all three components into practice will make you capable of having healthy future

relationships. This is not a true definition of relationships, instead it is a set of steps you need to follow to have successful relationships.

  Unhealthy Relationships. Unhealthy relationships are defined in lesson six, *Is It a Healthy Relationship*, through a set of three questions. The first asks if the relationship feels conditional or unconditional. Meaning do you have to constantly be earning their love/attention or is it always there for you no matter what. The second question asks if they are controlling/disrespectful or equal, respectful, and supportive. This is asking if they force you to do what they want or treat you and your ideas like they do not matter as much as theirs or if they treat you and your ideas as equal and as good as theirs and offer you support even when not needed. The final question is asking what the underlying attraction is. Are you together mostly for sex, improving your status or material gain or is this an attraction you feel on multiple levels such as having common values and great conversations. By asking all three of these questions you can get a sense of how healthy or unhealthy the relationship you are in is. Doing so can help you get out of the situation or make changes so the relationship improves.

  Safety in Relationships. Assessing for personal safety is an additional way to see if you are in a healthy relationship. The three types of safety that are addressed in the curriculum are physical, emotional, and trust & commitment. The curriculum defines physical safety as "easy to come up with examples of what it means to be physically unsafe and most would agree on the line between physically safe and physically unsafe" (Pearson, 2018, p.111). It defines emotional safety as being free to be yourself and being accepted for it. You are able to share what is in your heard and on your mind with this safety. This honestly leads to a sense of an emotional connection that is needed for strong relationships. The last sense of safety is trust & commitment. For this sense of safety, you know your partner will be reliable and have your back.

They will be there for you when you are in need. You believe you have a future with this person. This feeling is unique and not every relationship will reach this feeling. The three levels of safety, physical, emotional, and trust & commitment build off of one another to create healthy, strong, and safe relationships.

  Sexuality. Sexuality is not defined in the curriculum. Instead, the first sexuality-related information is presented with an emphasis on attraction chemistry. This happens in lesson four, *Attractions and Starting Relationships* after the relationship pyramid and how important it is to have a solid foundation before sex. The levels of the pyramid include *positive starters foundation, deepening & developing,* and *mature love* at the top. The bottom level, positive starters foundation are the beginning features of the relationship where you get to know one another and connect on things like values and common interests. The second level of the pyramid, deepening and developing is where you learn more about each other's personality and character. You look for qualities that are important if the relationship becomes serious. The top level of the pyramid, mature love if where you are each equally invested in the relationship and see a future together. Each level of the pyramid should be achieved before sex can happen in a relationship. Below are two examples of the relationship pyramid. One is a positive and healthy relationship while the other is built on a shaky foundation:

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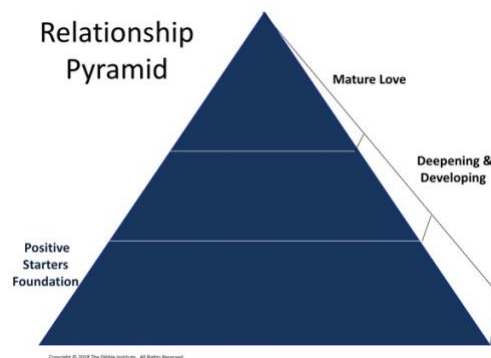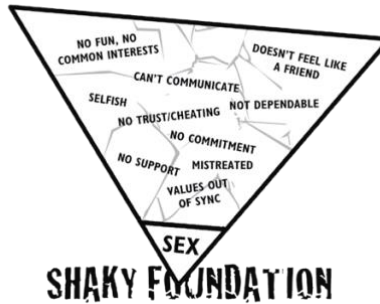
The shaky foundation pyramid happens when one jumps into sex before building a solid foundation. The reason this can happen is love chemicals and the affect they can have on a person's brain. With all of the chemicals flooding the brain it is hard to think clearly and make rational decisions. This is known as the *infatuation period*. During this period, one should follow a 3-6-9 rule where they wait 3-months, 6-months, 9-months before making big decisions, like having sex. This is so one can make sure the love chemicals are no long impeding your judgement and blocking you from seeing red flags in the relationship. The five love chemicals affecting the brain include: *PEA (Phenethylamine), Norepinephrine, Dopamine, Oxytocin,* and *Serotonin.* The curriculum definitions for each term can be found in the table below:

Table 2 *Love Chemicals*

Love Chemical	Definition
PEA (Phenethylamine)	Elevates and acts as a releasing agent for norepinephrine.
Norepinephrine	Goes up and gives you feelings of excitement and joy. It makes your heart race, palms sweat.
Dopamine	"Feel good" neurochemical that gives you a rush of pleasure, a desire to go after goals, and greater sociability.
Oxytocin	Bonding hormone increases with touch. It is sometimes nick-named the "cuddle hormone" and gives you feelings of attachment, trust, and safety.
Serotonin	Go down with romantic attraction. Serotonin is Zen-like. It is linked to tranquility, reason, and calm.

There is no mention of romance or sexuality when addressing attraction in the curriculum. It is strictly about reactions happening in the brain and the negative things that can happen because of the love chemicals. The curriculum focuses on a very black-and-white, "scientific" way to describe attraction. This omits addressing sexualities, instead focusing on a chemically based way of thinking about a natural body response to another person. Even without being mentioned, attraction and sexuality are connected. By framing them in a way that highlights the negatives of attraction, sexuality in general is put in a negative light as something that can cause poor decision-making. This is an indirect way to promote the sexual risk aversion message of the curriculum.

After spending lesson four learning about attraction within a relationship framework, the curriculum does not approach sexuality or attraction again until lesson 11 where the focus is on sex and intimacy. It begins by circling back to the romantic pyramid and building a foundation. The foundation creates intimacy, which is defined as "being truly close and connected in several ways…have a lot to do with good relationships and, ultimately, good sex as an adult" (Pearson, 2018, p.237). Being intimate is not about having sex, it is about connection according to *Love Notes*. The lesson then introduces six kinds of intimate connections: *physical, verbal, emotional, social, spiritual,* and *commitment*. *True intimacy* is achieved by combining all six dimensions.

Table 3 *Intimate Connection*

Intimate Connection	Definition
Physical	There exists a whole continuum of physical intimacy. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. This continuum can go from holding hands, hugging, to kissing, increasing physical affection, greater sexual touch, to intercourse. (Key words: Touch, Affection)

Verbal	When partners can really talk openly, honestly, and easily, they feel more connected to each other. When partners are interested in learning about each other, regularly sharing what's on their mind and their daily experiences, they build a bond of connection. (Key word: Talk)
Emotional	This connection relates to feelings. It's about how warm, strong, and genuine your feelings are for each other. The feelings are mutual—you both have healthy and strong feelings for each other and know you can share freely. (Key word: True Feelings)
Social	This dimension relates to togetherness—the time spent together doing things a couple enjoys. Shared activities and interests bond a couple together. (Key words: Activities and Interests)
Spiritual	When couples talk about the things that are really important—like their core values, who or what's influenced their life, or their philosophical, moral, political or religious beliefs—that is spiritual. Being in sync and talking and sharing on this level can truly make two people feel like they are soul mates. (Key words: Values and Beliefs)
Commitment	This is about trust and commitment. You can trust that your partner is in your corner and can count on your partner to be faithful. It's about supporting each other and being concerned about each other's well-being. It's doing nice things for each other. (Key words: Trust, support, faithful, healthy mutual giving)
True Intimacy	True intimacy takes time. It involves tender feelings and physical affection, but also much more. It involves respect for each other, even though you recognize neither is perfect. It involves aspects of honesty, trust, and admiration that last over a long period. It involves talking seriously about your values and ideals and sharing your goals. It means both partners give of themselves generously. It means supporting each other emotionally and not doing something purposely that will hurt the other person's feelings. And it means one partner doesn't pressure the other to do something for which he or she is not ready. It means both partners want to say, 'I love you,' and when they do, they mean it. All of these things take time to develop. This is the intimacy found in a healthy marriage.

The curriculum teaches that it is not until a couple reaches true intimacy that sexual intercourse should take place. In the definition for true intimacy, the curriculum states that it takes time and connects it to a healthy marriage, reinforcing the sexual risk aversion message. Once the types of intimacy have been discussed, the class takes part in a *Chart the Relationship* activity where the students are given a description of a heterosexual couple and have to determine whether they have each of the six dimensions and then using those results to determine whether they should have sex or not. Since the couple in the example are teenagers, the curriculum provides reasons why they have not fully established each of the dimensions and should not have sex. This is once again a way of promoting the sexual risk aversion message of the curriculum.

RQ2: What educational methods are used in each curriculum?

There are two major subthemes that emerge when examining the educational methods used by each curriculum. The first subtheme, *multi-modal instruction/active learning* has to do with how the lessons are intended to be implemented according to the curriculum. Each curriculum attempts to create a learning environment where students engage with information in multiple ways to make sure students comprehend it. The second subtheme, *developmental approach* has to do with how information is structured and presented to the students as well as a focus on the future. Lessons are structured to build on earlier lessons and to reach students where they are developmentally. While both curricula are lacking some important content information, both curricula include methods to create an active learning environment where students feel motivated because they feel cared about by their teachers (Aelterman et al., 2019; Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018).

Multi-Modal Instruction/Active Learning

The first theme to emerge while looking at the educational methods used is *multimodal instruction/active learning.* Research shows students do better in active classrooms that give students multiple ways to understand what is being taught (Gilakjani, 2012). Both curricula utilize this approach in their lessons. Lessons include a mixture of lecture, discussion, activities, and homework. Lessons often begin with either a lecture or a discussion. The first lesson in 3Rs, *Blue Is for Boys, Pink Is for Girls…or Are They,* begins with a lecture on gender and explain its "…how we understand our maleness, our femaleness or a combination of that" (AY, ML1.1). Further on in the lesson a discussion begins with the teacher asking students what do they think it would feel like if you were receiving gendered messages, but felt like you were a different gender. An activity done during the lesson on attraction in *Love Notes* a bottle of water has different colored glitter poured into it as each love chemical is described. Once all the chemicals have been defined the bottle is covered and shaken up to show how cloudy your brain can become when first meeting someone you are attracted to (Pearson, 2018, p.74). The *3Rs* curriculum also uses a demonstration activity to highlight the menstrual cycle. Students are given sheets of paper with the day of the cycle and a visual of what is happening in the body. The students line up from 1-28 to provide a visual explanation of what is happening to the body each day and what days a woman can get pregnant during her cycle (ML, 4.3). Each curriculum uses activities of some sort to teach students hard concepts and to help with their retention of the information.

Along with demonstrations, each curriculum utilizes group work and activities to have students work together and learn through a hands-on approach. One example of this in *Love Notes* is during lesson five, *Principles of Smart Relationships*. Students are taught seven principles of a smart relationship:

1. Seek a good match.

2. Pay attention to values.

3. Don't try to change a person into someone else.

4. Don't change yourself just to keep someone's love or friendship.

5. Expect good communication; willingness to work at it.

6. Don't play games, be phony, pressure, or use someone.

7. Expect respect. Have standards for how you will be treated. (Pearson, 2018)

These principles are a guide for asking questions like, *are our values in sync* or *am I respected* when analyzing a relationship. Students are then taught about the three sides of love and how it is important to nurture each side in order to have a healthy marriage. The three sides of the love triangle are chemistry, friendship, and trust & communication (Pearson, 2018). The conversation is grounded in the need for all three in a successful marriage.

Students are then put in small groups to work as love advisors for couples who are having trouble. Using the information on the seven principles and three sides of the love triangle, students are asked to come up with advice for couples they know. The students need to come up with specific advice of what a couple can do for all three sides of the love pyramid to help strengthen the relationship. While this group activity is focused on other people's relationships, many activities in both curricula are focused on helping students be prepared for things that can come up in their relationships.

Group activities are provided in the 3Rs curriculum to help students work through things they might encounter in a relationship, such as whether or not to have sex or how to communicate properly. In *3Rs* high school lesson two, *Sexual Decision-Making,* students are asked to role-play six scenarios where couples need to reach a decision about having sex quickly.

Students are prepped for this activity with a sexual readiness worksheet that includes questions like, *how does the other person feel, how do their feelings fit in with my own* and *if my partner and I created a pregnancy, would we be ready to start a family*. After answering these questions, the worksheet includes a statement that informs students that if they cannot answer all of the 18-questions with confidence, they are not ready to have sex. This worksheet is to be used as a reference while students work on their role-playing scenarios. The six scenarios used for this activity include a mixture of gay, straight, and transgender couples all at different stages in their relationships, yet none of them are ready to answer yes to all the sexual readiness questions students are asked to refer to. Here is an example of one of the scenarios:

Hannah and Mateo have been together for about six months. They have a good relationship but only get to see each other about once a month because Hannah just moved to a town about an hour away from Mateo. Since her move, Mateo has begun to hint that he's ready to have sex. Plan a role-play in which Mateo talks with Hannah about having sex and they make a decision.

Hannah: You're crazy about Mateo but don't think things will work out now that you live in two different places. You want to be honest with him and don't want to mislead or hurt him. Recently, Mateo has hinted that he's ready to have sex, but you're wondering if he's just trying to hold onto the relationship. Honestly, you want to wait to have sex until you're in a committed relationship with someone who lives in the same town and that you can share your day-to-day life with. Talk with Mateo about what you're sensing.

Mateo: You like Hannah a lot and you're glad that you still have a relationship after she moved away. You've decided you want to have sex with her because it might make your relationship stronger, now that you don't see each other as often (AFY, 2018)

Along with the role-playing scenarios, students are asked to practice different skills they are learning about. Lesson nine, *What's Communication Got to Do With It*, in *Love Notes* is about the importance of communication in relationships and what happens when a couple does not communicate well. The lesson starts with why communication is important before two communication skills are taught. The first, *time out* is about taking a step back for 30-minutes and calming down before addressing the problem (Pearson, 2018). This activity segues into the *speaker listener technique* for when a couple comes back together to discuss the problem. To start the activity, students are divided into pairs and given *speaker listener* cards. Both the speaker and the listener are given a set of individual and partner rules to follow to make sure they complete the activity successfully. The scenarios for this activity can either be from the *speaker listener scenarios* or from an expectations activity in lesson one. Once the activity is over, the students are asked to process how it felt to use the technique to resolve a problem (Pearson, 2018).

Table 4 *Speaker Listener Technique Rules*

Speaker Rules	Listener Rules	Rules for Both
Speak for yourself – don't mind read	Do not disagree	Stay on one topic at a time
Don't go on and on. Make a couple statements and pause so the listener can paraphrase what you said. Too much and the Listener can forget what you said to begin with	Try to understand what your partner is saying	Both people should be sure to share the *speaker listener* card, passing it back and forth a number of times as needed. The key is for both partners to feel heard and understood
Hang on to the *speaker listener* card while listener paraphrases	Paraphrase back what you hear	The speaker holds the card while the listener paraphrases
	Ask questions	

In each curriculum, lessons use multiple forms of teaching methods in order to get the information across to students. Lessons typically begin with brief lectures or discussions followed by an activity to help students understand what is being taught. By presenting information in different ways and engaging students in activities each curriculum is trying to reach every student's learning style so that all students are able to comprehend the information (Gilakjani, 2012). This method of active learning can create situational interest by teaching real information that applies directly to the students' lives (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Developmental Approach

The second subtheme that emerged while examining educational methods is that each curriculum took a developmental approach to the information. Each curriculum uses developmentally appropriate approaches to structure the information as well as give students the opportunity to start thinking about who they are, their future, and how what happens now affects them in the long term. In *3Rs* this approach is mostly seen in how the information is structured, how things are presented differently in middle school and high school lessons, and how lessons are built from one to the next. In *Love Notes*, the developmental approach is shown in the emphasis on being forward thinking and making sure the students set themselves up for the best possible future.

The structured developmental approach in *3Rs* is consistent with Jean Piaget's *Theory of Cognitive Development.* Piaget describes cognitive development as beginning with coordination of sense and moves through four stages towards more abstract thinking as a child develops (Piaget, 1972). Adolescents are moving through the final two stages, *concrete operations* and *formal operations* in middle and high school. While typically the *concrete* operational stage lasts from seven to 11 and the *formal operational* stage 12 and up, these are ranges and some

adolescents move through them slower/faster than others. In the *concrete operational* stage, concepts are attached to specific situations and connections (Piaget, 1972). In the *formal operational* stage, hypothetical and theoretical thinking starts taking place (Piaget, 1972). Abstract logic and reasoning begin to take shape as adolescents move through high school. The *3Rs* curriculum is structured according to these stages with more concepts being taught more concretely in the middle school portion and more abstractly in the high school lessons.

The middle school lessons begin with very concrete definitions and discussions of gender and sexuality. Lesson one, *Blue is for Boys, Pink is for Girls…or Are They?* focuses on "how we understand our maleness, our femaleness or a combination of that – who we are and how we express that to others" (AFY, ML1.1). The conversation around gender focuses on the messages received about how to act based on our gender and who we receive them from.

> Sometimes, when there is more than one gender of child growing up in a family, they will be treated differently because of their parents' or caregivers' feelings about gender. For example, a boy in a family is allowed to stay out later with friends or have more independence than his sister, regardless of their ages. For this activity, using that case, I would write down 'it's more okay for boys to stay out late than it is for girls,' as well as "parents/ caregivers" as the source of that message. (AFY, ML1.2)

This is a concrete, easy to understand way to think about gender with a direct connection between how we understand gender and why. A similar approach is used to help explain what being transgender feels like, with the inclusion of a reflection component.

> "We've been talking during class about messages people get on how they should act as boys and girls—but as many of you know, there are also people who don't identify as boys or girls, but rather as transgender or gender queer. This means that even if they were

called a boy or a girl at birth and may have body parts that are typically associated with

being a boy or a girl, on the inside, they feel differently."

"Think, for a moment, about the experience of hearing these gendered messages and

feeling like you were a different gender. If you felt on the inside like you were a girl,

but everyone perceived you as a boy and pushed you to be really masculine; or you

felt on the inside that you were a boy and people pushed you to be more feminine.

Or if you felt like you were both boy and girl, or somewhere in between boy and girl.

What do you think that would be like?" (AFY, ML1.3-1.4)

3Rs again uses a concrete, easy-to-understand approach to explain what being transgender is.

They take it a step further by asking students to relate to what it may feel like to have one's body

not match one's self image and the pressure that can come with that. Asking students to relate to

the feeling helps with their understanding of the experience instead of just giving them a

definition and moving on. This helps with the internalization and retention of the information

(Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Lesson two, *Sexual Orientation, Behavior and Identity: How I feel, What I do, and Who I*

Am uses this same straight-forward approach to explain sexual orientation in a PowerPoint as

"The gender(s) of the people to whom we are attracted, physically and romantically".

Accompanying this is a list of yellow flag terms, the recommended term, and the reason(s) why

they should use one of the other. This list gives straight-forward, easy-to-understand reasons to

explain why certain terms need to be used instead of others. See below for an excerpt from this

list.

Table 5 *Sexuality Terms*

Yellow Flag Term	Recommended Term	Reason(s)

Homosexual	Gay or Lesbian	"Homosexual" was used as a mental health diagnosis until the early 1980s when it was no longer seen as a mental disorder by the American Psychological Association. Today, "homosexual" is often shortened to "homo," which is used as an insult to people who are or are perceived to be gay (or to heterosexual people to mean they are stupid, like "that's so gay"). Yet, it is also an accurate category of sexual orientation that some people still use. If someone identifies as "homosexual," someone else can't say "you can't use that term." It's their right to use whatever term feels right to them.
Straight	Heterosexual	The opposite of "straight" is "bent" or "crooked." This can imply that there is something wrong with someone who is not heterosexual.
Sexual Preference	Sexual Orientation	"Preference" is a term that's used only about non-heterosexual orientations. It is intended to minimize those who are anything other than heterosexual by implying that their orientation is simply something they prefer rather than who they are. This is a "yellow flag" term because bisexual and pansexual people may say, "I am attracted to people of all genders, but I tend to prefer being in relationships with _____." In this case, the use of the word "preference" is correct.

Each reason is easy for the students to understand. Students in the *concrete operational* stage will be able to understand the first two middle school lessons because the curriculum focuses on easy-to-understand definitions and reasoning.

This changes when *3Rs* moves into its high school lessons. As students move into the *formal operational* stage the curriculum moves away from straight-forward thinking and more towards the abstract and counterfactual concepts. The first high school lesson, *Understanding*

Gender takes a more nuanced approach than the middle school lesson to gender and sexual orientation with the introduction of biological sex and gender scripts. Students are asked, *what does gender mean* to begin the lesson before the more nuanced way to think of gender is introduced:

> If you were to look in the mirror and see your body, what you see in the mirror
> is part of your biological sex. If you were to close your eyes, how you see yourself
> is your gender identity. In most cases, how people feel when they close their eyes
> matches what they see in the mirror. This is called being 'cisgender.' You might
> commonly hear people refer to just being 'male' or 'female,' but the correct term is
> 'cisgender.' For some people, what they see in the mirror and how they feel on the
> inside are different. This is called being 'transgender.' (AFY, HL1.2)

In this high school version of the gender lesson students learn about its different aspects, such as biological sex, cisgender, and intersex. To understand all of these different components along with gender scripts and their influence on one's gender development involves a higher level of thinking than the middle school version of the lesson. This difference between the high school and middle school lessons shows how the curriculum changes to be appropriate for the students' developmental abilities.

As *3Rs* instruction focuses on the cognitive development of the students, *Love Notes* instruction focuses on the life development of the student. This developmental approach aligns with Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* in how it approaches what to teach. According to Erikson (1950), adolescents are in the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage of development. During this stage, adolescents are starting to think about their future, who they are and where they are going. *Love Notes* focuses in on the future thinking aspect of the stage in the design and structure of their

curriculum. This approach can be seen immediately in lesson one, *Relationships Today* where after an introductory section, students are asked to define their vision for the future (Pearson, 2018). Students are asked to:

> Imagine life is exactly how you want it…you live in a nice place, have the resources you need, spend time the way you want. Now, imagine your love life. If you could have it exactly the way you want it to be, what would it be like? What is your partner like? What are you like together? (Pearson, 2018, p.10)

Students use the prompts to complete a relationship vision for themselves. The lesson wraps up by letting students know that *Love Notes* will help them attain their vision of a healthy relationship.

This focus on the future continues in lesson three, *My Expectations-My Future*. There are three parts to the lesson, *What's Important*, *The Power of Expectations*, and *Myself-My Future*. Each of these lessons asks the students to think about what they want for the future. *What's Important* asks students to think about ten things they want from a future partner and three things they could not accept (Pearson, 2018). The second, *The Power of Expectations,* is all about reasonable and unreasonable expectations someone can have for their future and relationships. Students are told, "most people have never really examined what they expect in relationships or why they want them. The importance of expectations shows up in how satisfied or disappointed we are in a relationship" (Pearson, 2018, p.49) before learning how expectations can cause problems and work in a positive way. Students are then asked to think about their expectations for the future and do an activity called *My Expectations* in their workbook. Some of the expectations include:

- Sharing Feelings:

- o Should you share your feelings with your partner? All of your feelings? Even secrets or things that make you feel weak?

- Who Should Pay When Going Out:

  - o Whoever has the most money? Both partners equally? Take turns? Explain.

- Timing of Sex:

  - o Postponing sex will help me accomplish my goals. I plan to postpone sex until (blank), because…

- Pregnancy:

  - o If you ever slipped up and went further than you intended and a pregnancy resulted, would you expect to raise your child together? Would you plan to get married? What are your views about how an unplanned pregnancy might affect a child? How would it affect your life goals? (Pearson, 2018)

Students are asked to focus on their future, especially via the timing of sex and pregnancy expectations. This is done with a subtle reminder that marriage should be part of the conversation surrounding both.

The biggest way *Love Notes* focuses in on the future is with the success sequence introduced in lesson eight, *Decide, Don't Slide! The Low-Risk Approach to Relationships.* Something called the *Success Sequence* is introduced to the students. The sequence is introduced as the best way to reach goals if one wants children:

If having a family and children some day are a part of your vision,

this sequence really matters in terms of increasing your ability to

reach your goals.

1. **Education:** Get a high school diploma by mid-20's and as

much college education or training as possible.

2. **Work:** Have full-time employment by mid-20's (or pursuing college/training).

3. **Marriage:** Be married before having a child.*

*Marriage is a legal and social commitment between two people, regardless of gender, identity, or orientation. (Pearson, 2018, p.164)

The students are taught that the best chance they have at achieving their goals is through this sequence. If they veer off path, it will be much harder, if not impossible, to achieve the goals. These lessons are designed to have students start preparing for the young adulthood stage Erikson (1950) defines as *intimacy vs. isolation*. In this stage, one searches for a partner so they can have an intimate relationship, otherwise they end up in isolation and do not or cannot form an intimate connection with another person (Erikson, 1950). The *success sequence* is designed to get students thinking about their future and start planning to make sure it happens without bumps such as an unplanned pregnancy.

Most of *Love Notes* is designed using this future-thinking, developmental approach. Along with it, for the most part they use examples relevant to the students and where they are currently to help students take in and apply the information. There are instances though where the curriculum veers from this and provides examples that are not relevant and do not connect with the students. One such example of this comes from lesson ten, *Communication Challenges and More Skills* section two, *Complain and Raise Issues Effectively*. After discussing good and bad approaches to complaints the students are asked to watch a clip of a couple arguing to review what they learned and to setup the next section of the lesson. The clip, *Jimmy & Elizabeth Have Issues* is of a white, married couple with a baby. They are arguing over who is going to miss work because their babysitter is sick. They have multiple negative interactions in the clip until

one of them decides to stay home with the baby. While this clip is a good example of what can happen to married couples, it might not be relevant to the students. Depending on where the curricula is being used, the students may be unable to relate to an argument regarding work and childcare between a middle-class couple. A clip showing an argument between a teenage couple would have connected better and been more relevant developmentally to the students.

With each curriculum using a version of a developmental approach it is clear that during the construction and design of the curricula the development of the students was taken into consideration. For *3Rs* the developmental approach took the form of the students' cognitive abilities. Information is structured in a way that compliments the cognitive development of moving from the concrete operations stage to the formal operations stage where thinking goes from concrete to more abstract and nuanced. *Love Notes* version of the developmental approach is aligned with Erikson's stages of development. Students are in the *identity vs role confusion* stage of their development. This stage is meant for them to start to understand who they are and prepare them for their future in young adulthood where they are meant to find their partner and form an intimate relationship (Erikson, 1950). *Love Notes* is designed to get students on what they consider to be the right developmental path by asking them to start thinking and planning for their future.

RQ3: How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?

Examining how the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices lead to three subthemes, *no discussion of puberty*, *abstinence-only versus comprehensive*, and *heteronormative and LGBTQ framed as deviant.* The curricula both fail to include puberty in their lessons, creating the first subtheme. The second subtheme is about the focus of the curricula. *Love Notes* has a relationship-focus, *3Rs* has a relationship, sex, and gender focus, and

both are abstinence-focused. The final subtheme, *heteronormative and LGBTQ framed as deviant* is the framing of information in a heterosexual context as well the negative information presented to students about LGBTQ individuals.

No Discussion of Puberty

In the curricula, puberty itself is not addressed. Instead, each curriculum includes information that is relevant to what happens in adolescence but does not directly address the changes one goes through during this time period. In *Love Notes* hormones and how they effect a person is the focus. This starts in lesson four, *Attractions and Starting Relationships* with the chemistry of love lesson described previously and continues into lesson 11, *Let's Talk About Sex* when section four, *Are We on the Same Page?* discusses sexual arousal patterns and hormone basics. Before the information on hormones is presented though students are told, "The discussion of hormones is based on research literature, which is mostly focused on those who conform biologically or socially to the stereotypical expressions of male and female. Some LGBTQ youth may not fit this data as neatly" (Pearson, 2018, p.247). This line is telling students who identify as sexual minority or gender non-conforming that the lesson is excluding information on their development and how hormones might affect them differently. It is also sending a message of not being important enough to discuss beyond a brief mention of being different. The hormones testosterone and oxytocin and how they affect males and females are described in the following portion of the text:

> What is true for everyone is that testosterone affects sex drive. Males, on average, have higher levels of testosterone, which is the hormone for sexual drive (for both males and females) and aggression. It is especially high for young males. Females have testosterone, but in smaller amounts, on average. Another hormone related to physical intimacy and

sex is oxytocin. Oxytocin affects feelings of trust and connection – making us feel close

to another. It's released through affectionate and supportive touch, breast feeding, and

sex. It's often nicknamed the bonding hormone or cuddle hormone. Both males and

females have increased oxytocin with intimate touch and get a surge of oxytocin when

having sex. However, females generally have higher levels of it than males. (Pearson,

2018, p.247)

It is suggested by the curriculum that females having more oxytocin is why they "have a harder

time separating their emotions from physical intimacy and sex than males. Females may be more

likely to quickly feel connected and trust with intimate touch" (Pearson, 2018, p.247). This

section on hormones, with its LGBTQ disclaimer and when lesson four describes the chemicals

in the brain that releasing and clouding judgement are the closest the curriculum gets to

discussing puberty.

3Rs, on the other hand, more closely addresses puberty by teaching students about the

body parts and hinting at bodily changes everybody is going through. In middle school lesson

three, *Everybody's Got Body Parts* students learn about the female and male reproductive

systems by watching slides on the website kidshealth.org followed by a video on the path of

sperm. While on the website students are given worksheets of male and female sexual and

reproductive systems to label. After watching the video, students are asked if they have noticed

changes happening to their bodies. Once a few students answer the teacher tells them:

You might become more aware of looks right around the time your bodies begin

changing. This can make physical changes difficult to deal with emotionally. Adjusting to

a changing body is more than just looks, though. Lots of teens base their self-image on

how their bodies feel and perform. (AFY, 2018, ML3.3)

This statement is the closest to a direct reference to puberty as the curriculum makes. The homework for this lesson is two crosswords, one on female and one on male sexual and reproductive systems. Clues for the crosswords include:

- I make eggs! (& no, I'm not a chicken!) There are two of me
- I work by taking urine from the bladder out of the body!
- I'm the head of the penis! Careful, I can be pretty sensitive.
- I'm like a big water slide – I go from the testes up into the body so I can carry sperm to where it mixes with semen before it leaves the body! (AFY, 2018)

The students learn about the body parts through these activities in lesson three to prepare them for lesson four, *Reproduction Basics*. Fertility and the menstrual cycle are the main focus of the lesson. The teacher hands out 28 cards that each represent one day of the cycle. Students are asked to tape them in order to the board so the teacher can describe them. The steps of the menstrual cycle lesson are stated as follows:

- Now we can see an average 28-day menstrual cycle with Day 1 being the first day of the period. Next, I'd like to show you when a person is most likely to become pregnant if sperm and an egg unite.
- Now whenever the egg is traveling through the fallopian tube pregnancy can happen if there are sperm present
- Sperm can live inside another person's body for up to five days.
- You can see how if there is sperm present either BEFORE or DURING the same time when the egg are present, that is the time when a pregnancy is most likely to happen (AFY, 2018)

This information on the menstrual cycle is the last time in *3Rs* students learn about their bodies and what is happening to them. While it does not give anything on puberty, it does provide baseline knowledge of male and female reproductive systems.

Abstinence-only versus Comprehensive

The way sexual behavior is addressed in each curriculum is very similar in the sense that both are focused on preaching the message of abstinence. *Love Notes* has a relationship-focus that works to provide students with the tools necessary to have a successful relationship. By using this approach, sex is not fully discussed until lesson 11, *Let's Talk About Sex*. Before lesson 11 any time sex is brought it is framed in a way that tells students they are not ready. *3Rs* sends a similar message to students about sexual readiness. While the curriculum is more comprehensive than *Love Notes* with the inclusion of a sexuality lesson and teaching the reproduction systems of males and females, it still sends the same message of students not being ready.

The way *3Rs* sends this message is through the readiness survey they ask students to fill out. The sexual readiness survey is introduced to students in high school lesson two, *Sexual Decision Making*. The students are given the survey to apply to some role-playing in class before being told, "It's important for each of you to figure out where you stand about decisions regarding sex so you can be clear for yourself and also find ways to be clear with any future partners" (AFY, 2018, HL2.3). Some of the readiness questions include:

- Do I want to wait until I'm married to have sex, or until my partner and I are in a long-term committed relationship?

- Do I trust my partner? Completely?

- How would my current family feel if they found out about my sexual relationship? How would I feel about their knowing?

- If my partner and I created a pregnancy, would we be ready to start a family?

The questions on this survey are designed to make students question sexual readiness and come to the conclusion that they are not ready. The final line of the survey, "If you cannot answer all of these questions with confidence, you are not ready for sex yet. You're the only one who can make the decision, please make it wisely" (AFY, 2018, HL2.4) reiterates the point to students that they are not ready by having them question themselves. This is a subtle way to remind students of the abstinence message.

Love Notes does not take as subtle an approach to teaching students they are not ready for sex. In lesson eight, *Decide, Don't Slide! The Low-Risk Approach to Relationships* students are introduced to the concept of the success sequence. The sequence begins with education and finishing your degrees by mid-20's, then it moves to work and having full-time employment by mid-20's, and the final step is marriage and having children (Pearson, 2018). According to the sequence you have to be married before having a child. *Love Notes* provides data that proves the importance of staying "on track" with the sequence:

> This is real – not opinion nor values. It is born out of research. Take a look at this slide analyzing those between 28 to 34 years of age who followed the Success Sequence or who were "on track" and those who did not. "On track" means completing education, being employed by mid-20's, and not married and no children (Pearson, 2018, p.165).

If students want to follow the sequence they are told, "Deciding not to have sex now, as a teen, is the surest way to prevent a pregnancy before your life is more settled" (Pearson, 2018, p.165). This once again reiterates the importance of abstinence and waiting until marriage.

When sex is discussed in the positive by *Love Notes* it is framed in the context of marriage, "Married couples want to have a good sex life. It's important for healthy marriages" (Pearson, 2018, p.233). In lesson five, *Principles of Smart Relationships* students are taught that to have a healthy relationship one needs all three sides of the love triangle, chemistry, friendship, and trust & commitment. This is then immediately connected to marriage, "In any successful marriage, all three sides must be nurtured" (Pearson, 2018, p.96). A healthy relationship is connected with a successful marriage, and students are taught sex should only occur in this context. Sex and pregnancy are also connected through out *Love Notes* with students being told, "Preventing an unplanned pregnancy before you are more settled and married is something you have some control over" followed by being told not having sex is the best way to prevent unplanned pregnancy (Pearson, 2018, p.165). Everything positive regarding sex is connected to marriage and anything negative such as unplanned pregnancy is framed outside of marriage.

Heteronormative: LGBTQ Framed as Deviant

The final subtheme that emerged while answering this question was the heteronormative framework and the deviant framing of LGBTQ individuals. The heteronormative framework in both curricula can be seen in how they handle the discussions of sex and contraceptives. Both curricula leave out LGBTQ youth from the sexual decision-making discussions. The deviant framing of LGBTQ individuals comes in the form of the information presented and how it is prevented. In lesson 11, *Let's Talk About Sex* when teaching students about hormones the information is prefaced by the quote:

- Some LGBTQ youth may not fit this data as neatly:

- As a reminder, for whatever reasons, LGBTQ youth are at a greater risk than the population of teens as a whole to engage in heterosexual behavior resulting in a pregnancy.

- LGBTQ youth are also at a higher risk for STDs (Pearson, 2018, p.247)

3Rs does this by presenting students with LGBTQ dating violence, "Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth are more likely to experience physical and psychological dating abuse, sexual coercion, and cyber dating abuse than their heterosexual peers" (AFY, 2018, ML8.9). Both curricula present negative information about LGBTQ individuals at different points, creating the deviant light focused on them.

Students are presented negative LGBTQ information while also not hearing about LGBTQ individuals in the sexual decision-making conversations. Instead, everything regarding sex is framed in a heterosexual lens. This happens in a few different ways with the curricula. The first way comes from how sex and pregnancy is connected. Both *Love Notes* and *3Rs* asks students if they are ready to have children, and if not, they are not ready to have sex. In *3Rs* this happens with the sexual readiness survey with the questions: "What would I do if a pregnancy resulted from having vaginal sex? How would my partner and I feel?" and "If my partner and I created a pregnancy, would we be ready to start a family?" They do not ask any questions related to LGBTQ couples in the survey. In *Love Notes* the dangers of early sex includes a heterosexual reference of "maybe they get pregnant" but not mention of an LGBTQ relationship (Pearson, 2018, p.69). This is furthered in lesson 11, when presenting risky situations for sex one of the situations, "Not having clear reasons for why you do not want to get or make someone pregnant at this time in your life" is something that can happen with heterosexual couples.

Contraceptives are discussed in the curricula, but with a focus on pregnancy prevention. The first time *3Rs* brings up contraceptives is in lesson four, *Reproduction Basics* where they are introduced as "Birth control, if used correctly and consistently, prevents the sperm and egg from uniting by either blocking the sperm or preventing an egg from leaving the ovary" (AFY, 2018, ML4.4). When *Love Notes* introduces contraceptives, they do so in lesson 12, *Pregnancy, STIs, and HIV* in a section called, *Planning a Family*. The section is introduced to students with the information, "…married couples want to plan when or if to start a family. To do so, couples have a number of methods available for preventing pregnancy" (Pearson, 2018, p.271). From there each form of contraception is described by how effective they are at preventing pregnancy: "The birth control pill, which must be taken every day, is 93% effective, if days are missed, effectiveness is compromised. The male condom is 87% effective with typical use. The female condom is 79% effective" (Pearson, 2018, p.271). These omissions of LGBTQ-related information such as different forms of penetration when discussing sexual decision-making, sex, and contraceptives contribute to the heteronormative lens that frames both sexuality education curricula.

RQ4: How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth?

When examining the curricula for its degree of inclusion, the subtheme of *false sense of inclusion* emerges. A false sense of inclusion in the curricula means that sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents are included as an addition to lessons, not seamlessly integrated throughout the curricula. This is demonstrated in four specific ways: the terminology used or not brought up, the examples given in lessons, LGBTQ information being an add-on to a lesson, and sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth are less than their peers.

Terminology

While each curriculum strives to achieve inclusive language, often times they miss the mark via the terminology being included or omitted. It can be seen in the relationship terminology being used in each curriculum as well as with the gender and sexuality terms. For example, both *3Rs* and *Love Notes* attempt to be inclusive via the use of the term "partner" when universally discussing relationships, yet they also use terms such as male/female and boyfriend/girlfriend. Omission of sexualities is also an issue with both curricula. Two specific sexualities that both curricula fail to fully address are, *pansexual* and *asexual*. *Love Notes* completely fails to address either sexuality while *3Rs* tells the teachers to address them only if the students ask:

- Note to the Teacher: If you choose to describe "pansexual" or if a student has used that term, this would be the time to explain what it means…

- Asexual – If this term comes up, you would define it as someone who does not have feelings of sexual attraction. (AFY, ML2.3)

This is a form of purposeful omission in *3Rs* and a lack of addressing the needs of all the students by both curricula.

Love Notes and 3Rs also have multiple instances where binary terms are used to describe individuals and relationship. In lesson three, *My Expectations-My Future* uses both an inclusive term and binary terminology in the same expectation, "I expect my partner to spend all of his/her time with me" (Pearson, 2018, p.52). In the first middle school lesson of *3Rs*, *Blue is for Boys, Pink is for Girls…or Are They?* gender is described as "how we understand our maleness, our femaleness or a combination of that…" (AFY, ML1.1). While it leaves it open to someone feeling like a combination of genders, it does not address those who identify with no gender. The

exclusion of those who may identify as gender-nonconforming happens again in middle school lesson 10, *Making SMART Choices*. Students are asked to use the SMART Choices Model to work through a scenario. The three practice scenarios all include the phrasing "your boyfriend or girlfriend" instead of partner, excluding gender-nonconforming students. In lesson 12 of *Love Notes, Pregnancy, STIs and HIV* binary terms are also used when describing a situation where someone might feel pressured to have sex, "Many times a person is attracted to someone and finds himself or herself pressured, subtly or not so subtly, by someone they like and want to have a relationship with" (Pearson, 2018, p.282).

Even though both curricula have a lot to improve on with the terminology they use, there are some exceptions where they are inclusive with their lessons. Both curricula directly address the issue of inclusion through statements. In the first high school lesson of *3Rs, Understanding Gender* the lesson wraps up with the teacher telling the students:

> No one has the right to tell someone else how they are supposed to express their gender or how they should look. Society will continue to give messages about gender and body image, whether from the media, family, culture, or religious groups. But in the end, every person has the right to discover who they are and to let others know in ways that feel right to them. (AFY, HL1.6)

Love Notes also does something similar to this in lesson 12, *Pregnancy, STIs and HIV*. During a knowledge testing activity an answer to a question about gay and lesbian individuals with an inclusive statement regarding information being taught:

> Every teenager, regardless of gender, identity, or sexual orientation needs the skills to build healthy relationships and healthy selves. All teens need to think about the quality, the timing, and meaning of sex. And all teens need to know the facts on STDs and

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pregnancy. All teens need to make clear decisions about sex and plans to stay true to their intentions. (Pearson, 2018, p.269)

The statements in both *3Rs* and *Love Notes* show that they are on the right track towards inclusion.

Positive & Negative Examples

Each curricula use examples throughout their lessons to help students understand what they are learning. In 3Rs there is a mixture of positive and negative examples for both heterosexual couples and LGBTQ+ couples. *Love Notes* on the other hand does not have this mixture. Instead, throughout the curriculum, particularly when presenting scenarios about healthy relationships and conversations about sex, oftentimes the only positive examples include White, heterosexual couples and the negative examples include LGBTQ people of color. In lesson five, *Principles of Smart Relationships* the differences can be seen in the examples for each principle. The examples for this come in two forms, use of the word partner, and use of he/she or boyfriend/girlfriend. In most of these examples the genders of the members of the relationship are either ambiguous or easy to infer:

- My religious beliefs are very important to me. My partner isn't very religious and mocks my beliefs.
- She's always right and I'm always wrong. I think it's just better to keep my mouth shut. I hate arguing. If it's meant to be, it will just work out.

Outside of these examples there was a direct reference to a lesbian couple, "My new girlfriend wants to get intimate. She says we're lesbians so it's no big deal – we can't get pregnant. I told her no; I was not ready for that. She respected me and stopped pushing" (Pearson, 2018, p.101).

While upon initial observation this seems like a positive with the outcome, but it is also playing upon the stereotype that some lesbians are masculine/aggressive.

The scenario comes up again in lesson 12, *Pregnancy, STIs and HIV* in the *pressure situations and assertiveness skills* section. Students are asked to role-play two ineffective scenarios and then complete two partially written ones. The ineffective scenarios include one that uses the term boyfriend/girlfriend so students can role-play according to their gender. The second scenario is the aggressive lesbian scenario from lesson five:

> You're at a party with a girl you really like. You met as freshman on the basketball team. She's come out, but you're still questioning and not sure. You've been developing a cool relationship. You can really talk, you both love dancing and going to parties aside from your sports interests. Tonight you're at a party. Parents aren't home and some people are leaving – maybe to have sex. She talks you into going upstairs and you start kissing and touching. You're not ready to have sex and want to go back to the party. (Pearson, 2018, p.298)

The scenario finishes with Person 1 convincing Person 2 to have sex after once again reminding her that they cannot get pregnant. The scenarios for completion include the boyfriend/girlfriend and a couple, Jasmine and Marcus. Jasmine and Marcus and their scenario is an example of what sounds like a couple of color in a negative scenario instead of a White-sounding couple:

> Jasmine likes Marcus but wants a relationship where they have more fun. It seems like all they do is spend time alone getting physical. And, she always told herself that when she does decide to have sex, she'd insist on condom. This afternoon, they are alone at her mom's apartment. They are in her bedroom, and kissing. Things are heating up.

The scenario ends with Marcus getting frustrated by Jasmine continuing to shut him down/ask for a condom. Even if Jasmine and Marcus do not end up having sex, depending on what the students write, it is a negative example of a couple of color.

In lesson eight, *Decide, Don't Slide! The Low-Risk Approach to Relationships*, there are two specific scenarios that further this. After learning about the risks of just sliding into sex the students are given a story titled, *A Young Father's Story* about someone who got a girl pregnant in high school. The picture on the powerpoint associated with this story is of a Black father and son, the handout itself also has a different picture of a Black father and son. This is followed up by the section on waiting to have sex. A girl named Sarah writes a letter about how happy she is not having had sex in high school. Sarah is a very White-sounding name. Putting these two scenarios - teenage pregnancy and a Black father - back-to-back helps reinforce the negative stereotypes of people of color.

LGBTQ as an Add-on

In this part of a *false sense of inclusion* it is the way LGBTQ information is included in the curricula. In both curricula when information is presented, oftentimes the information presented has a heterosexual focus with minor afterthought mentions of LGBTQ information. This can be immediately seen in *3Rs* second middle school lesson, *Sexual Orientation, Behavior and Identity: How I Feel, What I Do, and Who I Am* via the inclusion and exclusion of sexualities. Teachers are told to only explain the terms *pansexual* and *asexual* if students ask about them. This immediately sets up an imbalance in how sexualities are going to be treated. *Love Notes* also has an imbalance in how and what sexuality information is presented. In lesson 13, *Through the Eyes of a Child* there is a section titled, *What about Fathers?* that focuses on the importance of fathers in their child's lives and an activity on what being a good father is. In the

information for the teachers the curriculum tells them, "Whether a teen is LGBTQ or hetero, they may have issues related to father absence or abandonment" (Pearson, 2018, p.315) as part of the explanation for the section. When the possibility of not having a father is addressed in the activity it says, "If you did not have a father in your life – or positive father presence – think about what a good father should be like. Maybe you have two great mothers. Consider what a great father should be like" (Pearson, 2018, p.315). These are both add-on that do not add actual value to the lesson or activity and seem to be included for the purpose of seeming inclusive.

Even though a lot of LGBTQ information feels like it is an add-on, there are places where each curriculum does a good job integrating the information. In *3Rs* high school lesson one, *Understanding Gender* an activity where students have to guess the gender of a picture based on a nongendered description. After the activity the teacher tells the class,

> In the photos, there were certain features that could apply to someone who is or who we perceive to be female, to someone who is or we perceive to be male, or to someone whose gender identity we do not know or who does not identify as male or female. If these terms can apply to someone of any gender, why do you think we gender them in the first place? For instance, why would we say, 'she's dressed like a guy' vs. 'she's wearing pants?' (AFY, HL1.5)

This is an integration of gender minorities into the lesson on gender without othering. *Love Notes* also does a good job with this in lesson seven, *Dangerous Love* when introducing information on dating violence. The students are told, "And it's not just a heterosexual issue. Dating violence can happen in all types of relationships, regardless of sexual orientation or gender" (Pearson, 2018, p.136). The curriculum is making it a point for students to know that this is an important

issue, and anyone is susceptible to dating violence, there is no guaranteed safe type of relationship.

Sexual Minority and Gender-Nonconforming Youth as Less Than

The final aspect of *false sense of inclusion* is how sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth are treated by the curricula. In both *Love Notes* and *3Rs* sexual minority and gender nonconforming individuals are portrayed as less than their gender conforming and heterosexual counterparts. This microaggression occurs via omission, delivery of information, and information taught in each curriculum. Omission of specific LGBTQ information happens in each curriculum specifically when the discussion is centered around sex. The first occurrence of this comes with the types of penetration covered. Both talk about penis/vaginal/anal sexual penetration practices, but other forms of penetration such as fingers and toys are not mentioned. This leaves information missing on nonpenetration sex and the proper use of toys and fingers. Multiple sexual populations are missing relevant information with this minimal coverage. There is also contraceptive information missing for this population. The use of all contraceptives is centered around pregnancy prevention and *STIs/HIV*. Again, a population is missing out on relevant information on contraceptive use outside of those standards. And finally, in each curriculum when they are going over sexual decision making there is no LGBTQ information, everything is framed in a heterosexual light.

The second aspect of this, delivery of information is observed in how specific information is taught to students. The *3Rs* second middle school lesson, *Sexual Orientation, Behavior and Identity: How I Feel, What I Do, and Who I Am* the way teachers are told to only bring up *pansexual* and *asexual* if a student asks about them is both the omission piece and also delivery of information because it is added if asked. Also in this lesson, students are presented

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with a *Sexual Orientation: Myth or Fact?* worksheet to complete with no prior information given

outside of the definition of some sexual orientations. Some of the statements include:

- You can tell whether someone is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual by the way they look or act

- In a same-sex relationship, one person always plays a "male" or "butch" role, and the other always plays a "female" or "femme" role

- With the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court Decision on marriage equality, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people now have all the same legal rights as heterosexual people.

The answer to all of the seven statements is myth. After telling students the answer is myth there

is a paragraph of information as to why. Instead of taking the time to teach information on issues

surrounding LGBTQ individuals the information is presented as part of an answer without too

much direct instruction.

Examples of microaggressions from both the delivery of information and the information

presented can be found in *Love Notes*. A combination of both can be seen in lesson seven,

Dangerous Love when reasons why teens do not report dating violence reasons are presented, "In

addition, sexual minority youth may feel stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, or social

rejection" (Pearson, 2018, p.135). The information presented is negative and is also presented

with no extra information about what it could mean or how it can be helped. A second example

of this comes in lesson 11, *Let's Talk About Sex* during a discussion on hormones and sexual

arousal:

Some LGBTQ youth may not fit this data as neatly:

- As a reminder, for whatever reasons, LGBTQ youth are at a greater risk than the population of teens as a whole to engage in heterosexual behavior resulting in a pregnancy

- LGBTQ youth are also at a higher risk for STDs (Pearson, 2018, p.247)

The information presented here completely centers LGBTQ youth in a negative light. There are valid, researched reasons for both of these facts that the curriculum chooses not to give the students. Additionally, by using the phrase "for whatever reasons" discounts the discovery and coming out process someone who identifies as sexual minority and gender non-conforming goes through.

Even though both curricula have many points to improve upon, they are starting to become more inclusive. Just by having information regarding LGBTQ individuals is a big step in the right direction. The notes to instructor before every *3Rs* lesson reminding instructors about the importance of language:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom and should make adjustments accordingly. (AFY, 2018, ML1.1)

Something similar is seen in *Love Notes* when in lesson seven, *Dangerous Love* the curriculum reminds students that physical violence is "not just a heterosexual issue. Dating violence can

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happen in all types of relationships, regardless of sexual orientation or gender" (Pearson, 2018, p.136). This is just a simple reminder to students that everyone is at risk for domestic violence, no matter what. These are the subtle types of inclusion needed throughout each curriculum.

These four findings - terminology, positive and negative examples, LGBTQ as an add-on, and sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth as less than - can be interpreted through both universal and LGBTQ published standards. At a universal level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) produced a framework for action known as the Salamanca Statement in 1994 which directly addressed the topic of inclusion in education. The statement provides a strong foundation for how inclusive education should look. In specific, the framework (UNESCO, 1994) proclaims that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,

- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,

- Education systems should be designed, and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs (UNESCO, 1994)

Adopting this framework for inclusion would mean that an inclusive curriculum included information about every student and using multimodal instruction so most learning styles are met. For this study, the definition of inclusion comes from this framework with the belief that relevant educational information should be provided for all, including sexual minorities and gender nonconforming students.

Summary

The curricula analyzed for this study provided rich data about what is being taught and how. The sexual terminology students are learning have multiple definitions depending on the

curriculum/lesson, and at times students learn two different definitions for the same term. Each use a multi-modal approach to teach the students. They use a mixture of discussions, activities, and demonstrations to teach students different sexual education topics. Along with the multi-modal instruction, each curriculum uses a developmental approach to teach the students. In *3Rs* the developmental approach comes in the form in how the information is taught. The middle school lessons include more concrete definitions and discussions whereas the high school lessons include a more nuanced approach to the information where students think in the abstract about concepts. The developmental approach is different in *Love Notes*. Their version of developmental approach is what the students are thinking about. The curriculum asks students to start thinking about their future and what they want for themselves. Students are taught to start setting their life up based on what they want for themselves in the future.

The lessons taught using these approaches lack information on puberty, LGBTQ individuals, and are abstinence focused. When LGBTQ information is taught to students it is often as an addition to a lesson, creating a false sense of inclusion. Sexual minorities and gender nonconforming students can be made to feel less than their peers by how LGBTQ information is covered by the curricula. This is due to an omission of relevant information, the information that is taught and how it is delivered. In conclusion, the curricula are using a multi-modal form of instruction, so students are learning in multiples way and they are including some LGBTQ related information, but still need to take steps to become a fully comprehensive and inclusive form of sexuality education.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The research question that this study aimed to answer was, w*hat do current sexuality education curricula say to promote identity formation for adolescents who are sexual minorities or gender nonconforming*. To answer the overarching research question, I asked four specific questions:

(1) How are sexuality-related terms defined and addressed in these curricula?

(2) What educational methods are used in each curriculum?

(3) How do the curricula address sexual health, behavior, and reproductive choices?

(4) How do the curricula address a sense of inclusion for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming youth?

The results to these questions led to four themes, *inconsistent approach to sexuality-related terms*, *multi-modal instruction/active learning*, *a developmental approach*, and *a false sense of inclusion*. The combination of these four themes forms an overarching theme of *separate, but not equal* which in turn has a negative impact on the mental health on sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth.

Inconsistent Approach to Sexuality-Related Terms

Neither *3Rs* or *Love Notes* offers the students a clear definition of sexuality or all its related terms. *3Rs* actively chooses to exclude terms such as asexual unless students specifically ask about it and *Love Notes* completely avoids the subject by focusing on relationships and the "love chemicals" firing when you meet someone you like. These are both inconsistent approaches to sexuality-related terms due to the selectivity of terms in the curricula, the relationship framework used to teach about sex, and the lack of accurate definitions for terms chosen to discuss.

3Rs puts the responsibility of asking about certain sexuality-related terms on the students instead of automatically supplying them with the definitions. Not all students feel safe bringing up these terms, and some may not yet know there is a name for what they are feeling. These students are thus being left out of the experience of learning about themselves and knowing that what they are feeling is normal and not something to be ashamed of (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). Not learning about themselves in the curriculum makes it harder to feel safe openly exploring their sexuality (Toomey et al., 2012).

The sexual risk aversion message and relationship approach of *Love Notes* creates a curriculum where sexuality and its related terms are not defined or discussed. Instead, the focus is on what happens to the brain when love chemicals start firing. The curriculum teaches that chemicals have a negative impact on the brain, which leads to the necessity of the 3-6-9 rule. Students learn about the six parts of intimacy and true intimacy, which is framed as something that is part of a healthy marriage. When sex is addressed, it is framed as something students are not ready for because they have not reached true intimacy.

Gender as a concept is not addressed by the curriculum. When discussing concepts within relationships such as pregnancy, communication, and sex the curriculum uses a binary approach. 3Rs on the other hand begins with a lesson on gender in both the middle and high school lessons and has a lesson dedicated to sexual orientation for middle school. It makes sure to introduce the basics, but there is a lack of depth to the explanation and exploration of both gender and sexual orientation. They mention concepts like the gender spectrum and non-binary, but do not discuss them beyond the initial mention which can prevent some students with identifying with the curriculum (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Multi-Modal Instruction/Active Learning

Students learn best through multi-modal instruction and in active learning environments where they feel cared about (Aelterman et al., 2019; Hidalgo-Cabrilana & Lopez-Mayan, 2018). The structure of each curricula creates an active learning environment in which students can engage with the material and participate in their education. Both *Love Notes* and *3Rs* work to create these active learning environments through a combination of lecture, discussion, activities, and homework. The curricula work to connect the students with the information by asking questions like, "how would you feel" or "what would you do if" so that information became more relevant to the students. For example, in *3Rs* for the lesson on the menstrual cycle students had to take a sheet of paper with a number, an image, and information on it and line up in order. This was a way to demonstrate the monthly cycle women experience. Having the students line up and see what the process looks like and how something is always happening helps with the understanding and retaining of the information (Gilakjani, 2012). By presenting information in different ways and engaging students in activities each curriculum is trying to reach every student's learning style so that all students are able to comprehend the information (Gilakjani, 2012). This method of active learning can create situational interest by teaching real information that applies directly to the students' lives (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Developmental Approach

Each curriculum uses developmentally appropriate approaches to how they structure the information as well as give adolescents the opportunity to start thinking about who they are, their future, and how what happens now affects the long term. In *Love Notes* the developmental approach is related to the developmental life stages from Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* and the developmental approach that *3Rs* uses is related to Piaget's stages of cognitive development.

Each of these approaches creates a learning environment that connects with the students in developmentally appropriate ways.

The life stages approach *Loves Notes* uses to teach students sexuality education focuses on the building of relationships. In the adolescent stage of *Identity vs Confusion* students are learning about who they are and testing different aspects of themselves in the world around them, how their environment responds either helps or hinders them manage this stage crisis (Erikson, 1955). The curriculum does not spend time explaining the changes that take place in adolescence, instead it focuses on making sure the students are making the right decisions while in adolescence, so they are ready to find love in young adulthood, which is aligned with the Erikson stage of *Intimacy vs Isolation*. This is done by asking students to think about what they want in their future and start to come up with a plan to make that happen for themselves. Making the right choices, such as abstaining from sex in adolescence will prepare you to find love in young adulthood. The relationship information *Love Notes* provides for the students will then help them build and maintain healthy adult relationships. *Love Notes* is directly focused on making students prepared for future, healthy relationships. This focus and how the information is presented to the students creates a developmental approach similar to Erikson's eight stages.

The developmental approach of *3Rs* differs from *Love Notes* by focusing on the cognitive development of the students rather than their life development. This takes place in the way information is presented and described as the curriculum evolves through middle and high school with the students. In the middle school lessons begin with information being presented in a concrete, easy to understand way. As the lessons move into and through high school how the information is being presented evolves so abstract logic and thinking about sexuality and gender

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can take place. This presentation of information aligns with Piaget's *Theory of Cognitive Development* and how thinking evolves as a person ages (Piaget, 1972).

False Sense of Inclusion

In both *Love Notes* and *3Rs* sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents are included as an addition to lessons, not seamlessly integrated throughout the curriculum. This is demonstrated in four distinct ways, the terminology used, the examples in the curricula, being add-ons to lessons, and sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents are less than their peers. This false sense of inclusion can lead to sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents to not feel represented and could negatively impact their mental health (Snapp et al., 2015).

While *Loves Notes* and *3Rs* each strive to achieve inclusive language, often times they miss the mark via the terminology being used. This happens with both the description of the partners in relationships as well as by the forms of sexuality described. Both curricula use the term partner, but often revert to boyfriend/girlfriend and she/he when describing details about the relationship. They never leave it completely ambiguous for students to make their own decision about who is in the relationship. The terminology is also along the binary lines of male/female and aside from a small mention in *3Rs* of some people not feeling like either gender. Along with nonbinary individuals not being represented by the terminology, those who identify as asexual are not discussed at all unless the students take it upon themselves to ask. The terminology usage in the curricula is on the way to inclusion, but still has a way to.

Throughout the curricula, particularly when presenting scenarios about healthy relationships and conversations about sex, oftentimes the only positive examples include White, heterosexual couples and the negative examples include LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals.

Including examples of LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals seems inclusive upon first glance, but when the majority of examples are negative it is not real inclusion. Instead, these examples put LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals in a negative light and can perpetuate negative stereotypes. This can also make it harder for those who identify as a sexual minority or gender-nonconforming individual to explore their identity (Proulx et al, 2019).

In both curricula when information is presented, oftentimes the information presented has a heterosexual focus with minor afterthought mentions of LGBTQ information. Throughout the curricula how LGBTQ information is covered or included is as an addition to an already completed lesson and not as a complete part of the lesson. For example, when *3Rs* tells teachers to only bring up *asexual* or *pansexual* if students ask about them it creates an imbalance in how differing sexualities are addressed which creates a separation and otherness. In other parts of the curricula LGBTQ information such as "maybe you were raised by two moms" that adds no value to the lesson is included as a way to seem inclusive.

The final aspect of *false sense of inclusion* is that sexual minority and gender nonconforming individuals are portrayed as less than their gender conforming and heterosexual counterparts. This microaggression occurs via omission, delivery of information, and information taught. Two of the biggest ways this happens is the omission of LGBTQ information when discussing sex and the way the curricula frame the use and importance of birth control. When sex is discussed, it is mostly in the heteronormative framework of penis/vagina/anal. This leaves other forms of penetration such as digital out of the curricula, preventing sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents from feeling represented in the conversations surround sex. The framing of birth control as pregnancy prevention instead of something women use to regulate their period or to prevent painful menstruation and periods excludes an entire group of

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women and their reasons for using birth control. When the use of condoms is discussed, it also is in a heteronormative light with a focus on pregnancy prevention instead of a safe sex practice to avoid STIs. Teaching condoms through this lens with minimal information as to how else they are used prevents sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents from getting information that is relevant to their sexual development. Not having relevant information will create a disconnect where information does not feel relevant to students who identify as sexual minority or gender-nonconforming, preventing them from fulling connecting and taking in information that could prevent them from catching an STI (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Separate, but Not Equal

The overarching theme derived from the content analysis of two sexuality education curricula is the assumption that sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents are separate, but not equal. Each curriculum singles out the differences in sexuality, but only gives full information from a heterosexual lens, creating an unequal learning environment where sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents do not see themselves in much of the curriculum. The four themes of *inconsistent approach to sexuality-related terms*, *multi-modal instruction/active learning*, *a developmental approach*, and *a false sense of inclusion* come together to form the overarching theme of *separate, but not equal*.

Throughout each curriculum attention is called to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ information, but there is an imbalance to it. There is less overall information and more negative than positive information. LGBTQ information being presented in this way creates this sense of separation between those who identify as heterosexual and those who identify as a sexual minority or gender nonconforming. Including different sexualities in the curricula is important so adolescents know that they are valid, but only including partial information or only including information

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when students ask about them makes them not equal. The imbalance in how and what information is presented is noticeable in both curricula.

The imbalance of information in *Love Notes* relates to the positive and negative information delivered to students. The majority of negative examples and information throughout the curriculum is related to LGBTQ information. The negative messages that come from the information in *Love Notes* creates a separation between heterosexual and sexual minority and gender-nonconforming individuals where the latter is seen as less than their heterosexual counterparts.

The separation between heterosexual and sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents in *3Rs* happens due to the heteronormative framework used to present information. Information regarding sexual intercourse and sexual health are framed around heterosexual couples and their needs or experiences. Focusing mainly on the needs of the heterosexual identifying students creates a separation where the sexual minority and gender-nonconforming students are not seen as equal to their peers.

The inequality of information in both curricula lead to the overarching theme of separate, but not equal. This leads to an othering of students who do not identify as heterosexual or gender conforming. Experiencing this can create negative mental health outcomes for students who identify as a sexual minority or gender nonconforming (Steck & Perry, 2016). Students who are questioning might not feel safe experimenting with their sexuality or gender because the curricula create a sense of otherness that hinders a safe school environment (Klein et al., 2011). This separation and othering create a deficit in LGBTQ information taught to students that can lead to an environment of bullying and victimization of sexual minority and gender-

nonconforming adolescents because their peers do not understand what they are experiencing (Snapp, McGuire, Sinclair, et al., 2015).

The lack of information in the curricula and the negative messages leave sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents open to potential mental health issues. Sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents report 17% more bullying victimization than their heterosexual peers (Kann et al., 2018). Sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents also experience greater cyberbullying than their heterosexual counterparts (27% to 14%), which has been linked to an increased risk of suicide in sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents (Duong and Bradshaw, 2014; Burton et al., 2013). The lack of information and threat of bullying can also prevent them from exploring their identity because they do not perceive the environment as safe for them to do so.

This can lead to sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents falling behind their peers when forming their identity in the *Identity vs Confusion* stage of Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* (Erikson, 1955). Instead of solidifying their identity in adolescence sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents experience *identity diffusion* (role confusion) where they have not explored or made identity commitments (Erikson, 1955). This leads to worse mental health outcomes and a poor overall well-being for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents in comparison to their peers because better emotional and psychological well-being in adolescents is directly linked to a strong sense of self (Rageliene, 2016). Sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents are unable to achieve a strong sense of self when they do not feel safe to explore their identity. Not feeling safe to explore makes it harder to form an identity and foster healthy relationships because the stable personal identity that allows individuals to have better relationships with others has not formed.

Additionally, having confusion over your identity leads to a weak sense of self since you do not feel confident about who you are and what your abilities are (Rageliené, 2016). This puts sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents behind their heterosexual peers as they are moving into young adulthood and trying to find love in Erikson's *Intimacy vs Isolation* stage. Inclusive curricula can counteract this by creating an environment where it feels safe to explore your sexual identity (Proulx et al, 2019).

Analysis Criteria Update

Upon the initial review of literature for this study a set of criteria for inclusive and effective sexuality education was developed. This initial criteria list includes: *a developmental approach, relationships, sexual identities, sex health, body/reproduction parts & cycle,* and *multimodal instruction*. The findings and themes derived from this study leads to the need to update the comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education criteria. There are two additional criteria that need to be included, *inclusion of sexuality-related terms* and an *equal amount of LGBTQ+ information*.

Inclusion and Definition of Sexuality-Related Terms

The approach to sexuality-related terms was inconsistent in the curricula analyzed for this study. In *3Rs* the definitions were confusing at times and only touched upon in passing with no definition at other times. *Love Notes* mention both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ relationships but does not define any sexualities. Instead, the chemicals that fire in the brain when attracted to someone and how they affect your thinking are described. In both of these approaches sexual identities are brought up, but most sexuality-related terms are not included or thoroughly defined when included.

This lack of information in the curricula leads to the addition of sexuality-related terms to the list of criteria. A comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education should include the basic sexuality-related terms. Through my data analysis process, I developed this list of ten sexuality-related terms. These terms are *sexuality, biological sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, genderqueer, sexual intercourse, anal sex, oral sex,* and *vaginal sex*. Along with their inclusion there needs to be a comprehensive definition of the terms instead of just a mention. Students should come away with a general understanding of these sexuality-related terms and not just knowledge of the term.

Equal Amount of LGBTQ+ Information

The second criteria update that needs to be made is the equal amount of LGBTQ+ information. Current sexuality curricula include LGBTQ+ information, but to a lesser extent than heterosexual information. LGBTQ+ information is included as an add-on to lessons, only discussed if students bring the topic up, touched upon but not discussed, and can include more negative than positive information. These issues prevent the curricula from being comprehensive and inclusive and can have a negative mental health impact on students.

In order for sexuality education curricula to be comprehensive and inclusive they need to include an equal amount of LGTBQ+ information as heterosexual information wherever relevant. While many sexuality education curricula are working towards inclusion topics such as contraceptive use and sexual decision-making lack true integration of LGBTQ+ information. Additionally, when negative information is presented about LGBTQ+ individuals the context of why needs to be included otherwise it can other and negatively impact the mental health of sexual minority and gender non-conforming adolescents.

Implications for Practice

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The findings of this study have been used to create a list of recommendations for sexuality education curricula. The implications for practice are ways that educators can revise curricula to be more comprehensive and inclusive. Additionally, these implications can guide districts, administrators, teachers, and parents as they make decisions about the content of sexuality education. Included in the implications, are suggestions for changes in terminology, inclusion of more information on different subjects, and ways to create equality in the information.

Standardized Definitions Recommendation

Currently, sexuality education does not have a standardized set of definitions students should learn. Because of this, each curricula uses a variation that meets their needs, which leads to students receiving different and sometimes inaccurate information about sexuality terms. To fix this issue I recommend the use of a standardized set of sexuality education terms. The sexuality education advocacy group, FoSE developed a set of national standards that includes a glossary for all sexuality education related terms. If each sexuality education curricula used the glossary there would be less inaccurate information or confusion of terms.

Advocates for Youth, the group behind the *3Rs* curriculum is one of the members of the group that makes up FoSE. Even with this connection, the sexuality definition in the curriculum was a combination of sexuality and sexual orientation. The combination definition gives opposing information, causing confusion. Using the glossary definition of terms would clear up this confusion and make sure that all students will at least learn the same definition of terms even with the messages and focus being different. The use of a standardized glossary by all curricula would also be one way to help with the problems related to how sexuality education is

implemented. Even when curricula are focused on abstinence or are promoting negative messages, they will at least be giving students accurate definitions of what they are covering.

Inclusion of Puberty

Information regarding the changes that take place during puberty is not included in the curricula minus a passing mention of being aware of other people's emotions during changes. Information is focused on body parts, avoiding STIs & pregnancy, and the menstrual cycle. These are all important pieces of information, but adolescents are going through a transformation they are not prepared for. As these changes are happening adolescents' mental health and self-concept can suffer due to a lack of understanding the changes taking place (Rosario et al., 2011).

These changes during adolescence are crucial to the identity formation process they are going through. Adolescents are coming into their own and trying to understand what everything means and who they are (Erikson, 1955). If they are not given the proper information to help them positively make it through this stage, they end up with identity confusion, making it harder for them to move forward with trying to find a partner (Erikson, 1955). Not learning the basics of what is happening to their bodies leaves adolescents ill prepared as they start navigating dating and sexual relationships. By including a lesson focused on puberty all students will have a baseline knowledge of the changes happening to their body, improving mental health outcomes for all adolescents (Rosario et al., 2011).

Inclusion of Social-Media/Internet

Current dating practices have evolved as technology has evolved. People are meeting through apps or social media, changing the focus from chemistry to looks. Sexuality education should evolve to include this form of dating as a main part of the curriculum. Helping adolescents understand how to navigate this form of dating will help keep sexuality education

relevant to current adolescents. Remaining relevant to the dating experience of adolescents will

help with student buy-in and engagement because they are seeing experiences similar to theirs in

the curriculum (Snapp et al., 2015).

More Thorough Use of Inclusive Pronouns

The use of inclusive pronouns was sporadic in the curricula examined for this study. The

curricula used the term *partner* throughout, but often reverted back to the use of gendered terms.

Curricula can become more inclusive by using gender neutral pronouns when using examples to

describe concepts, such as "if your partner" or "when they kiss you" instead of "boyfriend" or

girlfriend". A second way to do this is by using gender neutral names whenever possible. This

can make things more flexible and allow for more students to feel represented Students who do

not see themselves are more likely not to take in the information and so just the simple change of

pronoun usage can create a broader audience for the information.

A third way this can be implemented is with how bodies and body parts are described.

When bodies and body parts are being described using phrases like "a person with" or "someone

with" instead of gendered terms like "girl" or "boy". This change in verbiage when describing

bodies and body parts not only creates a more inclusive environment, but it also creates

opportunities for dialogue amongst teachers and students. These dialogues are organic learning

opportunities for students and create more acceptance for differences amongst peers.

Equal Amount of LGBTQ+ Information

As sexuality education curricula continues to adapt and grow more inclusive information

about LGBTQ+ individuals need to have equal representation. Many curricula are currently

working towards the inclusion of these topics, but as more of an add-on instead of embedded in

the curricula throughout. For full inclusion of LGBTQ+ information it needs to be integrated into

the lessons on topics such as contraceptive use and sexual decision-making. Information such as higher substance rates amongst LGBTQ+ adolescents need to be explained, especially when negative so that students receive context as to why things may be harder for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Along with integrating LGBTQ+ information in conversations around sex, it needs to be part of gender lessons. Individuals who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming are currently not truly represented in these lessons. They need to know that what they are feeling is okay and normal. Discussions that include positive and relevant information about being transgender or gender non-conforming create acceptance amongst peers and a safer environment for them (Snapp et al., 2016). The integration of LGBTQ+ information throughout the curricula creates an overall more accepting environment for sexual minority and gender non-conforming adolescents to explore their sexuality in, which can lead to better mental health outcomes (Russell et al., 2021).

Equal Amount of Positive and Negative Examples

While sexuality education curricula are working to include LGBTQ+ information often one of the first places they do it is with their scenarios and examples. When doing this though there was a noticeable difference with more negative than positive examples that included LGBTQ+ scenarios. The inclusion of these negative scenarios is important for students to see that things can happen no matter how someone identifies, but it is important that there is a balance between positive and negative for the same reason.

Students should have examples of positive LGBTQ+ relationships just as they do heterosexual ones when learning about dating and relationships. The inclusion of these positive examples creates the normalization and acceptance for students who identify as a sexual minority

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or gender non-conforming (Snapp et al., 2016). One step beyond the balance between positive and negative LGBTQ+ examples is an equal amount of balanced LGBTQ+ and heterosexual examples throughout the curricula. Creating this equality amongst examples can help fight against the heteronormativity embedded in most sexuality education curricula. This can also help students with feeling represented by the curricula, which in turn can help with student engagement (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

Strengths and Limitations

As with all research projects, I made multiple decisions as I designed this study. The first decision I made was that two curricula will be analyzed for this study. There are multiple sexuality education curricula available for use depending on the state and approach. I chose two from opposite ends of the sexuality education spectrum so I could to a matched comparison. Narrowing it to two that meet the state standards for California and have opposing philosophical approaches prevents the results from being applicable to states whose standards do not meet those in California. A second decision made for the study is to focus on adolescents. Sexual development occurs across the life course, but few school districts teach sexuality education before adolescence. Focusing on when the majority of individuals receive sexuality education in school results in the necessity to study the effects of early interactions with inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education in another project.

Implications for Future Research

Due to the limitations of time and access there are some things this study was unable to cover. The limitations include the inability to add first-hand experiences, analyze more curricula, and address/researching further points of interest that came up during the study. Below are potential future research projects that would build off the findings of this study.

Teens Experience

One of the next steps in sexuality education research is interviewing students about their experience with the curricula. By learning about the students and how the curricula effects them researchers will have a deeper understanding of how students react to the curricula. Combining student feedback along with research can create curricula where students feel seen, and the curricula feels relevant. Additionally, learning about the student experience can help as the curricula goes through edits and updates. Student feedback can help create more impactful and relevant curricula.

Teachers Experience

Along with the experience of the students, the teachers should be interviewed to learn their experience with the curricula. The teacher's response to the curricula affects how they teach the material and directly impacts the students learning experience. Learning how the teachers experience the curricula can help as the curricula goes through updates and revisions. Hearing from the teachers can help them feel seen as educators and as an important part of the learning process, giving them a sense of ownership of the material and its implementation. Teachers can also let researchers know how they see students responding, which can also be beneficial as the curricula goes through updates and revisions.

Comparison of Students

A third research opportunity using the experience of the students is a comparison of outcomes. Interviewing students who have gone through the curricula to learn about the outcomes of their experience. Learning about student outcomes shows how the information from the curricula impacted students. It can bring to light parts of the hidden curriculum that may have

been missed by the researchers. Comparing student outcomes can also bring to light how each curricula impacts different types of student groups.

Comparing outcomes of students who have gone through the curricula as they move out of adolescence and into young adulthood can show the lasting impact sexuality education has. Doing a longitudinal study where students are checked in on through young adulthood will help identify not only the mental health impact, but also where students turn and how the process of learning extends through young adulthood.

Broader Version of Current Study

This study included two curricula who had different focuses. The next step would be to include a broader range of curricula. Examining the most used sexuality education curricula in the state of California would give a deeper understanding of the student sexuality education experience. Going even further could also include analyzing the top sexuality education curricula in use in the United States, providing more generalizable results.

Use of Black Indigenous People of Color (POC) in Curricula

The use of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in the curricula while not part of this study was noted. There seemed to be more negative examples involving stereotypical BIPOC names than those with White-sounding names. This negative usage can further negative stereotypes of BIPOC. A study that focuses on the use of BIPOC examples would give a clear understanding of if the curricula is used to perpetuate negative stereotypes about BIPOC individuals. Additionally, the inclusion of individuals with BIPOC identities would contribute to our understanding of intersectionality as it relates to sexual development and race/ethnicity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the content of sexuality education curricula to see if they are meeting their intended purpose of promoting healthy sexual identity formation for all adolescents. Overall, this study found that the curricula was insufficient in its coverage of LGBTQ information and lacked crucial sexual development information such as the changes occurring during puberty. To identify the issues in sexuality education curricula I created a developmental framework for this study through the combination of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model and Erikson's Eight Stages of Man. These findings have implications for adolescents as they are moving into young adult. In particular their identity development while they are in the stage of identity vs confusion. If sexuality education curricula are not more inclusive of sexual minority and gender-nonconforming adolescents, they put the mental health and well-being of these adolescents at risk.

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