Parts or Pleasure in Sex Ed:
Analysing How Sexual Pleasure and Desire is Included in TDSB Grade 9 Health and Physical Education Classes

By

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Abstract

Sexual Health Education is a subject that is relevant for young people’s academic, personal, professional, and adult lives. Significantly, the vast majority of sexual health teaching focuses on the reproductive systems and negative consequences of sexual activity. This approach dehumanizes sex education and does not serve students’ needs. In this bounded case study two current secondary level Physical Education and Health teachers working in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) were interviewed in order to gain a better idea of how TDSB educators include topics of sexual pleasure and desire in their teaching.

The data suggests that teachers rarely include sexual pleasure and desire in their teaching. The regressive curriculum is the most significant barrier to including these topics and creating a more comprehensive sex education. However, teachers did implement teaching methods which fostered student questioning, allowing students to inquire on topics of sexual pleasure that were more relevant to their lives. Student inquiry and teacher prompting on issues not included in the curriculum enabled discussion on topics of sexual pleasure and desire and other more relevant issues excluded in the curriculum.

KEY WORDS: Sex Education, Pleasure, Desire, Toronto District School Board, Health and Physical Education,
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Contradictions and Confused Values in Sex Education

“You all better listen up, or would you rather go home and have your parents teach you about sex!” bellowed my Grade 5 teacher to a class of students who could not help giggling on the first day of our sexual education unit. I recall that my classmates and I collectively cringed at the thought of talking about sex with our parents. How embarrassing! After that, we settled down and paid attention. Evidently, this was a pretty effective classroom management strategy my Grade 5 teacher employed. At least for the time being.

I carried this moment with me for quite some time, and thought about it over and over. Frankly, I still do not understand why my teacher made this threat. Why would I not want to talk with my parents about sex? What harm would be caused by that conversation? And why would my teacher imply that children would not want to talk with their parents about sex? In hindsight, maybe my teacher was uncomfortable talking about some of the topics covered in Sex Ed, and this caused her to utilize such a regressive classroom management strategy.

This type of comment is one that was echoed by many other Health teachers throughout my schooling as teen. This is a concerning message for teachers to impart to youth. Implicitly, teachers were telling me that sex was something serious to be discussed formally in Health class because youth would feel too awkward talking with their parents or guardians about this topic. This statement raises two key issues of youth Education: First, should youth be educated on topics of sexual health? Overwhelmingly, our society has said yes. Youth must learn about

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1 For the duration of this paper, the phrase “Sex Ed” will refer to any sort of sexual health education carried out in a formal school setting.
sexual health; it is an essential component for the individual and the nation. Second, is school the appropriate place for youth to be learning about sexual health?

To answer this second question, let’s think back to my Grade 5 teacher’s statement. In it, there is a huge assumption: that our parents know about sexual health, and could teach us about sexual health in a progressive and comprehensive way. For me, this would have been a fair assumption. I came from a home that was open-minded and accepting, and if I asked, I am sure we could have had an intelligent discussion about sexual health, reproductive organs, and other pertinent issues regarding sex in lieu of or to complement my in-class learning. In fact, my parents were very involved in most aspects of my schooling and are well educated; they could have taught me about sexual health. But what about the youth who do not have such well-educated and progressive parents? What about youth who come from families that associate any sort of pre-marital sex with sin, and would disown them if, God forbid, they felt same sex attraction?

Unfortunately many children, and adolescents do not have the same sort of accepting home environment to learn about sex as I do. There is a multitude of reasons why some students could not initiate an open and informative conversation at home: their parents’ religious beliefs, moralistic attitudes, or closed-mindedness, to name a few. For example, in “The Missing Discourse of Desire,” (Fine, 1988) a foundational piece of literature in Sex Ed research, Fine reported on student responses to their high school teacher’s instruction regarding how teens should talk about sex with their parents. The students protested vehemently. They explained that they could be beaten or sent to live with a different family if their parents suspected them of having any sort of sexual relationship, and would not dare talk about this topic with their parents.
(Fine, 1988). Evidently, these students could not discuss sex with their parents even if they wanted because it would jeopardize their safety and well-being.

So, on second thought, my teacher was wrong. Some students did not have a choice. School is the only place they could learn about sex. Well, I suppose they could learn about sex from their friends, television, magazines, the internet, books, newspapers, and advertisements. In fact young people do learn about sex and sexuality via all the media listed above. Accordingly, we as educators have to critically analyze how our Sex Ed is adjusted to the realities of our changing world. Adolescent sexuality and desire is present in popular culture and has been commodified in many different marketplaces. Youth are bombarded with sexual imagery daily, but schools lack the capacity to educate about and for youth sexuality in an appropriate and meaningful way (Fine and McLelland, 2006). If schools fail to provide the information young people seek, young people will find it on their own (Allen, 2006). Pornographic images are a mouse click away from Canadian teens. How are our schools countering and demystifying the potentially damaging and misogynistic sexual images teens are exposed to everyday?

Schools are some of the only places students can learn about sexual health in a safe environment and in a way that is informative, inclusive, respectful, Queer accepting, non-misogynistic, self-affirming and youth positive. That should be, in my view, the objective of an ideal Sex Ed program for adolescents. If school is, for many youth, the only place they will have access to open and honest sexual health education, is Sex Ed comprehensive enough to meet each student’s needs? If young people are living in homes where they cannot talk about sex, seeing images in the media that produce a particular sexist conception of what sex is, or feel confused because they experience lust but believe that lust would corrupt their innocence, is the public sex education they are receiving comprehensive enough to address all these very real
issues? Sex is a persistently controversial topic in our society, and most likely will continue to be for years to come. Therefore it is necessary to scrutinize Sex Ed curricula and teaching in greater detail, especially for adolescents and teens entering sexual maturity.

In short, I believe, and the literature suggests, that young people in the Greater Toronto Area, my current home, Ontario, Canada, and beyond, are not receiving a comprehensive enough sexual health education. In “Spirituality as an Integral Part of Education for Health” (Anderson, 2007), Dr. Andy Anderson, a prominent Canadian physical education and health scholar, describes Sex Ed content in Canada as “dehumanized”. What he means by this is that the curriculum, and therefore student learning, is primarily focused on a very narrow perspective of sex. It portrays sex as something that youth should manage and restrain so that they can avoid the negative consequences of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), abuse, and unwanted pregnancy. Anderson asks what happens to all the other aspects of sex that teens need and want to learn about. These topics include learning about love, negotiating feelings of lust with a partner, and incorporating sex and sexuality into their own changing identity (Anderson, 2007).

By only covering one narrow-minded aspect of sex and sexuality, many of the human aspects of sex and sexuality are omitted. How then, can we begin to humanize Sex Ed? One place to start is to begin to address all the aspects of sex and sexuality. Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013) conclude, if sexuality education is to be relevant to youth, it must include all aspects of their experiences. Teens must learn about the negative and positive aspects of sex and sexuality, and all the shades in between.

**Problematizing Adolescent Sexuality and its Modern Ramifications**

In order to determine why Sex Ed is constructed and instructed in a way that is not comprehensive by any means, it is necessary to explore how and why Sex Ed was originally
incorporated into public schooling in Canada. As with many educational issues in Canada, the first place to start is to analyze the American context of sexual health education. Canada and America were influenced by similar socio-economic, cultural, and political movements throughout the course of the 20th century. Their shared Anglo-Saxon heritage and cultural legacies provide for similar environments to assess how sexual health education made its way into public schooling. Sex Ed was first incorporated into the American public school system in the first half of the 20th century as a means to warn teenagers about the dangers of their own adolescent sexuality and to teach them how to practice proper self-restraint. Carlson (2012) classifies adolescent sexuality as a “problem” that sex education in schooling has attempted to “solve.” By analyzing the inception and evolution of Sex Ed in the United States over the past seventy years, he dissects the ways in which Sex Ed was created at a time when sex was something to be compartmentalized and controlled. Teens were viewed as impressionable, especially young women, and particularly susceptible to corruption by way of sex and sexuality.

The cultural legacy of sex as a corrupting agent in the American context is equally applicable to the Canadian context. As Anderson stated, currently, Canadian Sex Ed Curricula are too focused on the consequences and negative aspects of sex. This can be directly linked to the cultural legacy of interpreting sex as a corrupting agent as explained by Carlson. Adolescent sexuality has been viewed as a problem and a threat to personal, community, and societal health, for decades in Canada and America. Although significant societal changes have occurred in both nations regarding how the public and how schools view sex, the implicit messages that problematize adolescent sexuality are still prevalent in Canadian Sex Ed curricula. Considering the historical context, it is no wonder most Sex Ed curricula are dominated by negative-toned risk-management and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)/unwanted pregnancy prevention.
Therefore, it makes sense that sex education has been “dehumanized” because it was initially conceived as a way to solve the “problem” of adolescent sexuality. The association of adolescent sexuality as a “problem” is antiquated—it is time to reform the way we approach this topic in a way that is comprehensive and humanizing.

**Dehumanizing Messages in Ontario’s Curriculum Content**

Sex Ed remains controversial in public discourse and at all levels of schooling in Ontario. This is because some topics included in Sex Ed contradict societal standards of sexual morality. As a result, efforts to teach comprehensive Sex Ed in a way that is sex-positive and most beneficial for teens is often undermined. Sparks fly periodically in Ontario regarding this subject, most recently regarding proposed updates to the Sex Ed curricula that would include teaching queer sexuality, oral and anal sex, and masturbation at earlier grade levels than the current curriculum (Rushowy, 2013). These proposed curriculum changes have not yet been formally implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In fact, the current Sex Ed curriculum was originally written in 1998.

Significant reform to the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum was proposed in 2010, but after considerable outrage from conservative social and political groups, it was deemed too controversial and defeated (Oliver et al., 2013). Seventeen years and counting without any major reform to the Ontario Sex Ed curriculum is absolutely appalling in my opinion. To put that in perspective, Gay marriage was illegal when the current curriculum was drafted, and certainly no one had even considered the need to address “sexting” or cyber-sexual relationships at that time. Clearly, there is a great need for updating the Sex Ed curriculum in Ontario, and there needs to be serious consideration of topics and approaches that can make the Sex Ed curriculum more meaningful, useful, and impactful for Ontarian youth.
In Canada, one of the responsibilities of the provincial government, as opposed to the federal government, is all matters concerning education. Each province is responsible for creating its own education curricula and sexual education curricula. In Ontario, the curriculum is semi-rigid. Teachers are obliged to instruct their students on the curriculum expectations. These are the learning goals outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Teachers are then required to use their professional judgement to implement the teaching, learning and assessment of students. If teachers are legally responsible for teaching their students the contents of the curriculum expectations, assessing the curriculum expectations provides for a good starting point for a broader assessment of how comprehensive Sex Ed is in Ontario. My interpretation and assessment of the curriculum expectations fall in line with Anderson (2007) and Connell (2005), concluding that the curriculum expectations do not provide teachers with a comprehensive and inclusive framework for teaching Sex Ed.

The Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum indicates the ways in which the tone and focus of Sex Ed is overly scientific and antiquated (See Fig 1). In Grade 9, students are expected to have a basic understanding of sex and sexuality, with an added emphasis on exploring relationships and external “pressures” to be sexually active: Consider the specific expectation listed in Figure 1:

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Specific Expectations**

**Healthy Growth and Sexuality**

By the end of the course, students will:

- identify the developmental stages of sexuality throughout life;
- describe the factors that lead to responsible sexual relationships;
- describe the relative effectiveness of methods of preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., abstinence, condoms, oral contraceptives);
- demonstrate understanding of how to use decision-making and assertiveness skills effectively to promote healthy sexuality (e.g., healthy human relationships, avoiding unwanted pregnancies and STDs such as HIV/AIDS);
- demonstrate understanding of the pressures on teens to be sexually active;
- identify community support services related to sexual health concerns.
“demonstrate understanding of the pressures on teens to be sexually active.” The “pressures” mentioned in this passage could be a number of outside forces that may include the media, peers, pop culture, and many other factors. It is a necessary subject to understand in-depth especially for young people who are interested in engaging in sexual relationships. They need to recognise what external forces might compel them to do so. Yet the possibility that a teen could want to experiment and engage in sexual activity because of their own interest or to achieve pleasure is implicitly undermined by the wording of the specific expectation.

The curriculum infers that teens feel horny or want to engage in sexual activity solely because of peer pressure or some outside force, instead of because of natural feelings of lust in any person entering adulthood. By examining the other goals mentioned, it is safe to assume that “pressures” is more specifically meant to be interpreted as negative pressures. This is indicated by the curriculum’s emphasis on unwanted sex prevention, pregnancy, and STI transmission prevention. It is certainly important that we teach young people to understand when to say “no” to sexual contact and what the risks may be, but why do we not teach students when it might be appropriate to say “yes”? These assumptions deplete their ability to grow as healthy young adults, and may unintentionally lead to multiple negative outcomes with regards to the sexual health and overall health of young Ontarians. These expectations may be well-intentioned, but could inhibit healthy development for Ontarian youth. How can we expect teens to develop the skills to build healthy life-long sexual relationships with themselves, let alone others, if we are so narrowly-focused on control and risk management in our teaching of these important matters in schools? This represents how the approach and content of Sex Ed teaching is done without any regard for the students’ humanity or agency.
Notably, the Specific Expectations outlined in the Grade 12 Health and Physical Education curriculum contain much more of an emphasis on “long-lasting” relationships and even intimacy, representing increased overall attention to sexual relationships as students enter higher grades. The Specific Expectations emphasize the skills students must develop to maintain lasting relationships, and the communication skills needed to discuss sexuality and sexual intimacy (Fig. 2). Interestingly, sexual intimacy is only mentioned as something to talk about with your partner, as opposed to being an integral part of maintaining a long-lasting relationship. Discussion of pleasure, desire, playfulness, sexual expression and exploration appears to be absent or muted even in the Grade 12 curriculum.

The factors outlined above begin to illustrate the nuanced deficiencies in the design of the current Sex Ed curriculum in Ontario. The curriculum is by nature reactive, portraying sex as a danger to teens; it appears to be more focused on teaching students how and when to reject sex instead of how to actively explore ones sexuality as a young adult. Connell (2005) conducted a similar type of evaluation of the Sex Ed curriculum expectations in the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum using the critical lens introduced by Fine (1988). Her
conclusions and criticisms mirror my own: she asks why does the curriculum only include negative consequences, as opposed to negative and positive consequences of sexual contact (Connell, 2005). Instead, imagine a curriculum that could ask a similar question, but one that embraces discussion regarding all “pressures” that influence teens to be sexually active. Ideally, the curriculum would include positive pressures, not just negative pressures. Developing the “communication skills” to “discuss” sexual intimacy is important, but learning to have sex in a positive, meaningful, and pleasurable way is just as important if not more important than discussing sex. Connell argues that in order to make the Ontario curriculum truly comprehensive,

“We should encourage adolescents to explore non-goal-oriented sex (e.g. non-penetrative sex) and sexual self-exploration within their experiences, needs and limits. We need to talk about like, love and lust with adolescents. We need to talk about orgasms, pleasure, thoughts, feelings, sexual expectations and desire (Connell, 2005).”

It is certainly a difficult line to toe, but there must be a way to promote positive encounters with sex and sexuality, specifically forming a more positive sexual relationship with yourself, partners of the same or different genders, and society as a whole, without glorifying, qualifying, or undermining the serious health risks that go along with any sexual activity. In fact, research indicates that inclusion of pleasure in sex education can help women combat societal pressure to subdue their own feelings of desire. As a result, they will be empowered with the skills to combat pressures to be submissive in the sexual relationships they form (Hirst, 2005). The positive consequences of creating a more balanced, active and humanized sex education curriculum can be impactful beyond measure for young Ontarians, and requires further
Logical Researcher Stumped by Inaction and Misguided Policies

My personal interest in sex education is manifold. First and foremost, I am a firm believer in the power of education and the collective power of ideas. This is one of the pillars of democracy and modern life. Education is a tool for societal and community improvement. However, the evidence suggests that sex education is, in the best case scenario, not as good as it could be, and in the worst case scenario, damaging students and communities in more devastating ways than we realize (Fine, 1988). What is more unsettling to me is that our societal morality and traditional values are stymieing our ability to provide youth with the best possible sex education. School boards spend countless dollars each year purchasing the latest technology for our children to use in school because, they argue, it is absolutely vital that youth are technologically literate in the 21st century. Yet the Ontario Health Curriculum has not been substantially updated since 1998 because sex is such a contentious issue! This unsettling reality is mysterious, enraging, and fascinating to me, and has inspired me to study this topic.

My interest in this subject increased after one particular experience when I realized the stark contrast between sex education at the secondary and post-secondary level. My own sexual education experience in high school was typical of many teens in Canada or the United States. The greatest concern of my Sex Ed classes was risk-management, “safe sex” practices, and the scientific evaluation of sexual biology. I completed my high school Health requirement in Grade 12, and it certainly did not meet my needs as an 18-year-old young adult. Less than half a year after completing my high school Health class, I had graduated and was enrolled at the University of Toronto (U of T). The Sexual Education Centre (SEC) at U of T approached sex in a totally
different way. Sex was about identity, pleasure, experimentation, physical and emotional health, and safety. SEC provides a multitude of services from counselling students considering going on birth control, to hosting free “learn-to-give-the-best-handjob” workshops (Jerkins, 2014).

So what changed? I was 18 years old in both settings, I was discovering my own sexual identity, and I was eager to learn more. My high school Health course did not attempt and was not designed to teach any of the information that SEC teaches thousands of U of T students every year. SEC and my high school health class seemed to share little in common. Their setting, audience, and focus are quite distinct at first glance, but I contend these two programs share a common goal: they are both designed to raise awareness about sexual health issues and to keep young people healthy. This leaves me wondering why my recollection of high school sex education is either negative or negligible.

By contrasting my experience of learning about sex in the high school health setting, and at the University level, I began to realize how regressive Secondary level Sex Ed was. The SEC workshops were peer-led, invited student inquiry, were practically-minded, and sex-positive. This meant that they acknowledged and respected all forms of sexuality and sexual relationships. They emphasized safety, personal exploration, and taught thoroughly about safer, pleasurable alternatives to higher-risk sex acts. The SEC workshop modelled the kind of comprehensive sexual education teens must receive in order to best equip them for the internal and external challenges they face in their adolescent and adult lives.

The SEC workshops were effective because the student facilitators bridged the gap between the way their participants experienced sex, and how they educated about these topics of sex. In contrast, public school Sex Ed rarely speaks directly to students’ lived experience of sex. Student input on classroom discourse was minimal and class discussions rarely directly
addressed aspects of sex I was most concerned with. Fundamentally, my lived experience of sex and my sexual health education were mostly separate. In fact, I would go so far as to say my experience with Sex Ed in my own Secondary schooling was soulless and dehumanizing. It failed to acknowledge all the reasons I was interested in and thinking about sex in the first place: I wanted to experience physical and emotional intimacy, I wanted to be loved and pleasured, I wanted to do something positive and rewarding with my pent-up lust.

I can say with a great deal of confidence that if we learned about pleasure in sex I would have been much more interested in Health class because it actually would have been relevant to my lived experience of sex. Plus, teaching about mutual masturbation and non-penetrative sex as an equally satisfying and pleasurable way to engage in sex fits seamlessly into the goals of high school Sex Ed. Regarding risk management, stimulation with the hands is one of the least risky yet satisfying forms of sex that teens or anyone can engage in. As I reflect on this experience, it remains an unsettling non sequitur and has helped inspire me to further my research into this topic.

**Defining My Research and Exploring Challenges, Assumptions, and Clarifications**

Keeping in mind the recent stalling of major reform of the Ontario Sex Ed component of the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum in 2010, there is a desperate need for close examination of the current implementation of Sex Ed in Ontario. In order to do this, a close examination of Ontario’s largest, most diverse school district, Toronto District School Board (TDSB), is needed. Currently there is some literature written internationally about the effects of regressive Sex Ed curricula on youth, and some literature assessing the curriculum in Ontario, but research on how this curriculum is actually implemented in TDSB classrooms is lacking.
Therefore, a bounded case study on how TDSB educators actually implement the Sex Ed component of the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum would provide a clearer picture for community members, educators, students, policymakers, and citizens on ways to reform and humanize Sex Ed curricula and teaching.

In order to narrow my research focus, I have decided to focus on two essential components of comprehensive, humanized Sex Ed: pleasure and desire. I have conducted a case study assessing to what extent TDSB teachers include concepts of sexual pleasure and desire during their Sex Ed instruction. Moreover, how effective are the teaching methods used by TDSB teachers to explore issues of pleasure and desire? Are negative and positive aspects of Sex Ed discussed in classes? And how do students, parents, and other stakeholders react and respond to Sex Ed lessons on pleasure and desire?

Analyzing the ways in which sexual pleasure and desire are included in Sex Ed is not the only way to assess whether or not a Sex Ed curriculum is comprehensive and humanizing. In fact, it is important to note that not everybody associates sex or sexuality with pleasure or desire. Accordingly, some Sex Ed students may have limited or no personal experiences of feeling sexual pleasure or desire. Nevertheless, a great deal of youth experience sexual pleasure and desire, or are immersed in a community and society overflowing with depictions and portrayals of sexual pleasure and desire (Fine and McClelland, 2006). For many youth, feelings of sexual pleasure and desire are lived experiences that they must grapple with and question, but are not provided with an appropriate forum to learn about and dissect those feelings. That is why I believe these aspects of sex and sexuality are crucial to incorporate into Sex Ed teaching. There is a great need to measure how issues are incorporated into Sex Ed teaching in the TDSB to begin to understand how to move towards implementing more humanizing Sex Ed teaching.
The term “sexual pleasure” will be used in this paper to refer to euphoric feelings produced by sexual stimulation. Activities that could be classified as producing feelings of euphoria due to sexual contact could range from mild petting to any form of oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse that could result in orgasm. Sexual pleasure also includes self-stimulation of any kind including masturbation. The phrase “sexual desire” refers to any feelings of interest in sexual relationships, intimacy and/or contact.

It is important to note that the ways in which sexual pleasure and desire are included in Sex Ed curricula are implicitly and often explicitly different for men and women. Sex Ed sits at the intersection of tradition, morality, and a misogynistic Anglo-Saxon cultural legacy. As a result, societal misogyny and sexual expectations of women bleeds over into Sex Ed teaching. For example, only one hundred years ago, doctors determined that healthy adolescent women entering sexual maturity had no capacity to desire sex! In fact, only women possessing one or more of a laundry list of disorders\footnote{Masturbation was considered a disorder afflicting women at the time.} were thought to feel sexual desire as adolescents (Fine, 1988). As a result of societal prejudices and limiting gender role manifestations in Sex Ed, it is a topic that has garnered scrutiny from feminist and gender theorist for the past quarter century. In my opinion, this has had a profoundly positive impact on the study of this topic and will be an essential aspect in my review of the literature and analysis of data.

Another significant issue in Sex Ed that I must call to attention is the potential conflict between parents/guardians and teachers/administrators regarding explicit teaching of certain aspects of Sex Ed curricula. Each educator interprets his/her legal responsibilities as \textit{in loco parentis} in a different manner. For some that would mean upholding the familial and cultural values of a student’s parents/guardians about certain aspects of Sex Ed. Schools often make
accommodations to meet the expectations of their pupils’ and communities’ values. Some examples are allowing students of faith to cover their heads even though it is officially against school policy or offering modified physical education courses in which students do not have to make physical contact with the opposite sex. In my pragmatist outlook on this topic, reflecting a hierarchy of educator decisions above familial or cultural values, students should be required to learn about pleasure and desire in Sex Ed even if it clashes with some of their own familial, communal, individual or moral values.

I recognize that the problems, rationale, questions, and possible solutions to this topic are informed heavily by my own personal biases, interpretation of the world, and influential thinkers and authors who impacted my world view directly. With that in mind, I understand that I make a number of assumptions about Sex Ed, problems associated with it, and possible solutions to those problems. I am a logically minded, problem-solving, ends-based thinker and I prioritize my vision and role of education and responsibilities of an educator in a similar manner. In some respects I assume that sexual educators would have a similar outcomes-based approach to curriculum development and in-class teaching. Nevertheless I realize that my assumptions are subjective and limited in scope.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is a significant gap in the research on the specific circumstances and implementation of comprehensive Sex Ed in Ontario, the Greater Toronto Area, and the TDSB. I will look to a variety of nations and research approaches in order to situate this study in the global scholarly conversation on making Sex Ed more comprehensive. Fine (1988) was the first scholar to identify the absence of sexual desire in Sex Ed as a significant problem for youth. The most influential conclusion she argues is that the absence of discourses on sexual desire does not have a negligible effect on youth, but a sizable negative impact. This seminal study and others are assessed first in this chapter. Further scholarship evaluated the ways in which including sexual pleasure in Sex Ed can have numerous positive outcomes for society and for youth. Moreover, multiple studies evaluating exactly what youth wish to be included in their Sex Ed curriculum suggests that youth are inundated with messages of risk and dissatisfied with so much attention to learning sexual biology. Students demand more comprehensive Sex Ed where they can be legitimized as sexual agents, have open and honest discourses on sexual pleasure and desire, and even include discussion of pornography in Sex Ed.

Research related to sexual pleasure and desire in Sex Ed occurs in multiple disciplines conducted by scholars whose approaches vary greatly. Ethnographies are a key aspect of sexual education research, and have proven to be instrumental to the inception of research on sexual desire (Fine 1988, Fine and McLelland, 2006). These studies often do not solely assess Sex Ed itself, but are just as focused on the covert and overt classist, racist, and gendered prejudices imbedded in sexual education. Complementing ethnographic research is qualitative research focusing on similar prejudices, but analyzed in the context of curriculum document production,
curriculum implementation in the form of in-class teaching, and societal influences impacting educational policies. Accordingly, theoretical and pragmatic qualitative analysis of research on Sex Ed curricula are essential parts of the literature that informs this paper. For example, critical literature on Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula in the United States and outcomes-based reviews of Sexual Relationships Education curricula in the United Kingdom add depth and scope to the body of literature in which sexual pleasure and desire are either incorporated or omitted in Sex Ed in varying contexts.

I am sympathetic to many of the theoretical approaches and frameworks of the seminal and recent scholarly work on sexual pleasure and desire in sex education. Notably, the gender and feminist theorists who identified sex education as a forum for the perpetuation of inequity and stereotypes starting in the 1960s and then specifically the missing discourse of desire in the 1980s, have had an indelible impact on the scholarly research on sex education—and my own approach to this topic. Nevertheless, Pragmatism most closely identifies my interpretive framework. As described by Creswell, I am most concerned with the real world outcomes as opposed to the theory of my own research and the research I will review in this chapter (Creswell, 2013). Notably in Chapter 1, my emphasis on logical solutions is continued in my analysis of the current research. Crucial to the Pragmatist framework is drawing on multiple methods of research, which is exemplified in my diverse review of literature, and modelled within a certain realm of feasibility in my methodology and research design.

**The Absence of Discourses on Sexual Desire is Negative not Negligible**

Michelle Fine’s 1988 publication, *Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire*, helped lay the foundation for further research into sexual desire and pleasure in Sex Ed. Her focus was mainly on how women’s sexuality was represented in
curricula and classrooms. Specifically, she investigated how the absence of discourses on sexual desire negatively impacted low-income minority adolescents in New York City. Fine’s ethnography uses a compelling narrative approach by including raw testimonials of minority Secondary School students. This study helps to illuminate the ways in which these young women’s needs are consistently inadequately met by their school-provided Sex Ed teaching. When students inquired about orgasms, teachers dismissed and disregarded this sort of genuine inquiry. Instead, teachers redirected the question to the negative consequences of sexual contact. They shifted the conversation from orgasms to explaining how young women should view their vagina in the mirror so that they can identify the symptoms of genital warts (Fine, 1988).

Consequently, Fine is able to illustrate how critical it is for these young women to have the opportunity to explore their sexuality and address socially constructed roles that overlook desire, sexuality, and exploration for young women.

Fine argues that young women are actually harmed by Sex Ed in its current form. She asserts that too much attention on victimization, violence, and negative consequences of sexual interactions results in young women being “educated away from positions of sexual self-interest” (Fine, 42). This conclusion is echoed in other ethnographic, educational and psychological research that concludes that the development of female sexual agency is undermined by narrow-minded Sex Ed curricula. Fine supports this argument by concluding that women who behave in a more “traditional” female role, submissive and passive instead of assertive and entitled, are more susceptible to suffer from negative outcomes-focused Sex Ed, especially when they are poor and of color. She asserts that sex education that is anatomically focused, only accepting of marital consensual sex, and overwhelmingly hetero-normative exacerbates the negative societal influences on these adolescent women, increasing their chances of unintended pregnancy, being
abused or intimidated by male partners, and feeling guilty for experiencing feelings of lust and
desire.

I believe that Fine’s arguments are compelling and persuasive because of the ample and balanced evidence used to support her assertions, demonstrating validity via triangulation. Fine uses extensive field research with adolescents, personal conversations with educators, official school board and government policy, and thoroughly researched educational criticism of curricula. Consider the following example: Fine argues that although the overt goal of sex education curricula is to prevent female victimization, it actually can perpetuate that which it is trying to prevent because of an outdated sense of morality and an unwillingness to meet the specific needs of adolescent females. Fine reveals this hypocrisy by arguing that if the goal of Sex Ed was ensuring that women do not become victims, then Sex Ed curricula and teaching would highlight masturbation, healthy heterosexual and Queer relationships, along with fantasy (Fine, 1988).

Fine and McClelland (2006) reflect on the initial 1988 publication on The Missing Discourse of Desire to reassess the status of Sex Ed in America. The results are bleak. Over the course of nearly two decades, federal funding for Abstinence Only Until Marriage education has increased, while societal structures and supports for youth sexuality education and health inside and outside of schools have been severely undermined. In this article they reference state and non-profit produced statistics, criticism of curricula, and examples from their own ethnographic research to support their claims. Fine and McClelland expand their analysis of adolescent sexuality beyond the bounds of the classroom, investigating the interrelationship between curriculum, poverty, the criminal justice system, and race. In doing so, they create a new set of
guidelines for further research for creating a more detailed and comprehensive definition of sexual desire they call “thick desire.”

Fine and McClelland (2006) astutely note that in Abstinence Only Until Marriage Sex Ed curricula emerged from the idea that the act of sex itself is injurious to the individual and to the very fabric of society. Proponents of Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula believe that teaching youth to abstain from sex completely is the best solution for reducing negative health outcomes such as unwanted pregnancy and the spread of STIs. This is a manifestation of the misogynistic Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage of morality which still has real world impacts on youth in America and beyond. In contrast, advocates for teaching more comprehensive Sex Ed, refute that claim. They argue the act of sex itself is not injurious, instead pointing to inequities in education, class, and a number of other underlying social problems, and the absence of honest discourse of sex and sexuality for real world negative outcomes of adolescent sexual activity (Fine and McClelland, 2006). Abstinence Only Until Marriage Curriculum explicitly teaches some of the implicit tones prevalent in the Ontario Sex Ed curriculum.

The negative implications of omitting discourses of desire for youth and especially young women was contextualized in the Canadian setting by Connell (2005). She argues that the current Ontario curriculum omits comprehensive discussion of sexual pleasure and desire. As a result, the implicit messages of the curriculum equate sexual desire as dangerous, or even worse, a feeling that may lead to victimisation of youth. The framework for Connell’s research is directly related to Fine’s (1988) foundational study on the absence of sexual desire in Sex Ed. However, Connell did not conduct ethnographic research. Instead, she analyzed the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum and complementing curriculum resources containing exemplar lessons designed by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Contrary to Fine, Connell interprets certain parts of the curriculum documents as actually incorporating some discourses of sexual desire. This is exemplified by teacher prompts requiring instruction on analysing external factors that influence youth sexuality and gender roles. However, Connell emphasizes that these discourses are limited in scope and emphasize external influences as dangerous and negative. Even though discourses of sexual desire are not completely absent, they are still centred on the negative consequences of sex and sexuality for youth (Connell, 2005). Connell argues that such a narrow and rigid teaching of sex is damaging to girls and boys. Lastly, Connell makes a compelling case for including aspects of sexual pleasure and desire in the Ontario curriculum. She argues that the positive consequences of sex, not just the negative consequences of sex, should play a more prominent role in Sex Ed teaching. That way, Sex Ed can more closely reflect the “lived realities” of youth (Connell, 2005).

An example of further ethnographic research on the topic of the missing discourses of desire for adolescents is Froyum’s (2009) investigation of the ways that youth of colour are compelled to suppress their own sexual desires even in non-conventional Sex Ed settings. Froyum’s ethnography seeks to assess how a version of Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula implemented through a non-profit organization, Kidswork, impacts young women of color in a mid-sized southern American city. Froyum argues that curriculum and educators taught youth that feelings of sexual desire could lead to victimisation. The emphasis of the program was to teach young girls self-restraint as opposed to exploration. Their approach to teaching sexual desire was singularly negative—it was a feeling to be controlled. The consequences of engaging in sexual relationships were emphasized as opposed to the benefits, and students were taught that abstaining from sexual relationships all together was the best way to protect themselves from negative consequences of sexual contact (Froyum, 2009).
Froyum’s research methods and data collection were communicated clearly and her data collection method was triangulated thoroughly. She used curriculum interpretation, educator interviews, and referenced an impressive 2000 pages of classroom observation notes of data to report her findings. This research is significant for this study because it provides a contemporary example of how Fine’s research is still relevant today. This ethnography, conducted more than two decades after Fine’s 1988 publication, illustrates the ways in which discourses of desire are still absent in American Sex Ed. It may be easy to overlook these American examples, because they are more extreme than Canada. However, these studies are essential for my research because they exemplify a more extreme example of the unintended negative implications when sex and sexuality are only equated with negative consequences and danger.

Similar ethnographic research has been conducted in the Canadian context. Although the setting, circumstances, and populations are different, the results of Alexander and Froyum are congruous; Sex Ed fails to incorporate humanizing discourses of sexual desire, which has a profound negative impact on youth. Alexander (2007) conducted extensive interviews with 20 youth living in two small communities in Northern Ontario. The youth who participated were recruited from two youth community centres: one was focused on LGBTQ issues and the other was a general youth drop-in program. These youth met in small groups and were asked to comment on a number of pertinent issues about how they experienced Sex Ed.

Lines of inquiry and comments from youth varied. Overall, Alexander argues that the youths’ lived experience of sex and sexuality was not included in any meaningful way in their sexual health education (Alexander, 2007). Notably, sexual pleasure and desire were not viewed as institutional priorities, but in the eyes of the youth, they desperately wanted a safe space to have an honest and comprehensive discussion on these topics. Youth expressed frustration with
the lack of instruction on sexual pleasure and inclusion of Queer issues in Sex Ed. Youth felt as though they were not treated as legitimate sexual agents and were deprived of all the information needed to make thoughtful, rational decisions regarding their own sexual relationships (Alexander, 2007).

**Scholars Argue in Favor of Including Sexual Pleasure in Sex Ed Curricula**

Scholars have begun to investigate how sexual pleasure and desire is omitted or included in other national contexts as a result of the continued absence of discourses about sexual desire in the North American context. Many scholars have identified how Sex Ed omits these topics, and argue for the benefits of including sexual pleasure as a part of comprehensive Sex Ed. For example, there is recent analysis and criticism of sex education curricula in New Zealand (Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013) and Ireland (Kiely, 2005). Cameron-Lewis and Allen analyze two competing sex education curricula in New Zealand. One originated in the early 20th century, Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE), and is focused on scientific understanding of sex and socially conservative comprehension of sexual relationships. The other, Preventative Sexual Abuse (PSA), was born out of the feminist movement in 1960s and 1970s that was combating “rape culture,” mirroring the competing narratives, values and ideology in the American Sex Ed context. Influenced by Fine and other feminist critiques of sexuality education, the authors identify numerous systematic problems in the competing narratives, arguing that both reinforce negative stereotypes of men and women. Although the authors align themselves with a feminist theoretical framework and even sympathize with the reasons for creating and instituting the PSA curriculum designed to protect young women, they argue that the PSA curriculum falls short of achieving its goal.
Cameron-Lewis and Allen explain the narrow-minded destructive portrayal of the ways in which men are portrayed only as possible threats and women as possible victims. Instead of divergent curricula that portray sex as either negative or positive, they argue for a unified curriculum that portrays sex as complicated—consisting of both pleasure and danger (Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013). Their solutions-based thinking is persuasive because they suggest reasonable and simple adjustments in sex education: teaching it as a holistic complex process that contains positive aspects, such as pleasure, and negative aspects, such as unwanted pregnancy, in a way that is more responsive to real life situations youth will encounter.

Kiely’s analysis of curricula in Ireland leads her to argue for a similar paradigm shift. Kiely (2005) analyzes the language and tone of the Irish sex education curriculum. She concludes that the language portraying intercourse as a “sacred act” and a “gift” is both misogynistic and counter-intuitive for promoting healthy practices for teens. Kiely argues that using this sort of flowery moralistic language to describe heterosexual intercourse creates a hierarchy of sexual acts which devalues the pleasurable experiences of mutual masturbation that are less risky, physically and psychologically, for both partners (Kiely, 2005). Kiely points out how counter-intuitive this message is especially if the goal of sex education is to reduce the negative outcomes associated with adolescent sexual interactions. Kiely echoes Carlson and Fine by advocating for a paradigm shift away from identifying teen sexuality as a “problem” and embracing a discourse of desire, responsibility, exploration, and informed decision-making in sex education (Kiely, 2005).

Research on the specific incorporation of pleasure and how it can improve the efficacy and outcomes of sex education are the key topics of Ingham (2005) and Hirst (2013). Ingham’s research reviews public health, outcomes-based quantitative research primarily in the United
Kingdom. The conclusions gained from these studies suggest there is a positive relationship between STI and unwanted pregnancy reduction and sexual agency, sexuality education, and knowledge of risk factors. More specifically, Hirst uses evidence from Ingham and similar studies in the United Kingdom to argue for the ways in which pleasure education can improve these outcomes-based sex education. She presents a multi-faceted rationale for incorporating desire and pleasure in the curricula, contending that it will improve sexual agency in women, empowering them to obtain judgement free fulfillment from sexual experiences, and give them the tools to use non-penetrative sexual practices for pleasure if they are pressured by a male partner to engage in intercourse (Hirst, 2013).

The most compelling evidence Hirst uses are interviews of 15 and 16 year old English High School students conducted by her in 2004. Notably, she met with these students multiple times and conducted her interviews in a free-flowing conversation format. This decision helps validate Hirst’s research because it demonstrates the ways in which Hirst formed a positive rapport with her research subjects and wisely constructed an informal interview format that would induce more authentic and deeper responses. Accordingly, the results of her research are compelling. Her data validates her and Ingham’s assertions that teaching pleasure as a part of sex can improve agency for women. Pleasure can be used by teens to combat peer pressure. In the example her research subjects gave, in a hypothetical situation in which a boy wants to have sex with them but refuses to wear a condoms, the girls can explain that she will not be able to enjoy the intercourse because she will be too worried about the possible negative outcomes. Thus if both parties associate sex with being a pleasurable experience, the stubborn male partner will understand why he should wear a condom and be empathetic to his partner that wants to enjoy sex just as much as he does. As a result he ideally will comply (Hirst, 2013).
Ingham’s research scope is too broad to easily draw succinct conclusions in some circumstances. Indian and English sexual education programs do not seem analogous enough to create a unified synthesis of these two contexts for sex education studies. Nevertheless, Ingham’s analysis of one study conducted in the United States, APAUSE comparing the efficacy of peer-led versus teacher-led drama based sexual education teaching, complements Hirst’s conclusions (Ingham, 2005). The results of this study suggest that peer-led instruction is more effective than teacher-led, and I would argue, peer-led pleasure discussions to improve sexual agency is a compelling and feasible approach to pleasure and desire education and an interesting avenue for further research.

Surveys Say Youth Want More Comprehensive Sex Ed, Especially Sexual Pleasure

Beyond ethnographic and theoretical research on sexual pleasure and desire in Sex Ed are numerous qualitative survey based studies seeking to assess youth perception and opinions of Sex Ed. These studies range in scope, form, and geography, but their outcomes are essential for furthering this body of knowledge and research. Surveys conducted in multiple distinct settings of teens suggest that youth want education that is more responsive to their needs, discussed in a more open and accepting environment, less focused on negative outcomes, and includes deeper discussions of sexuality, desire, and pleasure, and even pornography.

The qualitative research conducted by Oliver et al. (2013) and Allen (2005) took place in different settings but produced similar outcomes. The first surveyed over 1200 teens, in 90 different settings in the Greater Toronto Area. The surveys were conducted in a variety of community centre facilities including schools. Although some of the surveyed teens did not learn about sex in a manner that was impacted directly by the Ontario Health and Physical Education
Curriculum, or any ministry sanctioned education curriculum, I contest this fact actually strengthens the conclusions because analysis of the data indicates patterns in responses that transcend in-school teaching and learning of sexual pleasure. The goal of the survey was to assess how well pleasure was being incorporated into sex education (Oliver et al. 2013). Ultimately, service providers in the multiple different settings were able to identify some common barriers to learning and teaching about sexual pleasure. The second survey asked 1180 16-19 year old New Zealanders in public, private, single-sex, and religiously affiliated school to measure how effective their sexuality education was and to suggest areas for improvement (Allen, 2005). Similarly, the scope of this study helps to validate its conclusions by including multiple kinds of school settings and learning environments. Both authors concluded that pleasure education needs to be catered more directly to youth needs, and that youth are eager to learn about non-penetrative sex, mutual masturbation, and safer alternatives to intercourse.

Gordon and Ellingson (2006) argue that pleasure should be an essential part of sex education for young people, but contest the idea that simply including pleasure in sex education is adequate for improving the outcome and efficacy of incorporating pleasure in sex education. Gordon and Ellingson’s theoretical lens for the their study is rooted in the cultural research on scripting theory, arguing that the external world people are immersed in have a profound impact on their interpretation of information. Therefore, the researchers created a study to measure the ways in which youth can interpret danger or pleasure in the same education curricula in many different ways based on their own personal experience. Three of their conclusions are important to note for my own research. First, students who analyzed curricula emphasizing abstinence overwhelmingly interpreted the primary message as equating sex with danger (Gordon and Ellingson, 2006). Second, although personal attitudes can be subjective, students interpreted sex-
positive curricula as more conducive to embracing pleasure as part and parcel of sexuality education, in comparison to the damning and judgemental abstinence-focused curricula. Third, Gordon and Ellingson’s interpretation of the data they collected validated their understanding of script theory: youth interpret meaning and messages in curricula in different ways. Thus, regarding the implementation of pleasure and desire in sex education, they suggest the educator use a variety of teaching methods and devices to best serve all youth who each bring their own world view and preconceived notions to sex education (Gordon and Ellingson, 2006).

Gordon and Ellingson mention some of the limitations in this research, but they do not sufficiently discuss all of them. The students they surveyed were University students, not secondary school students. They acknowledge this fact by explaining that the large majority were recently enrolled in high school level sex education courses and thus their opinions are still valid. Nevertheless, this undermines the usefulness of their data. More problematic is that the students surveyed were enrolled in the researcher’s class, wrote their survey for a mark, and already have some personal or academic interest in the study of sexuality. Therefore their data may be skewed due to performing or may be inauthentic or not sufficiently representative of any true secondary school interpretations of sex education curricula.

Youth surveyed in geographic areas as separate as New Zealand and Southern California have similar interests in incorporating more aspects of sexual pleasure into their Sex Ed learning (Angulo-Olaiz, 2014, Allen 2006). One survey was based on comments from male students enrolled in 15 different schools across New Zealand. The surveys were administered as anonymous questionnaires for young men aged 16 to 19. An intriguing pattern emerged in the data analysis: regardless of geography, socio-economic class, or age, high school boys described wanting more explicit and graphic depictions of sexual acts in their Sex Ed class. Allen offers a
couple interpretations of these results. One is that these boys want to assert their masculinity by demonstrating their interest in sex and implied sexual prowess. Another interpretation Allen offers is that explicit sexuality is considered “deviant” in a school setting, and therefore the boys sought to imbue themselves with some authority by bringing this forbidden topic into the school without cause for recourse (Allen, 2006).

The implications of this survey regarding the implementation for comprehensive Sex Ed are intriguing. Allen argues that the explicit nature of the boys’ comments is a response to schools not treating youth as legitimate sexual individuals. Sex Ed teaching does not fully incorporate topics of sexual pleasure and arousal, even though boys yearn to learn about these topics. Therefore, boys find other ways to explore sexual pleasure in pornography. Pornographic images acknowledge male sexual agency, and prioritizes their pleasure. Pornography serves as a key knowledge source for how to make sex pleasurable for both partners, a common concern of youth this age (Allen, 2006). This clearly demonstrates how youth want to learn about sexual pleasure, and because they have the means to, they will seek it out elsewhere if it is not provided to them in Sex Ed. A significant limitation of this study was that it was limited to assessment of male responses. Although the researcher did acknowledge that two responses from female participants were similar in content and tone to the others, there were so few of them that they did not include those two inquiries in the study.

Results from anonymous questions collected in southern California were not as uniform. Students included in the study were exclusively Black or Latino. This was a conscious decision by the researchers in an effort to fill a void in the literature. The study did not include an accurate representation of youth in the region, which could skew the findings. Nevertheless, this can be overlooked because of the amount, 676, of questionnaires collected, providing for a large enough
sample size that can offer a fairly complete picture of what questions youth have about sex and sexuality. Of a number of issues youth inquired about, including pregnancy, sexual biology, STIs and others, the most widely reported type of inquiry was on sexual arousal (Angulo-Olaiz, 2014).

In contrast to Allen (2006), the survey conducted in Southern California included inquiry about sexual arousal from boys and girls. Both sexes inquired about how to arouse, and how to please their partners during sex. Although there were fewer inquiries on sexual arousal collected from girls than from boys, there was a significant number of questions about sexual pleasure submitted by both sexes. This suggests that girls and boys are interested in learning more about sexual pleasure, demonstrating how conventional Sex Ed fails to comprehensively cover all topics relevant to youths’ lives (Angulo-Olaiz, 2014).

To summarize, it is clear from the research that Sex Ed is not currently meeting the needs of youth in Ontario and beyond. Youth want comprehensive Sex Ed that includes discourses on sexual pleasure and desire. Other literature raises legitimate concerns regarding the characterization of sex and sexuality in Sex Ed settings, imploring educators to portray negative and positive aspects of sex. As noted earlier in this chapter, the foundational feminist research on the absence of discourses of sexual desire has a negative, not negligible, impact on youth. Therefore this issue must be studied further.
Chapter 3: Methodology

There is a significant gap in the research regarding how sexual pleasure and desire is taught in the Greater Toronto Area. The studies I reviewed in Chapter 2 range in scope from specific ethnographic research of youth in New York City, to surveys conducted in New Zealand on the implications of Sex Ed policies. In recent years, there has been some research on sexual pleasure and desire in the unique Canadian and Ontarian context, but it is by no means a robust body of literature. Furthermore, even fewer studies have assessed sexual pleasure and desire in the unique context of Ontario’s largest city, Toronto. In order to ascertain a real-life contemporary assessment of the current inclusion of sexual pleasure and desire in Toronto schools, I designed a bounded instrumental case study of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

Data was collected by reviewing current literature on the subject and by conducting face-to-face interviews of two TDSB Secondary school sex educators. The data collected was based on the teachers’ extensive experiences teaching Sex Ed in the TDSB. The majority of the data included in the findings reflected the three-week long unit of Sex Ed occurring in the Grade 9 Physical Education and Health curriculum. The data also contained some recollections of current and past teaching of grades 10-12 Sex Ed. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

The data was analyzed by looking carefully for any and all mentions of sexual pleasure and desire, along with types of student inquiry and teacher practices used. These themes were informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and influenced by major problems raised by scholarly discourse on the topic. The remainder of Chapter 3 explicates my rationale for choosing this type of research, the procedure followed, a summary of how I insured the research was ethically conducted, and a description of some limitations of this paper.
Rationale

I chose to carry out a qualitative research project as opposed to quantitative research. Quantitative research relies on a robust body of literature and research to substantiate and assess certain phenomena. As exemplified by my analysis of the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum in Chapter 1, sexual pleasure and desire are hardly mentioned, if at all, in the specific curriculum expectations. Therefore I determined that a quantitative analysis would not be suitable because the phenomena I wished to measure, in some cases, might not exist at all. I opted not to try to quantify a phenomenon I was not sure would be present. Perhaps some time in the near future when sexual pleasure and desire education is part and parcel of Sex Ed in Ontario and the TDSB, quantitative research on how it is implemented and its impact on students would be an essential part of furthering the research and knowledge-gathering process on this topic. Moreover, the significant amount of time, funding, and measurable variables necessary for implementing quantitative research made it an impractical choice because of my other academic, personal, and professional obligations (Creswell, 2013).

I elected to frame my case within one school board for multiple reasons. One, the city of Toronto is one of the most international cities in the world, with over 50% of its current residents originally born outside of Canada. Therefore the TDSB contains a uniquely diverse student body. This makes it a fascinating school board to evaluate because of the variety of cultures, religions, world views, and lived experiences represented within the student body. Second, as discussed in Chapter 2, sex education in the secondary school is influenced most directly by two factors: curriculum and educator implementation of the curriculum in the classroom setting. Teachers in the TDSB are expected to teach the curriculum expectations set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Therefore, I selected the TDSB because it allowed me to assess how comprehensive the Ontario Sex Ed curriculum was in practice, along with the teaching methods used by
educators to meet the needs of their diverse student bodies. In contrast, other school boards in the city of Toronto, such as the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) have different stakeholders and goals than the TDSB. In order to analyze the inclusion of pleasure and desire in Sex Ed in the TCDSB I would have to consider the unique circumstances, pressures, goals and setting of board. That task would require a different research question, literature review, and qualitative approach and thus is beyond the scope of this study. Third, I am personally familiar with some aspects of teaching and learning within the TDSB via past peer experiences, familial ties to current students enrolled at the TDSB, and practice teaching placements at TDSB schools. It is important to reiterate that I was not schooled within the TDSB. Therefore, there is enough distance between myself and my research subjects, yet some familiarity with the culture and practices of the TDSB.

**Procedure**

My preliminary research on this topic began in January of 2014. By the fall of 2014, I decided on the form and format of my research collection. I used a semi-structured face-to-face interview framework for collecting data. I conducted two separate interviews in December 2014 and January 2015. The interview questions (see Appendix B) sought to ascertain a broad understanding of the ways the teachers taught about sexual pleasure and desire. Lines of inquiry included broader subjects beyond pleasure and desire such as student, community, and administrative responses to lessons on sexual pleasure and desire, classroom management strategies used, and specific teaching methods used.

As mentioned, I interviewed my participants in the Winter of 2014-2015 over a two month time period. I sent an electronic copy of my informed consent letter more than a week before the scheduled date of the interviews and offered avenues for further questions and
clarifications before the interview began. I emphasized that I would be available if they had any questions lingering questions by phone or electronically after the interview was completed. I then analysed and reported my findings in the Spring of 2015. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher, re-read repeatedly, and coded using virtual highlighters. Themes selected were based primarily on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. A handful of emergent codes were organized and summarized as Additional Findings. A more thorough review of how my data was collected and analyzed follows.

Participants

Recruiting participants for this study was a challenging task. I sought TDSB sex educators who had ample experience teaching in the board and specifically the Grade 9 Physical Education and Health course. Students in Ontario are only required to complete one full credit of Physical Education and Health at the Secondary level. As a result, it was imperative that I interviewed teachers who taught Grade 9 students because that way I could analyze the Sex Ed that all Ontario youth are taught. A crucial part of my inquiry into sexual pleasure and desire in Sex Ed was based upon a great deal of feminist research highlighted in Chapter 2. Therefore it was essential that at least one participant had ample experience teaching female students.

I used a number of different tactics to recruit participants: In chronological order, I corresponded with past mentor teachers and asked them to ask appropriate colleagues at their schools or in their personal networks on my behalf. I utilized personal friends with connections to physical education staff in one particular Toronto high school to help recruit on my behalf. I also provided a short description of my research study to a mentor professor at OISE who distributed this information on an electronic list-serve of Ontario physical education teachers.
The first recruitment strategy I employed connected me to the two participants I interviewed for this study. With the help of previous mentor teachers, I recruited one male and one female Sex Ed teacher. For the duration of the study, these two teachers will be referred to by the pseudonyms Shawn and Kim respectively. These pseudonyms accurately represent the sexes of the teachers. Both teachers had ample Grade 9 Health and Physical Education teaching experience in the TDSB and had taught in single sex and co-ed settings. The bulk of Shawn and Kim’s Sex Ed teaching occurred in single sex class settings corresponding to their own sex. This was essential for my study because I wanted to assess the impact of teaching sexual pleasure and desire for male and female students.

The letter of informed consent (see Appendix A) was reviewed thoroughly before the face-to-face interviews. Shawn and Kim were informed of the focus of my subject of research and agreed to participate. Both Shawn and Kim were interviewed at their places of employment. Shawn was interviewed in a teachers lounge with some other teachers present. Kim was interviewed in her private office.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I asked my planned interview questions in order. I sometimes asked for clarification or specific details if I believed that the participant could have answered the question more specifically. Throughout the interview, I made note of topics the participants mentioned that I was curious to find out more about. After all the set interview questions were asked, I inquired about the topics I noted in a more informal way. Both interviews were recorded with a portable recording device and my cellular telephone. Interviews were transcribed by listening to the recordings collected on the portable recording device. I decided to wait twenty-four hours before beginning to transcribe the interview. I needed some time to do a little bit of conscious
“forgetting” about the interview experience, so that I could transcribe my data more accurately. I utilized a semi-smooth transcription approach, eliminating some hesitations, repeated words, or filler words such as “like” or “ya know” when appropriate.

After reviewing the interview transcription multiple times, I began to code the data. I used themes identified in the literature as the basis for my coding. First, I scanned the transcriptions and highlighted all the instances that pleasure and desire were included in some aspect on transcript. After that, I realized that a great deal of my data did not directly deal with aspects of sexual pleasure or desire, and I decided I needed to broaden the parameters of my coding process. I went back to the literature, and assessed all the ways that scholars collected their data. I emulated that process in my coding, searching and separating the different ways that teaching methods, curricula, and student inquiries presented themselves in my data. I categorized and rearranged the data into 12 to 14 sub themes. Then, I condensed my findings into the 6 themes presented in Chapter 4.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are minimal risks associated with the data collection process of my research. The research subject may be asked questions they are professionally or morally unwilling or unable to answer because of personal discomfort or perceived professional etiquette. This may cause some level of social discomfort. Questions may also cause personal discomfort in certain circumstances.

The benefits of my research will be manifold. The completion of the research will help me achieve my degree requirements, accrediting, informing, and impacting my ability and proficiency as an educator. This ultimately will have a long term positive impact on my community. Research subjects will fulfill their duties as education professionals and good
Samaritans by participating in the data collection process. The outcomes of my research will have a positive impact on the progression and improvement of the Physical Education and Health curriculum in Ontario. As a result, Sex Ed for youth in Ontario and the TDSB could be made more comprehensive, which ultimately could lead to better health outcomes for youth and an improved sense of self-worth.

**Ethics Protocol**

This research was conducted with the highest expectations for ethics in mind at all times. The project was supervised by Dr. Lisa Dack and officially sanctioned by the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Additionally, I have been trained in research ethics at the department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning, by completing the Reflective Teaching and Research course in the academic year of 2013-2014. Participants volunteered their time and were informed of the risks and benefits of the study prior to participating. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time during the course of study. Their confidentiality was ensured throughout the data collection and reporting process. Their name or likeness was in no way implicated in this study.

**Limitations**

Some limitations of this study should not be overlooked. A key issue is the limited number of participants interviewed for this case study. More perspectives and experiences on teaching Sex Ed, by increasing the number of participants involved in the research, would have improved the reliability and would offer deeper insight into Sex Ed teaching in the TDSB. In addition, with appropriate ethics approval, interviewing students and observing students in class would have greatly improved the study. Instead of collecting evidence of student inquiry from what teachers recalled, the students could have been asked to comment directly. Additionally, the
study would have been improved if it included input from Sex educators at the middle school level. Grade 7 and 8 Sex Ed instruction is also compulsory and impactful. It takes place during the age when many youth begin to enter puberty. Finally, a more fulsome critical analysis of whole Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum would have helped to situate this study in the broader context of national and international curriculum criticism.
Chapter 4: Findings

The following is a synthesis of the data collected during two interviews with TDSB sex educators. The pseudonyms “Kim” and “Shawn” will be used to refer to the two interviewees. These pseudonyms accurately represent the sex of the participants. The objective of the interview questions was to ascertain a more detailed picture of what sort of sex educating these teachers are conducting, with specific interest on how sexual pleasure and desire are included in their daily classroom teaching. The interview questions were structured in the following manner: the first three questions were about the teachers’ daily timetable and experience teaching Sex Ed. The next four questions were about the teaching methods and classroom procedures used during Sex Ed instruction. The following six questions were specifically about the ways in which teachers included the topics of pleasure and desire in their teaching.

The topics of inquiry for the final line of questioning included prompts on the tone and context of sexual pleasure and desire instruction, along with questions on specific aspects of sexuality for which sexual pleasure and desire would most likely be addressed (e.g., masturbation and orgasms). The following four interview questions dealt with the teachers’ perception of the students they were teaching, how they responded to the topics of sexual pleasure and desire, and how other stakeholders responded to this sort of instruction. Lastly, I asked a series of questions about topics that emerged during the interview process.

The last type of questions mentioned above varied in the two interviews. Some of these questions focused on clarifying or expanding on answers provided earlier by the participant. Others focused on the logistics of teaching, changes in teaching practice over time, or on unexpected challenges in teaching Sex Ed. This part of the interview was open-ended and free flowing. Sometimes participants reported a memorable moment or interesting story about teaching Sex Ed without being prompted. This section produced data that will be discussed
throughout my findings, and particularly in the section vi. Additional Findings. My findings are organized based on the following themes:

i. TEACHER INSTRUCTION

ii. DESIRE

iii. PLEASURE

iv. STUDENT INQUIRIES

v. DISCOMFORT

vi. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Each theme will be discussed in detail based on the data collected. Examples of how the findings emerged in the research will be provided and explained. Each section begins with a summary of findings for that theme. This summary gives an overview of the main points to be covered in that section of the findings. Additionally, point-form specific findings accompany the summary. These specific findings are discussed in order.

i. Teacher Instruction

The evidence suggests that teachers included topics outlined in the Ontario Curriculum and used discussions along with other methods as their primary means of instruction in the Sex Ed unit.

1. Teachers were influenced a great deal by the curriculum expectations.

2. Teacher-initiated discussion was a key component of class instruction.

3. Student-initiated discussion by way of the question box method proved a crucial component of both teachers’ instruction during the Sex Ed unit.

4. Teachers used quizzes frequently to assess student learning
5. Other teaching methods used included worksheets, role playing, demonstrations, and research projects.

The Specific Expectations outlined in the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum greatly impacted Kim and Shawn’s Sex Ed units. One of the introductory questions I asked Shawn was to explain how he justifies teaching Sex Ed to his students. He stated that “Well, number one it’s part of the curriculum.” Shawn answered by mentioning the curriculum immediately, without any previous reference to the curriculum during the interview. This suggested that Shawn’s instruction is greatly influenced by the curriculum. Later on, I questioned Shawn about how important the curriculum expectations are to his daily planning and teaching. He responded by emphasizing that he incorporated the curriculum expectations consistently and precisely in his instruction. He explained, “Yea, I just follow the objectives,… so whatever I’m asked to do, I do that.” This illustrated how the curriculum expectations influenced Shawn’s teaching a great deal and that he dutifully implemented the teaching objectives outlined in the Ontario curriculum documents.

Kim’s instruction was also influenced by the curriculum expectations, though in a less direct manner compared to Shawn. When asked about how important the curriculum expectations outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education were to her daily lesson planning, Kim reported that she initially designed her Sex Ed unit based on the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum documents. She stated that “on a day to day basis” she did not think about the curriculum expectations, but that she is knowledgeable on what they are and how to instruct on the objectives outlined in the curriculum documents.

Kim and Shawn reported a variety of different teaching and assessment strategies used during their Sex Ed unit throughout the interview. Notably, both participants explained how class
discussions were a key component of their classroom teaching. For example, Kim was asked to
describe specific instructional methods she used to teach about the benefits of sexual intimacy.
She responded by stating “yea, it’s usually discussion, the Sex Ed unit is a lot of discussion.”
This comment suggests that one of Kim’s primary teaching strategies was facilitating teacher-
initiated classroom discussions. Shawn was asked about what teaching approaches he believed to
be the best for instruction on the topics included in the Sex Ed unit. He responded with “we do a
lot of group discussions, we do a lot of small class discussions.” Just like Kim, this statement
suggests that teacher-initiated discussions were a key teaching method used by Shawn.

One way both participants described using discussion as an instructional method was that
the teacher would introduce and instruct on a topic followed by fielding questions from students.
Shawn described how on the first class of the Sex Ed unit, he implemented a trivia activity in
order to introduce a number different relevant topics such as masturbation. After posing a trivia
question about masturbation, Shawn recalled that “they go through a little discussion about that.”
Additionally, Shawn was asked about what teaching approaches he finds to be the most effective
for teaching about Sex Ed topics. He recalled that videos about teens and teen issues were
effective for introducing discussions of these topics in class. He said “I find that videos work a
lot, because especially when they’re having discussions with teens, … so we talk about it too.”
These examples demonstrated how Shawn used teacher-directed prompts by way of a trivia
game or film to introduce, instruct, and then begin a discussion on topics of Sex Ed. In a similar
fashion, Kim described how she introduced the topic of masturbation and encouraged student
comments. Kim reported that students were hesitant to engage in a class discussion on the topic
of masturbation. Nevertheless, this demonstrates how Kim and Shawn both introduced topics,
and then sought student comments and questions, in the format of teacher-initiated discussion.
Both teachers reported that student-initiated discussion was a core component of classes during their Sex Ed unit as well. Kim and Shawn implemented this strategy by using the anonymous question box method. This method allowed for students to submit written questions anonymously to the teacher that would be addressed and/or discussed further in class. Shawn reported that he used the question box method to make sure he addressed all the issues his students wanted to talk about. Shawn explained that “I always give them a question box, where they’ll ask questions and I’ll give them the answers.” When Shawn was asked to speak more on this method of instruction, he said that he maintained the students’ anonymity when questions were collected, an important detail with regards to how he implemented this instructional strategy. Shawn stated that “everyone has to write something so it doesn’t look like “oh I know you wrote this down.””

Notably, student-initiated discussion carried out by way of the question box method was used more and more over the years by Shawn. Shawn was asked about how he had changed his teaching practice over the years. He explained that he increased the amount of time he dedicated to collecting and answering student inquiries. Shawn stated that “…the one thing I’ve changed is the class where, the question class, so I spend more time answering those questions than I have before.” Shawn indicated that the reason he spent more time on this class than in years past is because of the way teens are learning about sex, primarily through the internet. And that he sought to “set that straight for them” referring to myths or other misconceptions about sex that students learned outside of their formal sexual health instruction. This comment demonstrated that discussion of topics on sex, particularly anonymous student inquiry, were a key instructional strategy used by Shawn.
Kim was asked to describe specifically the methods she used when she taught about the benefits of sexual intimacy. She reported that if this topic were to be discussed, it would most likely come as a question from students. In a similar manner to Shawn, Kim explained that students submitted questions anonymously, and that she often started class discussion by addressing questions. Speaking about the kinds of question she received from the anonymous box, Kim stated that “Sometimes they’re silly and I don’t answer them, but most of the time they’re pretty good.” This statement showed that, even though some questions Kim received were not appropriate, student-initiated discussions was used frequently when she taught about particular topics in Sex Ed.

Later on in the interview, Kim was asked to describe in detail what the question box method is and how she used it in her teaching. She explained that students wrote down inquiries and submitted them anonymously to a decorated, repurposed, shoebox. Kim answered these questions during the next class. She recalled

“So, the first day of class I literally have a shoebox and I just decorate it with a question mark on it, and I just tell the kids at any point during the class, write down a question if you have one, you don’t have to put a question in, and just put it in, and then I’ll answer the questions at the start of the next class… and literally sometimes that takes the whole time.”

Kim noted that she always addressed the class before she introduced the questions box, stating that silly questions or questions about Kim’s “personal experience” would not be answered. She said that she still got some of these questions, and that she did not answer them. In fact, she stated “I pretend like I don’t receive them.” Although not all questions were pertinent or appropriate for class discussion, Kim indicated that she discussed some questions at length, and
that Kim needed the whole class period in order to fully discuss some of the inquiries submitted by students. This indicated that student-initiated discussion by way of the question box method was a key component of Kim’s Sex Ed instruction.

Kim and Shawn stated that they both used quizzes as a means of assessment of learning when they taught Sex Ed. Shawn was asked about what sort of assessment he used in his Sex Ed unit, as a follow up to a question about how his teaching practice has changed over the years. Shawn explained that each day students are assessed on the previous day’s instruction. He said “…so everyday they’re given a quiz on what they learned the day before.” Similarly, Kim was asked to describe in greater detail how she used the question box method when she taught Sex Ed. She noted that students were quizzed every class. Kim stated that “…actually I begin with a quiz, I always begin with a quiz.” These comments showed how daily quizzes were used frequently in both Kim and Shawn’s Sex Ed instruction.

Kim and Shawn reported that they used a variety of other teaching strategies, which included research projects, worksheets, demonstrations, and role playing. Kim was asked to comment on how her teaching had changed since she started. Kim noted that she used to do a demonstration of how to put on condoms. Kim said “I used to have condoms and told them to bring in a banana and they could put it on the banana.” Kim explained that she discontinued this demonstration because the condoms were not properly disposed of by the students. Either way, this exemplified how Kim used demonstrations when she taught Sex Ed in the past. When Kim was asked to comment on the teaching approaches that she found to be most effective when she taught Sex Ed, Kim recalled that she assigned a research project about contraceptive methods at the beginning of her Sex Ed instruction. She stated that “…then I’ll have them do a research thing about a contraceptive that interests them, and I like doing that because they don’t have to
give any reasons why they’re choosing that contraceptive… because maybe they’re considering it for themselves.” This demonstrated how Kim utilized independent student research that aided her instruction on particular topics in the Sex Ed unit. Interestingly, she justified why she used this instructional method by emphasizing how students would investigate contraceptive methods that they might have wanted to consider for their own personal use.

Shawn reported that he used a number of different instructional methods when he taught Sex Ed including role playing and different forms of worksheets. When Shawn was asked to comment on what teaching approaches he found most effective when he instructed Sex Ed, he mentioned that he used role playing. He noted “…then we also do a little bit of role playing so, that works for them.” This comment showed that role playing was sometimes utilized when Shawn taught Sex Ed. Later on, he was asked about what sort of assessment he used during this unit. He said that in-class instruction included reading information and answering questions on a worksheet. Shawn mentioned that “…every class I give them worksheets, and a package, and they answer the questions.”

Another example of the kinds of worksheets used by Shawn are diagrams of the human anatomy where students have to label parts of the reproductive system accurately. Shawn brought up a notable moment teaching Sex Ed at another school in conversation at the end of the interview. Then Shawn described how students were instructed to copy down proper labels of a diagram onto their worksheets. Thus this comment showed how Shawn used a variety of different kinds of worksheets, fill-in-the-blank and question-and-answer, when he taught Sex Ed.

ii. Desire

The evidence suggests that the topic of sexual desire is only included in Sex Ed classes in three contexts:
1. As a component of lessons on puberty.

2. As a component of lessons on feelings that could lead to forming sexual relationships.

3. As a component of lessons on the negative consequences of sexual intimacy.

Kim and Shawn were asked to describe the way they teach about sexual desire or lust in their Sex Ed unit. Shawn taught about desire as a new phenomenon that occurs in people at a particular time during adolescence, and contextualized this desire as the initiating step towards forming a romantic relationship. This romantic relationship could progress as far as “sexual intimacy.” Shawn explained that they talk about desire in the context of how people change when they begin going through puberty. He said that at the age of puberty “they start liking people.” Shawn recalled that “we go through the steps” of why you would want to form a sexual relationship and how far that sexual relationship could go. Next, Shawn said he went over how “liking” somebody can lead to flirting, then to touching, then to forming a sexual relationship.

With regards to lust, Shawn stated “I don’t think we really get into it, we just go in the order. Or, like, when lust would come in.” Shawn’s statement demonstrated that he did teach about lust and desire in his Sex Ed unit during lessons on puberty for the purpose of contextualizing the way in which people want to start, and begin to form, sexual relationships. This demonstrates the way in which desire is taught in the context of puberty and as a catalyst for forming sexual relationships.

Shawn also highlighted the ways in which sexual desire might lead students to feel uncomfortable. As Shawn described the escalating steps of a romantic relationship, that may begin with just talking, and proceed to hand holding and other sexual contact, Shawn emphasized that students must feel comfortable. Shawn warned that “you might not be comfortable going further” at one of the steps in the order of how a sexual relationship is formed. Shawn noted that he advised his students to be cautious and to manage their feelings of desire or lust to ensure that
they feel comfortable in whatever kind sexual relationship they would like to develop. This example demonstrates the way that Shawn’s teaching implicitly linked feelings of sexual desire to feelings of discomfort for students.

Similar to Shawn, Kim only taught about sexual desire in the context of puberty. Kim taught about sexual desire as a something that is novel which emerges in adolescents during puberty. Kim explained that “we talk about that near the beginning when we discuss puberty and things like that.” Notably, Kim explained that she did not talk about puberty much at all during her Sex Ed unit, and that she only instructed on the topic of puberty in one class. This illustrates that Kim did include a brief discussion of how sexual desire emerges, but this discourse was limited to a small component of an accelerated lesson on puberty.

Later on in her response, Kim explained that she acknowledged the fact that her students probably do experience feelings of sexual desire. As a result, Kim taught her students about how not to get pregnant and how not contract an STI if her students should decide to act on those feelings of sexual desire. She stated “I wouldn’t say it’s a huge part, but it’s kind of like an underlying theme, you have these sexual desires, what do you do about it? How do you not get pregnant? How do you not get infections but you have the sexual desire.” Kim spoke about sexual desire as a feeling that you have to manage that may lead to sex, and as a result, some significant unintended negative consequences of a sexual relationship. While Shawn mentioned that feelings of sexual desire could lead you into a sexual relationship that could cause people to feel uncomfortable, Kim taught students how to avoid pregnancy, contracting STI's and other negative consequences that feelings of sexual desire may bring on. Compared to Shawn, the evidence suggests that Kim focused a great deal more on the negative consequences of sexual desire in her Sex Ed unit.
iii. Pleasure

*The evidence suggests that the topic of sexual pleasure is discussed in Sex Ed courses during instruction on human anatomy and reproductive systems.*

1. *Teachers discussed what parts of the body are often associated with sexual pleasure.*
2. *Teachers emphasized that masturbation was a common activity for men and women.*
3. *There was some instruction on changes occurring to the body during orgasm.*
4. *Teachers clarified the composition of ejaculate in the context of reproduction.*

Kim indicated that sexual pleasure was not taught about specifically in her Sex Ed class. She emphasized that it is not discussed much beyond the fact that it merely exists as a function of the human body. I asked Kim “To what extent do you talk about sexual pleasure?” Kim responded by saying that they only discuss sexual pleasure in the context of anatomy. Kim explained that “the kids sorta all know the clitoris” and went on to say that they “have a conversation about that, but that’s it really.” The comment about the clitoris illuminated the fact that Kim assumed her students already had some knowledge of what the clitoris is and its function as a pleasure centre. Accordingly, Kim stated that because of this fact she discussed this topic with the students only briefly.

Later on in the interview I asked Kim if she discussed orgasms in any form when she taught her Sex Ed unit. She reported that she does talk about male orgasms in the context of reproduction, and only briefly mentioned female orgasms in the context of explaining the functions of a clitoris. Kim stated that “we talk about it…the day that we discuss the male reproductive system.” Kim explained that she was not even sure if female orgasms were in the Ontario curriculum, and that she approached the topic in a “textbook kind of way.” Kim explained that she instructed in detail about the difference between ejaculate and sperm, but only discussed male orgasms in an anatomical way. With regards to the female orgasm, she reiterated
her explanation of what the functions of a clitoris were from her answer about including pleasure in her teaching. Kim stated that there could be “discussion from that.” But “that’s usually as far as it goes.”

When asked about how she discussed masturbation for girls and/or boys, Kim described masturbation as a way to manage feelings of sexual desire. Kim stated “I talk about it as a form of, you have this sexual desire, what ways can you sort of handle it in your life and feel good and whatever, so we talk about it in that sense.” This comment demonstrates that Kim does mention masturbation but only in a limited way. In fact, she concluded that thought by suggesting that talking about masturbation really was not the focus of Grade 9 Sex Ed, and instead that it was a topic that was discussed in more detail at the Middle School level. Without further questioning or prompting from me, Kim added on to her response to that question. She described how the atmosphere of the class changed when she talked about female masturbation and why she thought the energy of students changed. Kim said

“I try and talk about it, I try and discuss it as a way to relieve that sexual desire, but the kids are like, kinda like “yea, ok” and there’s kinda like the stigma that, the stigma still exists, that you know only guys masturbate, and it’s kinda like “ooo, girls masturbate? [impressionistic, jittery speech] what do you mean?” The room seems to get a little bit uncomfortable about it.”

Kim demonstrated an awareness of how discussing the topic of masturbation changed the energy of the room and made her students more uncomfortable. Kim explained that she tried to bring up masturbation because it is an aspect of Sex Ed that is hard to talk about, and that has a stigma for women. Kim indicated that she emphasized in her teaching that “everybody does it.” Kim acknowledged in her class that many people do masturbate; that was the extent of her
conversation on masturbation. To summarize, the evidence suggests that limited conversations about orgasms and masturbation did occur in Kim’s Sex Ed unit. These conversations can be uncomfortable for the students and extend little beyond basic functions and anatomical explanations.

Shawn explained that he discussed sexual pleasure in the context of how the anatomy works. Specifically, Shawn described how you can tell when orgasms are achieved based on the way the body acts. When Shawn was asked directly, “To what extent do you talk about sexual Pleasure?” He explained how he discussed the penis and clitoris as the pleasure centres of the body in the context of the human anatomy: “We talk about where the source of pleasure is, and we go into detail with that.” When I questioned Shawn about how he talked about orgasms, he reiterated how discussion of male and female orgasms are contextualized within the conversation of how the body works and the function of different body parts:

“…And we talk about that part and how you get an orgasm, and how the body works. So we go through that, so when I’m talking about the penis and the prostate gland and the semen, how it travels and what happens, but as soon as we’re talking about the anatomical parts, that’s when we talk about the orgasm part. The signs you get, ok, so how you know a female has reached orgasm, and things like that.”

The way Shawn described teaching about the orgasm demonstrated how this topic is limited to the discourse of how the orgasm happens in the body and how one can identify when an orgasm occurs.

I asked Shawn if he discussed masturbation during his Sex Ed unit. Shawn reported that he informed his class that the vast majority of men have masturbated at one point in their life in his introduction to the Sex Ed unit. Shawn did not mention female masturbation during the
interview. As mentioned earlier, Shawn stated that at the beginning of the Sex Ed unit, he does some “fun trivia” about some facts his students may not know about sex. Shawn explained “we do that [mention male masturbation] during, when I do the trivia with them at the beginning.” In this trivia game, he taught his class about surveys conducted of male sexual habits. The results of these surveys were that 97% of men have masturbated at one point in their lives. He concluded by saying “but we don’t go into detail.” Shawn did not expand on this topic beyond confirming that many men do indeed masturbate. This suggested that Shawn does talk about male masturbation in his class in the context of emphasizing that the vast majority of men do indeed masturbate.

In the above section I mentioned all the ways that these two teachers initiate conversations of sexual pleasure and desire. Next I will summarize all the times that Kim and Shawn described instances when students inquired about sexual pleasure and desire beyond what was being delivered by the teacher.

**iv. Student Inquiries**

*Some students asked to learn more about orgasms, anal sex, pornography, how to have sex, or to learn about sex that is not only for procreation.*

1. *Teacher initiation of dialogue on orgasms and internet pornography encouraged student inquiry.*

2. *Male and Female students inquired about anal sex.*

3. *Specific student inquiries about sexual desire were absent.*

When I asked Kim about how she includes the topic of orgasms in her class, she noted that her students asked questions about the ways in which males have orgasms and were curious to find out more about how women orgasm. Kim initiated discussion of orgasms by talking about
the male reproductive system. Kim recalled that her students would often ask questions such as: “Can a girl have an orgasm?”, and “well, why don’t girls have orgasms like that?” Kim’s students’ inquiries revealed curiosity about the female orgasm, and suggests that her students were more interested in the female orgasm than the male orgasm. The evidence supports this because Kim did not say that during that lesson she mentioned the ways in which females orgasm. Yet, Kim reported that students often asked about how women can orgasm and how a female orgasm may be similar or different compared to a male orgasm. Thus the evidence shows that girls wanted to learn about male orgasms, and particularly about female orgasm even if the teacher did not initiate discussion on female orgasms.

I asked Shawn to comment on the ways in which students responded to discussions on the topic of sexual desire in his class. Shawn stated that “the kids don’t talk about sexual desire” illustrating the absence of student inquiries on sexual desire in his class. However, he explained that “the first question they ask me is “sir, am I going to learn how to have sex?”” This demonstrates that students wanted to learn how to actually perform sex. Shawn stated that “a lot of kids have this tendency to think that they’re going to watch porn. And they’re going to learn about sex that way.” Shawn did not teach about how to have sex and did not show pornography in his classes. These comments illustrated the ways in which students inquire about sexual pleasure beyond the ways that Shawn teaches it in the context of sexual biology. The evidence suggests that the students inquired and are interested in learning how to perform sex for pleasure.

As I searched my data for student inquiries about sexual pleasure, one unexpected topic appeared in the data collected from Kim and Shawn—students asked about anal sex. Kim and Shawn both inferred that the students were of aware of anal sex and inquired about it solely because of exposure to internet pornography. I asked Kim to tell me about how she taught about
the dangers of sexual intimacy. She answered by stating that “and more recently, there’s been discussions about porn in the class and I think, porn is changing the way kids feel about sex because they think what they see on the internet is what’s supposed to happen.”

After that, I asked about how she brought up the topic of pornography in her classroom teaching. Kim explained that “I kinda just put a little plug, “yea and it’s not always what you see online” and then it kinda snowballs from there.” Kim stated how “a lot of kids ask about anal sex” in the context of their broader conversation about how internet pornography may not be representative of what sex is like in reality. This dialogue indicates that Kim was aware that her students had likely directly or indirectly viewed or knew about internet pornography. Kim initiated and acknowledged this fact, and that resulted in further student inquiry on the subject. This suggests that once the avenue is provided by Kim to talk about pornography, her students actively inquired about certain kinds of acts of sexual pleasure, specifically anal sex.

As noted above, Shawn also commented that he addressed internet pornography in class and often answered students’ questions that he believed to have been heavily influenced by exposure to internet pornography. Specifically, Shawn explained how students inquired about anal sex in his class and other sexual “trends.” Shawn answered my question about how students responded to discussions of sexual desire by explaining that his students inquired more about how to have sex. I wanted to find out more about these student inquiries, so I asked Shawn “where do you think they get these ideas from?” Shawn told me about a specific discussion he had in his Grade 10 Personal Fitness class about anal sex:

“A lot of these kids are interested in Anal sex. I don’t know, and I think it’s because of the, they watch a lot of porn on the internet and I think that’s where they’re getting that from and what is trending now and it seems like they are into that and they want
to know what happens, what are the consequences of having anal sex. So we went through a whole class talking about that. Ok, and I was told “oh my sister, oh sorry my sister’s friend is having anal sex, and is it true that you know, you can poop everywhere” so these are things that they’re, want to know, they’re inquiring about what it’s like.”

This line of inquiry coming from students, about very specific details of an act of sexual pleasure such as anal sex, demonstrates the ways in which students inquired about certain forms of sexual pleasure in Secondary School.

Student inquiries on sexual desire were absent from the data collected. In the section of questions in which I asked my participants to comment on the ways in which students responded to different aspects of Sex Ed, neither Kim nor Shawn reported any instances when students asked to learn more about sexual desire. Kim reiterated how her discussion of sexual desire is limited to her lessons on puberty. Then she stated that “the discussion isn’t about like “what do I do? Or “how do I relieve this sexual desire” it’s not really like that.” This comment demonstrated how students did not ask further questions about sexual desire in Kim’s class. When Shawn was asked the same question, he noted that “I don’t know if they’re interested in desire,” indicating that his students did not ask him questions about sexual desire. Kim was asked to describe specifically what kinds of questions students submitted to the anonymous questions box, and she stated that students inquired about topics having to do with reproductive systems that they were curious about, not specifically sexual desire or pleasure. Kim noted “…there’s a wide range, just a wide range of things, mostly girls asking about guys, “can you pee with an erection?” just things they’re genuinely curious about. Not necessarily pleasure, desire, or sex.” This answer
confirmed the previous comments. Kim and Shawn did not recall any instances when students specifically inquired about desire.

v. Discomfort

The evidence suggests that teachers felt discomfort when they discussed Sex Ed with students of the opposite sex and students felt discomfort when a variety of different issues were discussed and in general with the subject matter.

1. Teachers felt embarrassed or uncomfortable when they taught the opposite sex and when they were asked personal questions.

2. Teachers intentionally designed their course and introduced the unit in a way that addressed potential discomfort in students.

3. Students felt embarrassed or uncomfortable at times when they learned about Sex Ed, particularly topics such as masturbation, pleasure, or just Sex Ed in general.

Kim and Shawn both mentioned moments when they felt embarrassed or uncomfortable when they taught Sex Ed, but for different reasons. Kim stated that she felt uncomfortable when she taught all-boys classes. Shawn commented that he felt embarrassed when he was asked a personal question when he taught a Sex Ed unit in a special education setting. Kim was asked to describe specifically how students reacted when she taught about topics of sexual pleasure and desire. Kim noted “I prefer to teach it to all girls, much more, I just find the conversations more open and honest…” Then I asked her why she preferred to teach all-girls classes. Referring to teaching boys Sex Ed, she explained “I just think everybody feels more comfortable, I don’t necessarily feel like a hundred percent comfortable talking to a young adult when they’re going through it, and I can’t relate to what they’re going through.” This indicated that Kim felt uncomfortable and out of place at certain times when she instructed Sex Ed to classes of male
students. She noted that she felt uncomfortable because she thought that she could not relate to what the male students had experienced at the moment in their lives.

At the end of the interview, without prompting, Shawn recalled a moment when he taught Sex Ed that caused him to feel uncomfortable. He explained that a female student was filling out a worksheet on the parts of the male reproductive system. The girl inquired about the diagram of the penis. Shawn misinterpreted the question. He thought the girl asked if the representation of the penis on the overhead depicted his own genitals. He reported “So one girl puts her hand up and she says ‘Sir, is that ‘U?’’” The student was asking a question about the spelling of a word, but at the time, Shawn thought she was asking if the diagram was of Shawn. Shawn diverted the question. He stated “I can’t, I can’t just say ‘No, it’s not me’ I go maybe she’s thinking something else, so I just avoided it, I avoided answering the question.” Then she asked again. Shawn recalled “…and again, she startled me with that question, I go ‘listen this is just a picture of the reproductive system, it’s not of anybody.’” When Shawn and the student understood the confusion, Shawn stated “She got embarrassed, I got embarrassed.” This humorous miscommunication indicated how personal questions caused Shawn to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable.

Kim and Shawn reported multiple times when students felt embarrassed or uncomfortable during the Sex Ed unit. Kim and Shawn both indicated that they were proactive in trying to reduce the amount of discomfort for the students that discussing this topic might cause. Kim directly stated that she designed the year’s plan so that she knew her students well by the time she taught them the Sex Ed unit. She said she did this because “they feel more comfortable with me… I want them to feel comfortable asking me questions.” This showed how Kim was aware
that her students could have felt discomfort during the Sex Ed unit and designed the course in a way that accommodated for the students because she instructed on Sex Ed after March Break.

Shawn taught his Sex Ed unit after March Break as well. He implied that it was for a similar reason. I asked Shawn if he knew the students he would be teaching before he started the Sex Ed unit. He stated “yea, yea, I know them really well by then.” Then I asked if his designed the year intentionally so that he knew the students well before he taught the Sex Ed unit. He confirmed this statement, saying “yes… that’s my decision.” This showed how Shawn also was cognizant of knowing his students before he taught them about Sex.

Kim described a significant moment of discomfort when she taught about masturbation, specifically female masturbation, to her class of female students. As assessed earlier in this chapter, Kim was asked to describe the ways in which she instructed on masturbation for girls and/or boys when she taught her Sex Ed unit. She reported that

“I try and discuss it as a way to relieve that sexual desire, but the kids are like, kinda like “yea, ok” and there’s kinda like the stigma that, the stigma still exists, that you know only guys masturbate, and it’s kinda like “ooo, girls masturbate? [impressionistic, jittery speech] what do you mean?” The room seems to get a little bit uncomfortable about it. So I do like to bring it up on purpose because I know it gets uncomfortable.”

The way she described how students responded as well as her acknowledgement of student discomfort demonstrated how the topic of female masturbation caused female students in particular to feel uncomfortable.

Some of the data collected did not fit within any of the five categories described above. Therefore, these findings are summarized below.
vi. Additional Findings

The evidence showed a variety of notable teaching practices, interactions, and issues relevant to either Shawn, Kim, or both.

1. *Teachers told jokes and used humour when they discussed masturbation, sexual agency, and other issues covered in the Sex Ed unit. Specifically, humour was used to make the students more comfortable.*

2. *Students were described as giggling or acting silly when they watched videos, discussed sexual pleasure, and in general when Sex Ed lessons were taught.*

3. *Although sexual orientation is not included in the curriculum, teachers indicated that they changed their teaching if they thought a Queer student was in their class or proactively used language which would be inclusive of Queer students.*

Shawn reported multiple occasions where he used jokes to discuss serious issues in Sex Ed, and Kim reported that she used humour, though less frequently, when she taught Sex Ed as well. The first time he mentioned how he used jokes when he taught Sex Ed was when he was asked about how he addressed internet pornography in class. The topic of internet pornography was mentioned before. I asked Shawn about how he considered any parent or community specific concerns when he taught, and then followed up by inquiring if he was ever worried about how parents would respond if he answered questions about pornography in class. Shawn explained that when he taught Sex Ed, he took seriously his role as a parent. Then he stated that he used a joke which brought up the topic of teens talking to their parents about sex as a way to encourage his own students to engage their parents in that conversation. Shawn reported:

“…and then I go, “but you *should* talk to your parents about sex.”

And then I’ll even throw in a joke here and there about, you know, someone having sex, and that jokes relates to, you should be able to talk to
your parents about, how sometimes a male, it’s easier to talk to the father instead of the mother, regarding sex. Because you know the mother always sees her child as a baby still. Where the father sees him growing up and sees hey this is the stage where you’re at, they’re ok with it. But the mother is usually not ok with it. So sometimes I say, to a joke, I sometimes throw out there that it’s easier to talk to your father than it is to your mother sometimes. But you gotta, you gotta understand your parents and you have to be able to communicate with them. So, and that’s usually the first day of class. That’s what we talk about then.”

This response showed how Shawn used humour when he discussed how students should talk to their parents about sex. Shawn mentioned how the joke addressed specifically how it might have been harder for his male students to speak with their mothers about sex, but nonetheless he strongly encouraged his students to discuss sex with their parents, even if it would be difficult.

Later on in the interview, Shawn reported in greater detail how he incorporated humour when he taught Sex Ed in order to make students feel more comfortable in class. Shawn was asked to describe the types of questions he received when he used the anonymous questions box method in class. He described a number of unique questions he had received and described how he used humour to answer them in class. For example, Shawn noted that one student asked “can I get an STI sitting on the toilet.” He responded by stating “so I always tell them the joke “the only way you can [referring to getting an STI sitting on the toilet] is if you sit down before the other guy gets up.” So it’s jokes here and there that actually make them comfortable so I always do that in class.” This showed how Shawn used a joke about having sex with men to debunk a myth about STIs and how he used humour to make the class more comfortable.
Similarly, Kim used humour when she instructed on masturbation because she believed it helped the students feel more comfortable in class. Kim was asked to describe how she included discussions of masturbation for boys and/or girls when she taught her Sex Ed unit. When she explained how she addressed this topic she stated “So I do like to bring it up on purpose because I know it gets uncomfortable, but that’s kinda the only thing I say, and that I try to be funny a little about it.” This showed how Kim used humour when she instructed on masturbation because she sensed that the conversation made the students feel uncomfortable. Therefore, the evidence suggests that she hoped to make students feel more comfortable by using humour.

Shawn and Kim both reported instances when students acted silly. Shawn and Kim both addressed how they handled silliness in their classroom and how they responded to silliness when necessary. Shawn was asked to describe some of the classroom management strategies he used when he taught Sex Ed. Shawn noted that he used a kind of preamble to directly address silliness in his class. He stated “Well I always tell them at the beginning, some of you guys might be silly, and let’s show a little maturity.” Shawn continued on by saying that he even invited students to leave at any point during class if they felt uncomfortable. Then he reported that “They do need to take the class seriously, when they are watching the video they will get the giggles cause they can’t help it.” This suggested that even though Shawn addressed silliness with students at the start of the Sex Ed unit, students did giggle during some of the lessons and there was still some silliness in classes during discussion of certain topics.

Kim was asked to respond to the same question, regarding what classroom management strategies she employed when she instructed Sex Ed. Kim explained that she did not micro manage the students, but did intervene when students became silly. She stated “I let them sit with their friends, until it gets silly, then I’ll just split them up.” Later on in the interview, Kim was
asked to report on how students responded to discussions of sexual pleasure. Kim stated that these conversations caused specifically her female students to giggle. She noted “I think they get more squirmish about that, especially the girls, they tend to giggle.” These examples demonstrate how in multiple scenarios, both Kim and Shawn reported how students acted silly or giggled, an indicator of silliness, when certain Sex Ed subjects were discussed.

Shawn and Kim both discussed ways in which they had accommodated for students who might have been Queer identified when they taught Sex Ed. Kim was asked to comment on how she regarded community specific concerns when she taught about sexual pleasure or desire, or Sex Ed more broadly. Kim explained that she was aware that there were lesbian, gay or trans students in her all-female class and tried to use inclusive language. She reported “I know we have some lesbian or gay transgender students, so I’m sensitive to not say he all the time, I try to say partner, so I’m sensitive towards that.” This showed how Kim tried to use language that was inclusive of non-cisgender students when she taught Sex Ed.

Shawn was asked to comment about community specific concerns that he considered when he taught Sex Ed, specifically, if he taught about queer relationships. He explained that he would discuss these types of relationships if he sensed that a student or students were gay and it would be relevant for them. Shawn noted

“well I try to see what the class make up is like, and if I feel or if I see that there is a kid who might be gay in the class, then I will bring up this role play where there’s a scenario and this person’s gay and they act it out and I bring that in, but I feel like there’s nobody gay, I won’t talk about that, unless the kids are interested.”
At a later point in the interview, Shawn explained how students responded when topics of Queer issues were discussed. He recalled some interesting teaching moments and discussed some notable issues that came up during his time teaching Sex Ed. Shawn reported

“every year it will change, just a bit, tweak it a bit, cause there’s one time when I would talk about, like notice I’d talk about straight sex and see a guy’s face and he’s getting upset, and I go, ok, this guy’s not interested in this stuff, so then the next class I will throw in, gay sex, and all that, and the next thing I see is his face changed and bit, now he’s more accepting of what I’m saying so, I change it a bit according to the kids’ needs, so they know, because sometimes they’re afraid to ask. That’s the way it is.”

This shows more specifically how Shawn analyzed, adjusted and adapted his teaching method when he suspected that there was a gay student in his class, and decided to adjust how he taught certain aspects of the Sex Ed unit.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to assess to what extent TDSB educators included the topics of sexual pleasure and desire in their daily classroom teaching. Additionally, the study sought to investigate what methods teachers used to instruct on the topics of sexual pleasure and desire, whether sex was portrayed in a negative or positive light, and how students and stakeholders responded to discussions on this topic.

The topics of sexual pleasure and desire were rarely included in TDSB Sex Ed classrooms. The evidence showed that the curriculum expectations established by the Ontario Ministry of Education have a great deal of impact on the topics covered in Sex Ed units. The ways in which sexual pleasure and desire were included in classroom teaching were not comprehensive at all. Sexual pleasure was spoken about in the context of reproduction and anatomy, and sexual desire was mentioned as a part of puberty, and as a feeling that could lead to negative health outcomes.

The Question Box method was an important teaching method used for facilitating student inquiry and class discussion. This method allowed for discussions of relevant topics not included in the curriculum, which sometimes included aspects of sexual pleasure. Notably, students did not inquire about sexual desire, therefore discussion of this topic was limited to teacher-initiated discourse. Additionally, students and teachers felt discomfort during some components of Sex Ed teaching, especially when discussing sexual pleasure. Lastly, student silliness and use of humour by teachers was further evidence of discomfort during Sex Ed instruction.

In this section, I will evaluate the meaning and explain the implications of my findings. I will also evaluate to what extent the main findings correspond with the literature reviewed in
Chapter 2. I will then offer practical recommendations and discuss some qualifications and limitations of the study. Finally, I will suggest areas of further research and offer some concluding thoughts.

**Current Curriculum is Biggest Barrier to Comprehensive Sex Ed**

As stated in Chapter 1, teachers are expected to teach the specific expectations outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Therefore, I was not surprised when Shawn and Kim confirmed that they taught the specific expectations. The obligation to teach the curriculum expectations is the most significant reason explaining why the topics of pleasure and desire are rarely incorporated in Sex Ed teaching. The stark reality of the situation is that the curriculum omits comprehensive discussion of sexual pleasure and desire. When it does include aspects of sexual desire, they are often characterized in a negative or dangerous way (Connell, 2005). As exemplified by my own analysis in Chapter 1, the curriculum highlights the negative consequences of sexual contact and focuses on teaching youth ways to reject sex.

Scholarship on this topic confirms these finding as well. Literature assessing why the discourse about sexual desire is missing in America points to curriculum as one of the most significant barriers to implementation of comprehensive Sex Ed (Fine 1988, Fine and McClelland 2006, Froyum 2011). Connell (2005) and Alexander’s (2007) conclusions about the Ontario curriculum mirror those of the American scholars and my own. In her analysis of a prepared activity meant for Grade 10 students, Connell astutely notes that “desire and pleasure are entirely absent and the focus is one of danger, responsibility and self-control” (Connell, 259). The outdated and misguided curriculum is the most significant factor for explaining why sexual pleasure and desire was rarely included in TDSB Sex Ed classes.
I do not envy TDSB teachers such as Shawn and Kim. It is clear from their comments in Chapter 4 that they want to implement teaching methods and topics that are relevant and responsive to their students’ lives. This is exemplified by their incorporation of independent research projects, willingness to dedicate extended periods of time to answering student inquiries, and determination to discuss difficult topics such as internet pornography. Nevertheless, they still have the professional obligation to teach the specific expectations outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. As a result, a great deal of their teaching time was dedicated to comprehension of course content by way of traditional teaching methods.

Shawn and Kim both used worksheets and quizzes in their Sex Ed teaching “every day.” Although Shawn and Kim did not explicitly express what topics were covered by their worksheets, and what subjects students were quizzed on, it is fair to assume that these quizzes and worksheets were primarily focused on the topics outlined by the curriculum. Considering that the curriculum is focused most on sexual biology and preventing negative consequences of sex, this means that a great deal of class time was spent on analysis and evaluation of these topics. Learning about sexual biology or STIs is not an unimportant part of Sex Ed, but as indicated by daily quizzing and worksheet completion, it took up a significant amount of Shawn and Kim’s teaching time.

This example demonstrates the ways in which the requirement to implement the curriculum impedes dedicated teachers from adjusting and adapting their Sex Ed units. Perhaps class time during the Sex Ed unit could be spent differently to facilitate more comprehensive Sex Ed. In fact, in a compelling survey of Toronto youth, one of their most frequent critiques of their Sex Ed teaching was that it was too narrowly focused on sexual biology (Oliver et al. 2013). Additionally, student feedback from surveys conducted in New Zealand exemplify how students
expressed some frustration at the extensive focus on STIs and limited education of other aspects of sexuality (Allen, 2005).

When they had the opportunity, Shawn and Kim utilized a wide variety of teaching methods during Sex Ed classes. The use of class discussions, role playing, demonstrations, independent research, and small group discussions are excellent tactics to improve Sex Ed instruction. Moreover, scholars have reported on how these methods could improve student learning and outcomes, and foster inclusion of the topics of sexual pleasure (Allen 2005, Ingham 2005). If these methods were paired with a more progressive and comprehensive curriculum, a foundation for more comprehensive Sex Ed could begin to be formed here in Ontario and beyond.

**Question Box Method and Adaptable Teachers Succeed where Curriculum Falls Short**

The anonymous question box was a teaching method employed by Shawn and Kim where students could submit any sort of relevant question to the teacher, which in turn would be addressed in class. As a result, this teaching method was used to circumvent the stifling curriculum, allowing students to ask questions about topics that were relevant to their actual lived experience. In turn, this method offered an avenue for students to push the boundaries of Sex Ed, making the class more comprehensive in lieu of the curriculum’s shortcomings (Angulo-Olaiz et al., 2014).

It is critical to point out that anonymity is crucial for implementing this teaching method. The conventional method of students raising their hands and asking questions would not have allowed for such an open discourse. Shawn cleverly described how all students were obliged to “write something” when he collected submissions to the box. That way he would not be able to
identify who wrote what questions. The students were assured that they would not be judged by
their teacher, and as a result, they felt comfortable testing the boundaries of their Sex Ed course.

Significantly, Kim explained that student inquiry collected from the anonymous question
box was likely to be the only way that discussion on the benefits of sexual intimacy would be
included in her Sex Ed teaching. Kim’s implication suggested that although she did not initiate
discussion about the benefits of sexual intimacy, and it certainly was not included in the
curriculum, anonymous questioning allowed students to incorporate this topic in their own Sex
Ed discourse. This conclusion aligns with research on this topic conducted in Southern
California, in which Grade 9 students were given the opportunity to ask any sort of anonymous
question about sex and Sex Ed. A good portion of students inquired about sexuality in a positive
light as opposed to negative, demonstrating how students used anonymous questioning as a way
to satiate their appetite for more comprehensive Sex Ed where the curriculum fell short (Angulo-
Olaiz et al., 2014).

Notably, teachers made their own Sex Ed units more comprehensive by incorporating
discussion on current issues that were not included in the curriculum. Shawn and Kim reported
that they made a point to address internet pornography in class because they knew their students’
conception of sex was directly or indirectly impacted by this prevalent form of sexual media.
Shawn and Kim’s effort to deconstruct depictions of internet pornography as performance that
were not representative of sex in real life are critical steps in the right direction towards forming
a counter discourse addressing this highly influential topic for youth. Scholars argue that schools
must address internet pornography openly and honestly because it has been shown to have an
increasingly impactful influence on youth ideals and conceptions of sexuality (Allen, 2006).
Additionally, both Shawn and Kim mentioned that they tried to use language and teaching
methods that would be include Queer students and issues during the Sex Ed unit (Connell, 2005) This served to counteract the implicit heteronormativity prevalent in the Ontario curriculum, demonstrating how adaptive teachers helped make the Sex Ed curriculum more comprehensive when they could.

**Sexual Pleasure as Biology and the Impact of Internet Pornography**

The ways in which Shawn and Kim included sexual pleasure in their class discussion was regressive and inhibiting. Masturbation and orgasms were discussed in very limited ways, and often, orgasm was only discussed in the context of reproduction. While Shawn and Kim explained that students needed clarification on the difference between semen and sperm, I suspect the students were left wondering why they associated sex with powerful feelings of pleasure, yet this discourse was largely absent from their teacher’s Sex Ed instruction. Instruction on sexual pleasure that is limited to biology misrepresents sex and impedes youth development as legitimate sexual agents (Allen, 2005, Ingham, 2005, Hirst 2012).

One of the most problematic misconceptions regarding omitting genuine discussion of how sex can be pleasurable is the idea that teaching about sex in a positive, pleasurable manner will encourage youth to have sex. The belief is that as a result, the students will inevitably have sex sooner, and fail to manage risks associated with sexual contact. Literature on this topic vehemently refutes this idea. In fact, some scholars argue the one of the best ways to reduce negative health outcomes among youth is to associate condom use with pleasure (Hirst, 2012). Additionally, teaching masturbation as a normal and healthy means of achieving pleasure can help empower youth to be more self-reliant and independent. To their credit, Shawn and Kim attempted to normalize discussions of masturbation; however, they did not go far enough in explaining its role in a healthy young person’s sexuality. Scholarship has shown that by
incorporating in detail how masturbation is a pleasurable alternative to intercourse, youth tend to delay first intercourse and reduce pregnancy rates (Ingham, 2005).

One of the most surprising findings was on the ways in which students discussed internet pornography in Shawn and Kim’s classes. Both teachers mentioned that they deliberately bring this topic up for discussion in their class because they are cognizant of how much students are impacted by internet pornography. Specifically, both teachers explained how students wanted to learn about anal sex, and how they suspected this was because of access to internet pornography. Shawn noted how anal sex had become fashionable in pornography, and therefore a topic of interest for his students.

Scholarship has identified pornography as a crucial part of sexual knowledge for youth (Allen, 2006, Allen, 2005). Allen (2006) explains that pornography provides youth with graphic depictions of sex that are absent from their Sex Ed classes. Moreover, Allen suggests that young men are interested in pornography because it prioritizes their desires and acknowledges their sexual agency where school fails to do so. Inquiry on the logistics and specific details of how to perform anal sex is in line with Allen’s arguments regarding how young people use pornographic images. If Sex Ed curricula and classes fail to construct a forum for learning about sex in a pleasurable and more fulsome way, students will find other means to glean information about pleasurable sex. Therefore it is absolutely imperative that sexual pleasure is incorporated more deliberately into Sex Ed teaching. Internet pornography is already having a measurable impact on youth’s understanding of sex and sexuality. If we do not offer a counter discourse, or at least contextualize internet pornography in a broader discourse of sexuality, we are limiting youth’s education on the pleasurable aspects of sex to that of internet pornographers and other possibly inaccurate or misogynistic sources (Allen, 2006).
Limiting Construction of Sexual Desire

Discussion of sexual desire was mostly absent from my findings. Unlike sexual pleasure, both participants did not report any instances of student inquiry into aspects of sexual desire. The fear of peer scorn and limited inclusion in the curriculum may play a role in hindering student inquiry on the topic of sexual desire. Perhaps some students fear that if they admit to feelings of wanting or lust, they will be considered promiscuous or “slutty” (Kiely, 2005). Or, perhaps the limited and narrowly focused portrayal of sexual desire in the curriculum stymies student inquiry on this topic because students do not feel that their lived experience of sexual desire will be legitimized in classroom discourse (Fine and McClelland, 2006). Looking closely at the way in which discourse on sexual desire was included in Kim and Shawn’s classroom teaching explains how limited discourse on sexual desire was.

Shawn explained how a teen’s sexual desire could lead to them forming a sexual relationship with a partner. Then he framed a number of different sexual interactions, beginning with flirting and hand holding and ending with intercourse, within the confines of an escalating “order” of sex. This “order” of sex inhibits the teaching of a more complex and nuanced understanding of sexual pleasure and desire. As Kiely (2005) notes, the problem with this “order” is that it implies that all romantic relationships are for having sex. Moreover, this kind of narrative assumes that all teens want to have sexual intercourse. Accordingly, by positioning sexual intercourse at the top of an “order” of sexual acts that may occur because of feelings of desire, it implicitly lowers the status of other forms of sex. This ordering of sex diminishes other forms of pleasurable and meaningful sex. As a result, teens are steered away from desiring and exploring other fulfilling types of non-penetrative sex (Kiely, 2005, Connell, 2005).

In addition, Shawn and Kim equated feelings of sexual desire as something that is dangerous and could lead to discomfort or serious negative health outcomes. Coinciding with the
bulk of feminist literature on the topic of including sexual desire in Sex Ed, Shawn and Kim characterized desire as a feeling that could lead to discomfort or danger. This finding mirrors the literature of Fine (1988), when she argues that discourses of desire in Sex Ed are most often defined by danger in schooling. The implicit messages communicated by only associating sexual desire with negative outcomes of sexual intimacy provides for a narrow and incomplete understanding of what sexual desire is. A more thorough exploration of sexual desire may offer students a more nuanced understanding of the risks and possible benefits of lust and other emotions.

**The Final Barrier to Comprehensive Sex Ed: Embarrassment and Discomfort**

I was surprised to find that aspects of Sex Ed made both students and educators feel uncomfortable. The discomfort for students manifested itself in multiple ways. Sometimes it was overtly described by Kim or Shawn, while other times it was covertly displayed in what they described as “silliness.” I interpret silliness as discomfort because the essence of humour is to relieve tension. Therefore, moments that were described as causing “giggles” or silliness suggest that students felt a certain discomfort or tension in class, and needed to relieve this tension through laughter. This highlights one of the most significant barriers to implementing quality comprehensive Sex Ed: the possibly poisonous classroom environment in which this topic is instructed.

Students and scholars identified tense and judgemental classroom environments as one of the most difficult challenges to student engagement when teaching Sex Ed (Angulo-Olaiz et al., 2014, Alexander, 2007). In a survey of teens learning Sex Ed in Northern Ontario, students expressed how they often wanted to ask questions about sex and sexuality that were not covered by the curriculum, but they feared judgement and ridicule from their peers (Alexander, 2007).
The regressive Ontario curriculum sets rigid parameters for discourse on sex and sexuality. The implementation of the curriculum in the classroom created a distinction between “normal” topics to discuss in Sex Ed, and taboo topics. Alexander notes that the way in which a topic is or is not included in the curriculum and therefore the “normal” classroom discourse creates an exclusive and limiting environment, even if the anonymous question box method is used (Alexander, 2007).

As exemplified by my analysis of the use of the anonymous question box method, student inquiries often addressed topics that were not discussed by the curriculum. This served an essential role in my findings for incorporating discussion on sexual pleasure into Kim and Shawn’s Sex Ed class. Notably, Kim and Shawn did not report any instances when students inquired about sexual desire. Alexander’s (2007) argument presents the best justification for why inquiry on desire was absent from my findings. Questions on topics outside the perceived confines of the curriculum were implicitly delegitimized and could even lead to ridicule. Thus, student discomfort, especially if it is augmented by the rigid curriculum, is a serious impediment for inclusion of topics of sexual pleasure and desire for TSDB Sex Ed classes.

One of the most candid statements of the interviews was when Kim admitted she felt more comfortable teaching girls Sex Ed than boys. Kim and Shawn both expressed concern about being asked personal questions, and how certain interactions during Sex Ed made them feel uncomfortable. Interestingly, the teachers used humour and joke telling to discuss topics such as masturbation. Fine (1988) argues that teacher comfort with discussing sex in a fulsome and positive way is one of the most important factors for implementing comprehensive Sex Ed. This demonstrated how teachers also resorted to humour to relieve the tension of the discomfort caused by discussing certain topics with their class. A common complaint among students in
other literature noted that teachers’ unwillingness, prudishness, or discomfort with talking about the details of sex and sexuality was a significant barrier for learning comprehensive Sex Ed (Alexander 2007, Allen 2005, Oliver et al., 2013). The comfort level of the teacher when facilitating lessons on Sex Ed has a profound effect on the incorporation of topics such as pleasure and desire. Evidently, Shawn and Kim’s overt acknowledgement of discomfort, and implied discomfort, reveals that teacher discomfort is a serious impediment to comprehensive Sex Ed.

**Implications and Recommendations**

One of the most significant implications of this research is the “reality gap” it exposes. What I mean by “reality gap” is that the lived experience of sex and sexuality for TDSB youth, and formal schooling on Sex Ed that they receive, are completely separate from each other. The ways in which youth experience sex, by way of pop culture, the media, their personal relationships, cyber interactions, and internet pornography fails to be represented in any meaningful way in their Sex Ed courses. As a result, Sex Ed fails to meet their unique needs, and so they are obliged to contemplate and navigate these issues on their own.

Sex and sexuality impact youth constantly. Whether coming from internal desire, or external pressure, sex is everywhere. Yet, in high school, students are only obliged to complete one full credit of Health and Physical Education, within which, there is only three weeks allotted for Sex Ed instruction. This is inadequate. Shawn summed up this problem best when he reflected on what outside knowledge his students brought with them to class:

“All they learn is off the internet and their friends with experiences … and three weeks of our health [his Sex Ed unit], yeah.”
Educators have a moral and professional obligation to reform and refine Sex Ed so that it more directly addresses the lived experience of youth. Our long term Sex Ed goals should be to reduce the “reality gap,” because if we fail to, it will likely continue to grow.

Another significant implication of this research is how internet pornography has changed the way youth develop their own sense of personal and communal sexuality. This study has revealed ways in which access to internet pornography impacts youth. Pornography is not a novel phenomenon in our culture. However, access to pornography has never been so great. As educators we must find ways to address internet pornography in a civil and professional way, because it will likely continue to be a part of many adolescents’ realities.

A key implication of this study is how discomfort remains a barrier to effective Sex Ed instruction. The intersection of sex in the public space and the public school is tricky for any educator. The teacher’s precarious position as in loco parentis and in close interaction with vulnerable sector populations is an understandable barrier to implementation of more comprehensive Sex Ed. As curriculum changes and ideally, expands in scope, educators need intimate, honest, and open discourse with Board leaders and community stakeholders on defining permissible bounds of Sex Ed instruction. Moreover, educators need to be better prepared and trained in how to talk to teens about sex. Increased attention to this specific skill in teacher education should be a priority for any reputable Faculty of Education.

Moving forward, the public and education community must treat youth as legitimate sexual beings. This will create avenues and opportunities to provide youth with humanized Sex Ed, with desire, pleasure, and other pertinent issues discussed in full. Although it is controversial, I believe, and some scholars recommend, that Sex Ed should teach students how to have sex (Ingham, 2005); specifically, how to have pleasurable non-penetrative lower risk sex. It
is important to note that students should not just learn about this kind of sex, but actually how to perform it. Students should also be taught how to masturbate in a safe and sanitary way. Normalizing and encouraging these lower risk and pleasurable sex acts will empower youth to explore their own sexuality, and could lead to better public health outcomes.

**Limitations and Further Research**

This case study was limited by a number of different factors. Some methodological limitations are described at the end of Chapter 3. During the course of this research, it was announced that a new Sex Ed curriculum will be implemented in Ontario for the 2015-2016 academic year. This curriculum will shift a great deal of Sex Ed teaching and learning at the primary and secondary level. It will also impact the public discourse and teacher training of Sex Ed. This study was not able to take into account the significant changes in Sex Ed resulting from the announcement and coming implementation of the new curriculum. Nevertheless, a critical evaluation of the new curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum is a logical next step in research on this topic. This study can serve as benchmark in future analysis of how sexual pleasure and desire is included in TDSB teaching, helping to assess whether Sex Ed is becoming more or less comprehensive.

Thinking more broadly, the impact and influence of internet pornography and its effect on youth sexual development is a topic of interest that should be investigated furtherer. This phenomenon is not well understood yet and will prove essential for implementation of comprehensive Sex Ed in the 21st century. Exposure to internet pornography does not necessarily have a negative impact on youth. However, much of the mainstream internet pornography that youth most likely are viewing is produced in a manner that does not depict sexual acts in a safe or respectful way. The impact of these particular depictions of sex on youth is a critical area of
future inquiry and research. Additionally, Feminist/Gendered interpretation of these findings and further research would help appropriately identify the overt and covert differences of teaching on topics of sexual pleasure and desire for girls and boys in Sex Ed. Lastly, analysis of these issues with regards to Queer youth and Queer issues, often omitted or relegated to the fringe of Sex Ed discourse, would be an important perspective to analyze in future studies.

Concluding Thoughts

Personally, this study served as a stark reminder of the challenges of reaching students. By this I mean, teachers must find ways to meet students where they are in Sex Ed and every other subject. This study revealed just how disparate and disconnected youth’s lived experience and curriculum can be. In my practice, I will seek to incorporate methods such as the anonymous question box to help me connect curriculum to students’ lived experience. For the most part, curriculum fails to stay current with the changing demands and dilemmas of the real world. By including more student input, I can help to keep my teaching more responsive to the real-world changes that are unaccounted for in the curriculum. These types of methods are transferrable to any subject matter, and would improve the efficacy and outcomes in any classroom setting.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


Appendix A

Letter of Informed Consent

December 3, 2014

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided so that you may make an informed decision regarding participation in the present study. This study is actively supervised by a representative of the Ontario Institute of for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Lisa Dack, Ph.D. The study will be executed by Sam Kohn, B.A., Master of Teaching Candidate.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which sexual pleasure and desire are included in the daily teaching practice of Secondary level TDSB Physical Education and Health teachers. The procedure of this qualitative case study consists of interviews with health educators within one calendar year. The data collected in this case study will help further the exploration of this topic specifically within the Greater Toronto Area.

The main data collection process used in this study will be personal interviews of health educators. Interviews will take place at the educator’s place of employment in an area that provides appropriate privacy. Interview questions will focus on the methods and strategies educators employ, in addition to the way individual educators’ philosophy of education informs their teaching of pleasure and desire. Interviews will be 20 to 60 minutes in length and will be audio recorded.

You should be aware that you are in no way obliged to participate in the study and you are entitled to withdraw from the study at any point in the research process. Choosing not to participate in this study will not impact your relationship with Sam Kohn, OISE, The University of Toronto, your employer, or your status in the OCT in any way.

The final research product will be published within the University of Toronto’s digital archive of Graduate research called T-Space. Your confidentiality will be respected at all times and protected to the best of my ability and your likeness will in no way be revealed at any point in the research process. Audio recordings and notes will be stored in Sam Kohn’s private residence and all digital data will be stored in a password protected computer. You will have ample opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications before, during and after the interview process. After the research project is completed, I am happy to share the results with you personally.

In certain circumstances, consultation with the participant may be requested after the interview in order to assure the accuracy of the data collected. This data will be supplemented by interviewer reflections immediately following the in-field data collection along with written notes recorded during the interview.
There are minimal risks associated with this research. The benefits include improving the scope of research of this topic, contextualizing the TDSB within the broader world of current research on key Health and Sexual education policy, and helping me fulfill my Master of Teaching program requirements.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the research procedures. After signing, interviewer and interviewee will both keep a copy of this document.

Sincerely,

Sam Kohn
Samuel.Kohn@mail.utoronto.ca
416-389-9099

Dr. Lisa Dack
lisa.dack@utoronto.ca
416-577-9979

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Sam Kohn and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________

Date: ________________
Appendix B

Interview Questions

General Inquiry:

1. What classes are you currently teaching? Grade, Section?
2. How long have you taught Phys Ed and Health?
3. Are the classes you teach required for graduation or electives?

I am going to ask some questions about specific practices regarding your teaching of Sexual Education, please answer them to the best of your ability:

4. What rationale do you provide for teaching units that include the topic of sex
   a. (e.g. this is something you need to know for life, this is relevant for your health and safety, this is a part of growing up…)

5. In your experience, what teaching approaches are most effective for facilitating discussion on topics regarding sex?
   a. Teaching approaches: set up classroom, activities,

6. What are some classroom management strategies you employ to aid in maintaining a comfortable classroom setting when discussing sexual pleasure or desire?

7. Are the curriculum expectations outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education important to your daily lesson planning and teaching?
   a. In what ways do they impact your planning? If they do not, why are they omitted?

Teacher directed instruction

1. To what extent do you talk about sexual desire?
   a. How are your discussions similar or different for your different health sections/individual class/Grade level?

2. To what extent do you talk about sexual pleasure?
   a. How are your discussions similar or different for your different health sections/individual class/Grade level?

3. To what extent do you discuss the dangers of sexual intimacy?
   a. How do you approach this topic? Specific examples?
4. To what extent do you discuss the benefits of sexual intimacy?
   a. How do you approach this topic? Specific examples?

5. To what extent do you discuss Orgasms?
   a. How do you approach this topic for female orgasms? Do you discuss vaginal and clitoral orgasm?
   b. How do you approach this topic for the male orgasm?

6. To what extent do you discuss Masturbation for girls, boys, or both?

**Student/parent/community considerations/responses**

1. How do students respond to discussions of sexual desire? Can you provide some examples?
   a. Active participants, engaged in learning, distracted, curious?

2. How do students respond to discussions of sexual pleasure? Can you provide some examples?
   a. Are students active participants, engaged in learning, distracted, curious?

3. To what extent do you consider Parent or Guardian comments or concerns when teaching about sexual pleasure and desire?

4. To what extent are Departmental, administrative, or community specific comments or concerns regarded when teaching about sexual pleasure and desire?