

AN EXAMINATION OF ABSTINENCE-ONLY, ABSTINENCE-PLUS, AND
COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION IN LIGHT OF IDENTITY THEORY

BY

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Abstract

This analytic study examined abstinence-only, abstinence-plus, and comprehensive sex education to determine the consistency of the pedagogical practices with identity development theory. Both the archetypal definitions of these three approaches and a specific curriculum from each of the three categories (i.e., *Choosing the Best Life*, *Reducing the Risk*, and *Making Proud Choices*) were analyzed in the context of the identity development literature. The abstinence-only definition and the *Choosing the Best Life* curricular approach were found to be least consistent with practices that promote identity development. The SIECUS definition of comprehensive sex education and the abstinence-plus curriculum, *Reducing the Risk*, exhibited the most consistency with the identity development literature. Sex education practices were discussed in the social context in an effort to identify the root causes of the recent emphasis on abstinence-only sex education approaches. Finally, recommendations were presented for sex education practices both from existing curricular approaches as well as novel approaches that may increase the likelihood of facilitating identity development and achievement.

Introduction to the question

Sex education is a controversial topic in our country today. Although many would agree on the need for young people to receive sex education, there is substantial disagreement regarding the precise approach to sex education that should be taken. These disagreements center in large part around the context and content: What should be taught and where should teaching occur? The three most prominent curricular approaches to sex education today are abstinence-only, abstinence-plus, and comprehensive approaches.

There are many theoretical and empirical studies devoted to discussing and examining the various educational approaches and contexts. Many empirical studies focus on behavioral outcomes and consequences such as sexual activity, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. The overriding concern in much of the research seems to be how best to promote the physical health of young people via a particular approach to sex education as well as how to achieve specific behavioral outcomes (i.e., abstinence, contraceptive use, reduction of pregnancy rates, etc.). It is frequently the case that sex education program goals and definitions of success are focused almost exclusively on these specific behavioral outcomes. For example, in the case of abstinence-only programs, success is often viewed in terms of the percentage of participants who remain abstinent. This emphasis on physical health, while important, has sometimes overshadowed another area of concern, healthy psychological growth and development.

One very important psychological milestone for adolescents is identity development. Erik Erikson was the first in the field of psychology to discuss the importance of identity in the developmental process. Erikson viewed adolescence as the period when we each face a necessary crisis in an effort to develop an identity. At this point of crisis, which Erikson referred to as the identity versus role confusion developmental stage, young people are faced with the challenge of progressing toward identity achievement. If this crisis is unsuccessfully resolved, identity development is thwarted and the individual develops role confusion. For Erikson, positive and successful resolution of eight development crises (trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair) was necessary for psychological health and development (Erikson, 1963). He believed that we confront each of these crises as we progress through various age-related milestones. Years later, James Marcia set out to examine Erikson's developmental stage associated with adolescence, identity versus role confusion, more closely and to determine the process for identity achievement. He identified four specific identity statuses (i.e., diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement) that individuals may experience in the process of working toward identity achievement (Marcia, 1980). Later research also detailed the psychological health and well-being implications of becoming stuck in identity diffusion, foreclosure or moratorium rather than moving forward to identity achievement.

Even though both sex education and identity development are of paramount importance during adolescence, there has been no research to date comparing and analyzing the various approaches to sex education in light of identity development theory. This is a significant gap in the current research. Understanding this relationship may help clarify which approach to sex education has the greatest potential for promoting both the physical and psychological health of young people.

Therefore, it is my intention to examine the three sex education approaches (i.e., abstinence-only, abstinence-plus, and comprehensive) to determine the extent to which the stated goals and approaches of each approach are consistent with Marcia's identity theory as well as newer identity theories that extend and expand Marcia's original paradigm. I will also discuss the extent to which identity-related milestones are included in the definition of program success. Lastly, I intend to make specific recommendations for sex education programs and the associated definitions of success to include promotion of identity development and psychological well-being and for these to be regarded as at least equally important to the promotion of physical health and specific behavioral outcomes.

This will be an analytic study. In the next three sections I will set the stage for the analysis by reviewing major theoretical perspectives on identity development, making a case for the importance of considering the identity impact of the sex education process, and review sex education approaches including empirical literature regarding their effectiveness. I will begin my analysis by examining the archetypal definitions of the three sex education approaches in the context of identity

development theory. After examining the archetypal definitions, I will review three specific curricula from each of the curricular categories (i.e., Choosing the Best Life - abstinence-only, Making Proud Choices - comprehensive, and Reducing the Risk - abstinence-plus) to determine what information is presented and how it is to be taught. These three curricula have been selected due to their status as one of the most commonly used curricula in each of their respective categories. Each curriculum will be analyzed within the context of the major identity development theories outlined in the literature review in order to determine the extent to which the educational practices seem to be consistent with the identity development process and to identify any barriers that may be created through the use of each approach. Following the analysis, I will discuss our current attitudes and approaches to sex education in the societal context. Finally, I will attempt to recommend sex education approaches that are more consistent with the identity development process outlined in the literature and hence more likely to promote identity development. While some recommended approaches may exist within current programs, the recommendations may also include novel strategies that are not currently in use. I will also attempt to outline the benefits that may result from remaining mindful of the identity development process in the educational environment.

Theoretical overview: Identity theory

Identity theory was an outgrowth of broader psychological theories regarding human behavior and personality development. Sigmund Freud was one of the first to propose a comprehensive theory of personality development. Although he did not specifically propose or address the concept of identity, his theory laid the foundation for other theorists who did discuss the concept of identity. Freud contended that there were three structures within the human personality (Freud, 1933). According to his structural model, the Id was the first to form and was primarily focused on seeking pleasure and gratification. The second structure, the Ego, embodies our sense of self and rationality. Last, the Superego is our internalized parent, the part of our personality that evaluates our behavior as acceptable or unacceptable. Of the three structures, Freud believed that the Ego was the most important because its task was to mediate between the Id and Superego to fulfill our desires but to find a socially acceptable path for this fulfillment. He also contended that due to the importance of the Ego each of us has a variety of defense mechanisms in place to shield the Ego and keep it strong and performing its important function.

Moreover, Freud believed that at all ages and stages of development humans were sexual beings and focused on experiencing gratification from different sources. During the oral stage that occurs during infancy, Freud proposed that infants derive pleasure from oral activities. Next comes the anal stage. Toilet training is a critical event during this period and the experience of gratification shifts to elimination activities. During the third phallic stage occurring from approximately ages three to

five, children are focused on their genitals and according to Freud are attempting to resolve attraction toward the opposite sex parent. The fourth stage is known as the latency period during which our sexual urges remain relatively dormant and we focus on same sex bonding from the ages of approximately six to twelve. Finally, at adolescence, we reach the fifth and final stage, the genital stage. During this period we once again are focused on the genitals and sexual activity and we begin the quest to establish success in love and work, which are the hallmarks of the healthy individual from the Freudian perspective. Freud believed in the importance of early childhood experiences and argued that each of our personalities is essentially set by the age of five or six.

Erik Erikson was one of the first prominent psychologists to focus on the concept of identity. Erikson, a neo-Freudian, attempted to move beyond Freudian theories and the psychoanalytic perspective. He felt that examining the psychosocial landscape of a person's experience was more important to understanding personality than Freud's focus on sexuality at each stage in his psychosexual model. Erikson believed that each of us grows and develops psychologically over our entire life span and that at each stage of our lives we are resolving conflicts not necessarily related to sex. Erikson developed his own theory that outlined eight stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959). Each of the stages corresponded to a particular period in the life span and was focused on a particular crisis that each of us works to resolve. Trust versus mistrust is the first crisis which occurs during the first year of life. During this time we crave nurturing and caring from those around and if it is provided

will develop a sense of trust. Autonomy versus shame and doubt is the second crisis and it occurs from approximately ages one to three. The desire during this stage is to begin to assert one's independence. The third crisis is initiative versus guilt occurs from ages three to five. This stage is not simply devoted to asserting one's independence but to planning one's own actions as well. Industry versus inferiority is the fourth crisis that typically occurs during the early school years until about the age of twelve. The focus during this stage is on finding success by developing our abilities. The fifth crisis is ego identity versus role confusion. This crisis occurs during adolescence. It is during this period that Erikson believed that we all begin to attempt to define who we are and what we stand for as individuals. If we are unsuccessful in this self-defining process, we can either remain in confusion or resolve this crisis in a negative fashion. Erikson proposed that we are all attempting to find identity synthesis in which we were able to reconcile childhood influences with present day identifications. The sixth, seventh, and eighth stages occur during young, middle, and older adulthood respectively. The associated crises are intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. During these periods we are attempting to connect with others, give back to the younger generation, and find a sense of meaning in our lives. Erikson's argument was that positive resolutions to each of the crises promoted positive development and psychological health while negative resolutions could make addressing future crises more difficult and might lead to psychological difficulties.

After studying Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, James Marcia began his quest to validate the construct of identity and to delineate the process of identity development. In the book *The Future of Identity*, Marcia authored a chapter entitled "Why Erikson?" in which he explains how Erikson's theory sparked his interest and was the foundation for his research into the development of identity and the identification of the four identity statuses. In the chapter he discusses being particularly struck by a 1959 book by Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, in which Erikson outlined the therapeutic success he had in assisting a patient resolve an identity crisis. Marcia found this perspective helpful in his clinical work and made the decision to focus on identity for his dissertation. Subsequently, Marcia devoted his entire career to research in this area.

Marcia (1980) defined identity as an internal self-structure that was a "dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history" (p. 159). Given this definition, the composition of each individual's identity will be a unique amalgamation of innate predispositions combined with cognitive and emotional responses to life experience and introspective reflection. So, while we are born with a foundation of certain predispositions, identity is a dynamic structure that evolves throughout the development process.

One important debate within psychology is nature versus nurture (i.e., how much of our behavior and personality comes from innate characteristics, how much these things are shaped by our experiences and choices, and to what extent both variables may be at work). The psychological literature is replete with evidence of

the importance of both biology and environment as Marcia's definition of identity suggests. Temperament research, for example, has demonstrated that we are not born as blank slates but rather have innate tendencies toward particular mood states and behaviors. Infants who have not yet had a chance to be environmentally influenced demonstrate individual temperament characteristics that vary widely from infant to infant (Thomas and Chess, 1977). Essentially, each of us is born with certain predispositions that provide a baseline or foundation for our personality, self-concept, and identity.

There is also evidence that particular traits, characteristics, or difficulties may be either linked to biological differences or inherited. For example, Johnson et al. (1999) found a significant difference in the baseline brain activity of introverts (i.e., those who are more solitary and less socially gregarious) and extraverts (i.e., those who prefer a great deal of interaction and enjoy group settings). Introverts have significantly more baseline brain activity than extraverts. Researchers posit that, because they already experience an ideal or nearly ideal level of brain activity, introverts do not need to seek much external stimulation while extraverts need additional stimulation to reach their ideal level. So, this biological variation translates into an identifiable personality difference. There is also some evidence to suggest certain characteristics such as sexual preference may be linked to particular genetic configurations and thus are inherited. Furthermore, research on psychological disorders has shown increased risks of many disorders when one or more of an

individual's family members have been diagnosed with a given disorder. This suggests an inherited susceptibility for particular conditions.

However, biological and genetic factors are not solely responsible for who we are. Our personality is not entirely predetermined. Life experiences and influences do shape our development as well. Marcia firmly believed as Erickson did that certain periods in an individual's life are crucial to the identity development process and that adolescence was one of these periods. Marcia (1980) noted that during adolescence we begin our identity negotiation process in which we should begin to relinquish childhood ideologies and move into an uncertain future in which we must analyze and evaluate what we believe and what seems to fit with our particular dispositions, thoughts and feelings. When we assess the level of fit within the identity development process we are presumably evaluating possible choices in the context of our innate temperament as well as accumulated life experiences that have shaped our personality to determine which new options might fit into the developing mosaic of our identity.

Marcia (1980) also emphasized the importance of decisions in the formulation and structure of identity. He noted that even those decisions or choices that may seem inconsequential at the time (e.g., whom to date, whether or not to break up, having intercourse, taking drugs, etc.) have identity-forming implications. "The decisions and the bases on which one decides begin to form themselves into a more or less consistent core or structure (Marcia, 1980, p. 161)." From Marcia's perspective

personal decision-making is a significant factor in the formulation of an individual's identity.

Marcia developed semi-structured interviews and a scoring manual that he used to assess identity development and to identify differences between individuals. Through this research Marcia determined that there are two critical components for identity development and the presence or absence of each of these components determines an individual's identity status (Marcia, 1987). These two necessary components are crisis and commitment. The first component, crisis, is essentially exploration. Those individuals who are engaged in active exploration can be said to be in crisis within Marcia's model. So, for example, a student who is not sure what major to choose in college but who is actively examining the possibilities would be classified as being in crisis. The second component, commitment, is present if an individual has made decisions about what is most consistent with whom she is as a person. After exploration, an individual may decide that a major in education feels like the best choice based on her abilities, interests, and personal values. At this point, commitment has occurred.

As previously mentioned each of the two components of identity can either be absent or present which yields four possible identity statuses. If both crisis and commitment are absent, an individual is said to fall into the status of identity diffusion. Such an individual is not engaged in active exploration and has not made any decisions about those things that fit with their personality and worldview. Individuals in this status are often social chameleons with shifting behavioral patterns

that mirror current influences of those around them. If crisis is present but commitment is absent, an individual is said to be in identity moratorium. In this status individuals are actively looking for core beliefs and values to which they will commit. Those in this status can experience a sense of frustration or confusion as they are still in the process of identifying the values and ideals. If crisis is absent but commitment is present, identity foreclosure is said to have taken place. This often occurs when young people simply adopt or commit to values proposed during their upbringing by authority figures in their lives. This status is often deceptive because those in this status feel as though they have achieved an identity because decisions, albeit premature ones, have been made. Those in foreclosure may exhibit cognitive rigidity and may not see the need for exploration. Finally, when both crisis and commitment have occurred an individual is said to have reached the status of identity achievement. Such an individual has engaged in a period of active exploration, has thoughtfully evaluated the alternatives, and has reached a conclusion about those things that resonate with her and reflect her personality and interests. Marcia classifies diffusion and foreclosure as lower identity statuses because of the lack of active exploration and designates moratorium and achievement as higher statuses due to the presence of exploration, which is necessary for achieving an identity. Although significant disadvantages are generally associated with identity foreclosure, MacKinnon and Marcia (2002) found that mothers of preschoolers who exhibited foreclosure were more likely to exhibit a secure attachment relationship style. This is an exception to Marcia's original conceptualization that framed foreclosure as

problematic. However, this is an isolated result related to attachment style and does not eliminate the possibility of foreclosure leading to cognitive rigidity and impeding the identity development process.

Marcia also discusses the difference between a conferred identity and a constructed identity. Those individuals who are in foreclosure and who have adopted the positions of authority figures are said to have a conferred identity, in that the elements of identity have been provided to them. Within Marcia's model, individuals with a conferred identity have not reached identity achievement but rather have fallen into identity foreclosure. Moreover, adopting a conferred identity is likely to serve as a barrier to true identity achievement, which should be an outgrowth of personal exploration and subsequent decisions about who we are, what is most important to us, and the thoughts, values, and behaviors that are consistent with our defined self. He notes that those in foreclosure may gradually begin to realize that the conferred elements are not truly congruent with their personal self-concept. Once this recognition of incongruence occurs and personal exploration can take place, the individual has started down the path to a constructed identity and identity achievement. In order to achieve a constructed identity, an individual must engage in a thorough exploration process and make commitments that truly reflect their individual values and priorities.

Marcia notes that identity is segmented into important content areas or domains such as occupation, religion, and sexuality. It is quite possible for an individual to be in differing statuses across various areas or domains. For example,

an individual could be in moratorium regarding a potential occupation but in foreclosure in the areas of religion and sexuality. Progress toward identity achievement is measured by an overview of status classifications in specific domains. The likelihood that the overall structure of identity is approaching achievement increases as the number of domains falling within identity achievement increases. The identification of domains also underscores the extent to which the exploration process must be comprehensive in order to reach identity achievement.

Even though Marcia developed his original model in the late 1960's, he is still using it in his own research today. There are, of course, some additional models that have been proposed since Marcia's identity status theory but none have developed the same level of prominence in the field of psychology in the form of almost universal placement in general psychology textbooks as well as inclusion in an overwhelming number of studies exploring identity and none of the newer models have the extensive number of years of validation research behind them. Moreover, most of the more recent identity theories are based at least in part on Marcia's model. Schwartz (2001) noted that newer identity theories could be classified into two groups, those that extend identity status theory and those that expand upon the theory. This clearly indicates that Marcia's original theory still lies at the core of these new extended or expanded models.

Waterman (1982) examined Marcia's identity statuses and delineated the possible pathways from each status to the next in an attempt to determine how individuals reach identity achievement. He proposed that those in identity diffusion

could simply remain in diffusion, move into foreclosure by committing to the first option presented to them, or move into moratorium by engaging in active exploration. Those in foreclosure have three possible pathways out of this status. Foreclosed individuals could either regress back to diffusion if they were to relinquish their premature commitment, hold on to their premature commitment and remain in foreclosure, or move forward to exploration in moratorium. Finally, those in moratorium could either cease exploration and fall back into diffusion or move ahead with a thorough exploration and reach identity achievement via a post-exploration commitment. These pathways underscore the importance of moratorium and the exploration process because identity achievement can only be reached via the moratorium status. Waterman categorized diffusion and foreclosure as the less mature identity statuses due their lack of direct connection with achievement. Conversely, he characterized moratorium and achievement as the more mature statuses given that achievement is the end point and moratorium always precedes achievement.

In an attempt to outline the specifics of the pathways from status to status, Kroger (2001) outlines the steps she believes are necessary for an individual to move from foreclosure through moratorium and finally to achievement. She proposes that the following are the necessary steps for this process to occur:

1. Experience conflict or discrepancy rather than denying it.
2. Focus on separation from our internalized other and becoming independent.

3. Begin to take action to separate.
4. Possess the ability to withstand the guilt and fear associated with the separation process.
5. Repudiate childhood identifications and possibly experience anger associated with these.
6. Focus on individuation.
7. Experience differentiation and a new form of connection.

Kroger bases her proposed seven steps on her own clinical work and particular case studies of those experiencing identity struggles. It is interesting to note that according to Kroger's process, there is a range of unpleasant emotions that individuals must face and endure in order to move past foreclosure. This underscores the difficult and challenging nature of moving beyond foreclosure and leaves open the possibility that some individuals may not complete the steps thereby remaining in a foreclosed state.

Kroger also details what she believes are the differing cognitive and emotional processes for those in foreclosure and achievement when they are faced with new information that conflicts their belief systems. She indicates that those in foreclosure will explore the conflict only if they are blocked from continuing to use their old belief system. They will pause to address this but will enlist the guidance of significant figures in their life rather than contemplating it themselves. They may develop some new commitments but are likely to express a sense of longing for older, better days. Those in achievement on the other hand pause to identify the problem independently and looking for perspectives that are a better fit with those things that

they find personally meaningful. They then develop new commitments based on their exploration and express these commitments often with great energy and enthusiasm.

Grotevant (1987) focused specifically on identity exploration and attempted to delineate the components that were necessary for exploration to take place. He indicated that the likelihood of exploration was based generally on our abilities such as decision-making and problem-solving as well as our orientations or perspectives and that our own combination of abilities and orientations would impact our willingness to engage in identity exploration. He proposed that individuals could be categorized according to their presence or absence of abilities and their favorable or unfavorable orientation toward the process of exploration. The likelihood of exploration is maximized when abilities are present and a favorable attitude toward exploration exists. This suggests the importance of both emotional readiness and critical analysis skills in the exploration and self-discovery process. If one of the two components is present alone (i.e., analytical abilities present with an unfavorable emotional reaction or analytical abilities absent with a favorable emotional response), some exploration may occur but the probability for successful and ongoing exploration is reduced. And, finally, if an absence of critical analysis skill is coupled with an unfavorable emotional reaction, the exploration process becomes extremely unlikely.

Grotevant also delineated five antecedents to the identity exploration process. These include information-seeking tendencies, the presence or absence of competing forces, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our current identity, our expectations of the

exploration process, and our willingness to explore. He noted that these five variables would temper the amount of exploration that occurred and how long the period of exploration would last. Those individuals who were inclined to seek information, had fewer competing forces, were dissatisfied with their current identity, held positive expectations for the exploration process, and possessed a willingness to explore would be the most likely to engage in exploration. To the extent that individuals have opposing tendencies on any of these five antecedents, the probability of exploration declines.

Not only is the presence or absence of exploration important but the quality of exploration is important as well. Waterman (1990) noted that exploration could either be a high quality process in which many alternatives are explored in a search for personal meaning and intrinsic value or a lower quality process in which personal meaning is not a significant factor in the search but the motivation is instead extrinsically focused. This distinction he felt was mostly applicable to the identity achievement status because those individuals in moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion either had not engaged in enough exploration to be categorized in this fashion or had not completed their exploration process. Waterman used the term personal expressiveness to describe this variation in the personal meaning of identity commitments. Those high in personal expressiveness have engaged in substantial emotional and cognitive exploration devoted to identifying those things that fit best with their personality, values, and beliefs. Waterman proposed that high levels of

personal expressiveness were needed to develop what he called one's daimon, which is our best set of potentials.

Another theoretical perspective that links to Marcia's identity model to cognitive and emotional style is Berzonsky's (1989) identity style model. He suggests that there are three overriding problem-solving strategies or coping mechanisms associated with the identity statuses outlined in Marcia's theory. According to this model, our cognitive and emotional style will vary depending upon our current identity status. The diffuse-avoidant style is utilized most by those in identity diffusion. The behavioral patterns of those in the diffuse-avoidant category include procrastination, evasion, a moment-to-moment approach to life, and emotion-focused rather than problem-focused coping. The second style, which Berzonsky called normative, is associated with those in identity foreclosure. Individuals with this style are prone to imitation, conformity, closed-mindedness, and cognitive rigidity. The third style is informational and is associated with both those who are currently in identity moratorium and achievement. Those with this style are most likely to research the available options, carefully assess both their cognitive analysis and emotional response to potential options, and make a self-congruent selection based on their analysis. Those using the informational style are gathering information for use in the process of self-discovery if they are in identity moratorium. These individuals will reflect on their analysis as well as their emotional response, consider the level of fit with their personal predispositions, beliefs, and emerging identity structure, and decide if new perspectives are consistent with existing identity elements. Even those

who have reached identity achievement will consider information in this same fashion to determine if new possibilities might enhance their existing identity structure.

Both the diffuse-avoidant and normative styles are potentially problematic since the associated behaviors tend to stifle the developmental process leaving the individual stuck in their current state. Clearly, the informational style is regarded as the most desirable of the three styles because it enhances the probability of continuing development and movement toward identity achievement. Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, and Berman (2001) conducted an empirical study to examine the connection between the various identity statuses and Berzonsky's three identity styles. Their data confirmed Berzonsky's theoretical contentions. They found that lower levels of informational style were predictive of inclusion in diffusion or foreclosure while high levels of informational style were predictive of those in identity moratorium or achievement.

Adding to various personal characteristics that make the necessary processes for identity achievement more likely, Kerpelman & Smith (1999) propose identity control theory, which places identity development in a context of social influence. This theory focuses on microprocesses (i.e., interpersonal interactions and their impact on our intrapersonal evaluation) and their relationship to identity development. They suggest that feedback we receive from important figures in our lives impacts our likelihood of identity exploration depending on congruence or incongruence with our current view of our self. Congruent feedback is less likely to promote exploration while incongruent feedback increases the probability of

exploration. Therefore, according to this perspective, a certain amount of incongruent feedback is useful for facilitating the cognitive and emotional exploration process, which is necessary for identity development. It is likely that the construct of cognitive dissonance is explanatory within identity control theory. Festinger (1957) noted that cognitive dissonance (i.e., a conflict between our attitude and our behavior or other attitudes) is a very uncomfortable state and that we are all motivated to resolve this dissonance to alleviate the discomfort. It is likely that incongruent feedback creates a sense of cognitive dissonance by presenting an attitude that is at odds with previously established identity attitudes and it is this that motivates the exploration process in order to achieve a resolution.

An additional model that Schwartz (2001) saw as an expansion rather than an extension of Marcia's identity statuses is Kurtines (1995) co-constructivist theory. This perspective suggests that identity formation is a process shared between the individual and society. Individuals move forward in the societal context to engage in a personal analysis in order to develop an identity. Kurtines suggests that three problem-solving processes are necessary to promote exploration and in turn increase the probability of identity achievement. The first process is creativity, which Kurtines defines as the ability to generate many alternatives. In order to exercise creativity, an individual must be able to generate novel alternatives as well as to identify alternatives for consideration that may be at odds with his or her current perspective. Suspension of judgment is the second process in which an individual carefully and objectively evaluates the alternatives they have generated without

prejudging the alternatives based on past or current experience or sentiment. This requires that we look beyond our initial emotional reactions and attempt to hold these responses in check while we engage in a rational evaluation. The advantages and disadvantages of each alternative should be carefully considered and the decision process should be based on this analytical process along with our post-analysis emotional evaluation. Finally, the third process, critical evaluation, occurs when we are able to make decisions based on the outcome of our analysis and remain open to changing our perspective even if it may contradict a previously held position to which we may be emotionally attached and personally invested. Individuals successfully engaging in creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation can develop what Kurtines referred to as a critical identity. This is an identity achieved through the combination of rational analysis and emotional evaluation as opposed to an identity based solely on initial emotional reactions or biases.

The identity development process is not merely a disconnected rational analysis of various facts. The self-discovery process requires an emotional assessment of what feels right to us. Kurtines (1995) is suggesting that it is to our benefit to implement these three processes in order to ensure our exploration is thorough and avoid jumping to conclusions that are based on knee jerk emotional reactions to options that we may not yet fully understand. Within this framework, our emotional assessment of the level of personal fit will be more accurate if we first understand the alternatives rationally.

In summary, Marcia's theory of identity statuses was an attempt to describe Erikson's developmental stage of ego identity versus role confusion in operational terms. Since the development of Marcia's theoretical perspective, a variety of theorists have built upon the identity status model and attempted to outline related constructs. In the next section, I will describe the relevance of these constructs in the context of sex education.

The case for relating identity theory to sex education

Adolescence is a period during which a developmental surge takes place on a variety of levels. It is during this time that our physical development progresses toward adulthood. Our psychological development is also dramatically increased as we approach formal operations (from a Piagetian perspective) and we become abstract thinkers (Piaget, 1962). Moreover, we are also entering the Eriksonian developmental stage of ego identity versus role confusion and are attempting to achieve a sense of who we are as individuals.

Although some individuals may receive some sex education prior to the onset of puberty, this type of education becomes extremely important as young people enter puberty and their teenage years. This is when the need to understand and deal with changing bodies and a newly developing sex drive is strong. Some individuals will receive the bulk, if not the entirety, of their sex education during this time of critical development. Because each of us is also faced with the developmental challenge of establishing an identity during our adolescent years, it is important to examine the types of information and activities that are likely to contribute to this process and to identify barriers that might detract from the path to identity achievement. Furthermore, given that Marcia noted that our identity is segmented into domains and he specifically identified sexual identity as a developing domain, it seems only logical to question how the messages we are receiving through sex education might impact our identity development.

It could be argued that if someone encounters an identity development blockage during adolescence then they can still establish an identity at a later point in time. However, both Erikson and Marcia regarded adolescence as a critical period for identity development. Marcia (1987) notes that identity is always changing but changes at a progressively slower pace after adolescence. It appears that once we exit the developmental period of adolescence, our identity may be less likely to shift and when changes occur they will take a much longer period of time. If we agree with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, each life stage is devoted to a particular crisis to be resolved. Once we move out of adolescence, we are moving forward to deal with intimacy versus isolation within the Eriksonian model. If we have not resolved our identity appropriately during adolescence it may be difficult to continue to manage this conflict while addressing an additional conflict. Additionally, if we remain in role confusion, this could have lasting negative effects on our ability to resolve future developmental stages positively according to Erikson's model. For example, during intimacy versus isolation we may establish relationships that have a weak foundation due to the fact that our own identity is still in question and we cannot, therefore, make an accurate determination about our compatibility with significant others in our lives. So, it is to our benefit to resolve this crisis and establish our identity during the appropriate developmental period (i.e., adolescence), due to the challenges associated with a late resolution and the possibility of impacting our future development negatively.

Within Marcia's identity theory, individuals must engage in thorough cognitive and emotional exploration and must reach commitment in order to achieve an identity. Moreover, as Grotevant (1987) noted, the potential for exploration rests in part on the ability of the individual to engage in exploration. Although exploration is sometimes described in behavioral terms, the exploration needed for identity development is an internal process. Neither Marcia nor Grotevant suggested that individuals would need to act out all possible options behaviorally in order to make an evaluation. Schwartz, Kurtines, and Montgomery (2005) found that cognitively and emotionally focused strategies were both important to facilitating identity development in that cognitive strategies supported self-constructive identity processes and emotional strategies supported self-discovery. Because of the necessity of both cognitive and emotional evaluation, comprehensive exploration requires providing information that can be contemplated and considered in each of these realms. The information that we receive during adolescence, contributes to our personal exploration of a variety of important domains including sex. If an individual does not receive information that can be evaluated from both a cognitive and emotional perspective during this critical period, her capacity for identity development would be significantly reduced because the amount and quality of exploration would be diminished. Without a foundation of information it is not possible for exploratory ability to flourish.

Although we receive information from a variety of sources, some of the information that we receive during adolescence comes through our formal education.

So, the formal educational process can contribute directly to exploration ability by providing information to be considered, by engaging students in conceptual discussion and alternative generation and by encouraging an assessment of emotional responses and level of fit with one's existing self-concept. In order to promote the exploration that is necessary for identity achievement, it is desirable to examine the educational process to determine the extent to which the content delivered and the particular approach to education are laying an appropriate foundation for exploration to occur.

If we are to promote thorough exploration, which is necessary for identity achievement, we must deliver thorough and accurate information to the developing adolescent in order to equip the individual with the ability to explore. While this delivery can take many forms, such as an instructor presenting a lesson or a lecture or a student reading a required assignment in a text, the underlying importance of information delivery remains unchanged. Whether an educational process occurs in a classroom environment or elsewhere, conveying information is paramount to the developmental process. Moreover, it is desirable to ensure that the information delivered is clear, accurate, factual, and useful. Delivery of incorrect information does not support the developmental process but rather undermines the development of the individual by serving as a barrier to exploration. It could be argued that incorrect information creates worse conditions than no information at all because the individual receiving it may begin to build an identity upon an illegitimate foundation. It is also possible that incorrect information could place the well-being of an individual in

danger. Consider an example outside the context of sex education in which a student is told that a particular type of plant is edible when in fact it is poisonous. This inaccurate information could lead to serious illness or death because the person mistakenly believes that plant to be fit for human consumption. While other factual errors may not carry with them the same significance in terms of putting a person's life at risk, they still have the potential to be damaging or at the very least to detract from the learner's ability to function effectively in the world. So, clearly, it is desirable to attempt to convey accurate and factual information in the educational process in order to facilitate the ability of the learner to understand, to promote the health and well-being of the individual, and to allow for emotive self-assessment which yields a foundation for identity development.

Further, withholding important pieces of information restricts the range of cognitive and emotional exploration that can occur. If a learner does not have access to the critical pieces of information about a topic, her or his learning and identity development may consequently be truncated. The effects of omission can be as negative as the effects of misinformation. If for example, a college student is told about certain majors and academic programs but not others, she cannot engage in a rational and emotional assessment of the existing possibilities in order to make the most self-congruent selection. A more complete understanding would decrease the likelihood of a personal choice that is not a good fit for the individual. So it would seem that the educational process should not only convey accurate information but

also ensure that important information is not omitted if we are to promote the full range of exploration that is necessary for identity development.

However, as Rousseau suggests our delivery of information must be tempered by the readiness of the learner (Noddings, 1998). Moreover, Anderson (2007) argued that differentiating instruction based on various factors including learner readiness increased the likelihood of a successful educational process. Delivering information before a learner is ready or in need of the information could be problematic in several ways. Learners who are not ready to receive information may simply not attend to or comprehend the information because they either do not see it as relevant or are not yet in a position to understand. Learners in this situation could also feel emotionally overwhelmed and confused. Consequently, exploration ability is not enhanced. In more extreme instances, learners may be troubled or traumatized by information that they are not prepared to assimilate. So the timing of information delivery is quite important. We must consider the cognitive and emotional maturity of the learner as well as the impending need for the information. Piaget demonstrated quite clearly, for example, that children of different ages have different capacities for cognitive processing. In all but the most extreme and unusual of circumstances a 2 year-old will understand the world dramatically differently than a 13 year-old. It would clearly be unproductive to lack sensitivity to these differences. Moreover, it would seem less appropriate from a timing standpoint to explain in detail the important principles of driving a car to a 2 year-old for use when the child is old enough to drive than to explain these principles to a 12 or 13 year-old. Conveying the information at

a time when it can be understood and remembered is important for facilitating exploration ability.

Consistent with Rousseau's perspective it is important to deliver the information in a timely fashion (Noddings, 1998). It would not make sense, for example, to wait until someone was 18 years of age and had been driving for two years to explain these aforementioned driving principles. By that time the person would have, in all likelihood, either figured the principles out by experimentation or made driving mistakes as a result of not being informed and subsequently learned because of these errors some of which could potentially be serious or life-threatening. The fundamental consideration is to understand when the information is needed and to deliver the information prior to that point in time but with some reasonable temporal proximity.

This issue of timing seems straightforward yet complexities can arise. If those in a position to deliver information refuse because they do not agree with the time line on which the information is needed, this is a specialized instance of omission of information that promotes the possibility of significant negative consequences. If a driving instructor does not feel that young people should drive until the age of 18 and subsequently withholds driving information to those younger than 18, he or she is promoting ignorance in the 16 and 17 year-old drivers which could lead to serious negative outcomes. It is important to provide information before the need arises so that the information can be explored in advance and used to make commitments or particular behavioral choices. Subjective judgments about the appropriateness of the

timing of the need for information should not interfere with the delivery of information. Even if we assume that the driving instructor is correct in his/her belief that 18 is a more appropriate driving age, it would be irresponsible and unethical to neglect the realities of when young people start to drive. Because we know that 16 and 17 year-olds do drive, we should provide them the crucial information before they begin to drive in order to maximize their safety and the safety of others on road. It is certainly legitimate to discuss the appropriateness of driving at a particular age and to lobby for associated legal or societal changes in the sanctioned age. But it would not be appropriate to stop providing information about driving prior to the age of 16 as long as driving is occurring at that age.

When we consider these issues of accurate, complete information delivered according to the readiness of the learner and prior to the time at which the information is needed in the context of sex education and identity development, it is clear that we would limit the ability of an adolescent to engage in cognitive and emotional exploration and move forward in her identity development if we fail to provide thorough and accurate sex education preceding and during adolescence.

Along with providing complete information in a developmentally timely manner, encouraging a climate of exploration is extremely important. As mentioned in the previous section, Grotevant (1987) stressed the importance of exploration in identity development and noted that willingness to engage in cognitive and emotional exploration was critical for maximizing its likelihood. Willingness to explore can both be modeled and encouraged in the educational context. As educators, if we

demonstrate this willingness to examine content from various angles and to discuss a wide range of perspectives, we provide a productive model for our students and may potentially encourage their willingness to explore. Moreover, if we engage students in discussions and create activities that require a certain amount of conceptual and personal exploration, we can begin to positively influence their attitude toward and level of exploration.

On the other hand, negative attitudes toward exploration are likely to result when educators do not model and encourage this process. Bandura's social learning theory demonstrated the powerful impact of observational learning and modeling (Bandura, 1986). We learn by watching others. If an educator demonstrates discomfort with exploration or an unwillingness to explore, the exposed students may develop a negative attitude toward exploration and will be less likely to engage in this behavior. Additionally, presenting a truncated range of perspectives along with unfavorable responses to students who attempt to explore additional perspectives produces a punishing effect on those who are inclined toward exploration. Skinner's operant conditioning paradigm (Skinner, 1938) clearly illustrates that our behavior is affected by consequences. Behavior that is followed by pleasant or favorable consequences is reinforced via our positive emotional state and becomes more likely. However, behavior that is followed by an unfavorable outcome has been punished and therefore is less likely to occur in the future. If exploratory attempts are repeatedly followed by an unfavorable response, exploration becomes increasingly less likely and the individual's attitude toward exploration becomes more negative.

Clearly, promotion of a positive attitude toward exploration requires both educational models that represent exploration as desirable and demonstrate a willingness to explore. Creation of a positive emotional climate as well as encouragement of exploration are both very important for fostering a positive attitude.

Moreover, Waterman (1990) noted the importance of high quality exploration, which he felt led to personal expressiveness and an identity structure most consistent with our core values and potentials. So, encouraging students in the educational process to contemplate various perspectives, examine their feelings about each perspective, and evaluating which perspectives fit with who they are and what is important to them is important for maximizing personal expressiveness and promoting identity achievement. Exploration that is low in quality might be described as a rapid, surface-level consideration of multiple perspectives. While this type of process is an exploration in its most rudimentary form, its shallow nature prevents the possibility for depth of understanding and the meaningful introspection that is necessary to yield personal expressiveness. To achieve exploration of high quality we must set the stage for an in-depth exploration of perspectives, contemplation of their meaning and ramifications, an introspective evaluation of our emotional responses, an assessment of which perspectives are most consistent with our values, committing to the perspectives that reflect what we value and believe as individuals, and achieving the ability to express to ourselves and others what we are committed to and the reasoning behind our commitment. It is only after we have engaged in this comprehensive process that we could be considered to have achieved

an identity that is personally expressive. While those in adolescence may not have completed a comprehensive exploration process or fully developed the cognitive capacity that is necessary to achieve personal expressiveness, we can at a minimum begin to create a foundation upon which a personally expressive identity can emerge.

Consistent with the aforementioned importance of exploration, Marcia (2003) notes that advanced identity formation is associated with advanced reasoning ability. Additionally, Marcia (1980) argued that our decisions and the bases on which our decisions are made form a core structure that impacts the identity formation process. From this perspective, our ability to establish an identity is enhanced if we develop strong critical thinking and decision-making skills that may also be promoted through the educational process. Three cognitive styles were delineated by Berzonsky (1989) who indicated that those in identity moratorium or achievement most often exhibited the informational style, which is characterized by research, analysis and careful decision-making. Moreover, Waterman (1990) indicated that in addition to a willingness to explore, the ability to engage in problem solving and decision-making was the second critical component for promoting the exploration process. In specifying the requisite reasoning process even further, Kurtines noted that creativity (i.e., extensive generation of alternatives), suspension of judgment, and a critical evaluation are necessary for developing an identity in the co-constructivist context (Schwartz, 2001). Given the proposed link between critical reasoning skills and identity formation, it is also desirable to contemplate the extent to which approaches

to sex education encourage careful, extensive analysis, critical thinking, and a mindful personal choice process.

Defining what constitutes a quality decision is necessary before analyzing which educational approaches are most likely to facilitate high quality decision-making. Consistent with Pierce (1877) and Nussbaum (1997) who both emphasize the importance of the scientific method and reasoning, I am defining a high quality decision as a decision made after careful scrutiny of the relevant information in the context of one's existing identity structure (i.e., predispositions, drives, attitudes, beliefs, and assessments) that stands to help the learner to either maximize positive outcomes or to reduce negative outcomes. Positive outcomes within this definition include making selections that offer a specific benefit to an individual, are consistent with her identity structure, or both. While negative outcomes are linked with a specific disadvantage or are inconsistent with existing identity elements.

It is important to note that careful scrutiny of information is an important part of the decision-making process but it is not sufficient. To make an identity-congruent decision not only is it important to acquire and review pertinent information, but individuals should also evaluate this information with the context of their current identity structure. This evaluation is clearly something that cannot be provided from an external source but must take place as an introspective process within each individual. As previously mentioned, the identity structure consists of many different elements such as temperament predispositions, physiological drives, and thoughts and experience. I would also argue that emotional assessment is a factor in this

introspective process as well. People certainly can and do make decisions without exposure to a wide range of information. In these instances, we simply assess what limited information we have via this introspective process and develop our assessment of what feels best to us. However, I believe that in these instances the quality level of the decision is diminished due to the lack of a wide range of information to subject to our introspective assessment. In this example, we leave open the possibility that there may have been another perspective that would have been a better fit for our existing identity structure that we were unable to consider.

Given this definition of quality decision-making, it appears that there are three things we can provide in the educational process that lay the foundation for and encourage higher quality decisions. One is to strive to provide a wide range of perspectives that can be considered by students. Another is to promote critical thinking and analysis of the information. These two approaches work together to help students undertake a thoughtful rational analysis. Students should also be encouraged to assess their emotional reactions in conjunction with the rational analysis. Finally, we can encourage students to engage in their own introspective analysis in order to determine what is the best fit for them relative to their developing identity structure.

While education in the form of a comprehensive delivery of accurate and relevant information in a timely fashion does not guarantee critical thinking and quality decision-making in every instance, it would appear to put the learner in a much better position to make a quality decision than a situation in which the information is not delivered. It is not a defensible position to suggest that ignorance

or misinformation leads to better decision-making than comprehensive, accurate information. Yet, there are those who would argue against the dispensation of information in some contexts. This tendency is most likely when an individual feels strongly that others should not engage in a particular behavior or take a specific approach. The premises for the preventing acquisition and exploration of information are varied but may include the belief that ignorance necessarily leads to inaction and/or the suggestion that because high quality decisions cannot be guaranteed via education that we should not pursue education.

The belief that ignorance will lead to inaction is simply inaccurate. John Dewey (1900) among others notes that humans are curious from a very young age and that even though we may not know or understand, we will interact with our environment, and in the process, over time, gain knowledge about the object of interest. Observational evidence supports this hypothesis. If we concede that humans are prone to experimentation when they lack knowledge, the contention that ignorance leads to inaction is not viable. One could argue that total ignorance may lead to inaction when no prompting or awareness of behavioral options exists. However, creating a state of total ignorance would be very challenging to achieve given that it would require a child or adolescent to be isolated from any information about the subject of concern. Moreover, in order for this lack of information to lead to inaction, internal drives to discover or exhibit behavior must not be present. Because total ignorance is almost impossible to achieve and some behaviors are

driven by biological drives, ignorance is likely to lead to action of an experimental variety in an effort to acquire information or knowledge.

The second premise, that because high quality decisions cannot be guaranteed education should not be pursued, is also quite questionable. Even Aristotle who argued for moral education via authority conceded that humans will not make appropriate and moral decisions 100% of the time (Noddings, 1998). We are not perfect beings and neither is our capacity for decision-making. If we recognize that we cannot guarantee high quality decisions, the option that would seem secondarily desirable is to maximize the chances of quality decision-making. A quality decision is unlikely to be made without a complete set of relevant facts. So failing to provide information undermines the potential quality of the subsequent decision. Therefore, thorough education is necessary for maximizing the possibility of a high quality decision. Even though a guarantee of a quality decision is not possible, we should aspire to approach education in a fashion that maximizes the probability of critical thinking and better quality decisions.

The exposure to a variety of relevant perspectives is necessary for high quality decision-making in more complex realms. If learners are exposed to only one perspective on a given topic, their decision can only be based on this perspective and is, then, quite limited. Consistent with Pierce (1877) who argued that the scientific method was the superior avenue for fixing belief, I would argue that, all other things being equal, the best decisions are reached when a person can consider all relevant perspectives. It is also critically important that the individual evaluate perspectives

and his emotional assessment of each carefully within his identity context, and then either choose the best perspective from the available choices or create a more identity-consistent original perspective. So, if we wish to promote identity development and quality decision-making through the educational process, we must present learners with various viewpoints to be evaluated via this multifaceted analysis.

Selecting perspectives for inclusion in the educational process can be challenging. Some may ask how we select perspectives to be included. It seems reasonable to strive to introduce all viewpoints that are held by a substantial number of individuals in the country. At a minimum, we should include at least one opposing viewpoint for any perspective we are presenting to give learners a chance to compare and contrast the views. There may be some practical constraints on the number of perspectives that can be included. Striving to be comprehensive is an important goal but in many cases we may need to be reasonably comprehensive rather than completely comprehensive. Generally, classes, programs, or lessons have a time constraint. So, we must select a reasonably comprehensive range of information that is most germane to the topic and can be covered in the time allotted. This may mean that certain views that are somewhat uncommon in the population may not be selected for inclusion. Also, perspectives that endorse illegal behavior or those that might traumatize learners would not be reasonable candidates for inclusion. For example, even though a minute fraction of individuals feel that pedophilia is a valid

sexual preference, this behavior is against the law and would not then be a reasonable perspective to include in a sex education program.

It is important to acknowledge that even those perspectives that differ from our own may still qualify as relevant for inclusion in the educational process. It might be tempting for someone with a strong belief to dismiss alternative views as unreasonable simply on the basis that the view is different from the one he or she embraces. This, however, is not an appropriate disqualification of a perspective as worthy of inclusion in the educational process. Worthwhile views may quite often be perspectives that educators do not embrace themselves. The obligation of the educator is not to share only those views that are consistent with his or her value system but rather all reasonable perspectives related to the issue at hand.

We must also consider that as topic complexity increases, the possibility for variations in opinions rises. This added complexity creates a greater probability for confusion and less than ideal decision-making. As mentioned previously, we cannot guarantee high quality decision-making through comprehensive delivery of information but we can maximize the probability of identity-congruent decisions by facilitating a thoughtful rational and emotional analysis. We must recognize, however, that decisions cannot be categorized in a simple dichotomous fashion. Rather than simply fitting into the broad categories good and bad, the quality of a decision can fall along a continuum ranging from poor to excellent with points such as marginal, fair, good, and very good in between. We must also be aware there are various decisions associated with life choices and that the quality of a decision may

vary along the aforementioned continuum. For example, imagine a young person is riding a bicycle with his friends and he makes the decision to wear all the appropriate safety gear such as a helmet. He, then, decides to emulate a difficult trick that requires sliding down a railing and subsequently falls injuring his arm and leg. While the second decision to perform the bicycle trick was unwise, the first decision to wear safety gear was excellent and may have prevented serious injuries from occurring. Through education we would ideally like to promote quality decisions in each and every instance. However, this cannot always be ensured. Yet, if some decisions are quality decisions we have created a better condition than if none of the decisions were quality decisions. It is vital to recognize that if any decisions are influenced positively through the education process, at least partial success in the promotion of quality decision-making has been achieved.

It is also preferable to promote decisions that are mindful and are a product of an applied line of reasoning. While it is possible to select a wise course of action purely by chance, it is not desirable to leave this possibility to chance. It is important that all people become familiar with the process for decision-making so that each person has the capability to maximize the likelihood of making a quality decision. Thoughtful consideration of various perspectives, evaluating the alternatives, examining the possible outcomes associated with a particular decision, and selecting the most desirable option are all important facets. However, individuals are not born with either all of the requisite knowledge that is important for making decisions about various topics or an understanding of the decision-making process. Therefore, it is

important for the educational process to include these elements in order to promote mindful decisions.

Moreover, it may not be possible to assign an external evaluation to personal decisions. Each individual must decide what is best for her. A particular choice that is very identity-congruent for one individual could be ill fitting for another individual. In these instances, it is not the particular course of action selected at the conclusion of the process but the process leading up to the decision that is of paramount importance. It is possible, for example, that two individuals who have committed to abstinence may exhibit dramatically different levels of identity congruence in making this choice. If one individual comes to make this choice after careful consideration of possible courses of action, his emotional response to these different possibilities, and evaluates each possibility in his developing identity context in an attempt to select the option that is most consistent with who he is, it is reasonable to assert that this was a high quality evaluative process leading to a value commitment. On the other hand, if an individual commits to abstinence simply because he is told this is the decision he should make, the evaluative process is virtually non-existent. Therefore, in the realm of identity, the quality of decisions or choices will likely hinge upon the preceding process and the ultimate level of identity-congruence as opposed to the particular decision that is the end result.

Beyond the personal cognitive and emotional assessment, the co-constructivist context proposed by Kurtines (1995) points to the importance of influential contexts outside of the individual. Identity does not develop in a vacuum and we must

consider the potential impact of environment influences. Kerpelman and Smith's (1999) identity control theory indicates that the messages we receive from important figures in our lives will impact our identity development. Messages from family members, teachers, peers and the media ultimately all play a role in the identity development process. According to this perspective our interactions with others tend to influence our intrapersonal evaluation of ourselves. So, the feedback we are receiving from important figures in our lives stands to influence how we feel about ourselves. Ultimately, these messages that we receive in the interpersonal context become part of the larger context of perspectives to be evaluated along with ideas shared in the formal education process. From Kerpelman and Smith's perspective, the type of feedback we receive from those in our lives is important to our developing identity. They posit that incongruent feedback (i.e., messages that challenge or are inconsistent with our existing perspectives) promotes the identity development process because it forces the individual to examine and resolve the disparity. However, we also need to ensure that the individual is truly engaging in an examination to make an identity-congruent choice rather than simply foreclosing and adopting the perspectives presented by others. When individuals use this feedback to foster the exploration process and engage in a thoughtful assessment process before choosing what fits best with their developing identity structure, they are moving toward identity achievement.

Unfortunately, messages from others do not always encourage positive identity development. In discussing events associated with identity status change,

Kroger and Green (1996) note that influence by a significant figure in one's life was most commonly associated with a foreclosed status while internal change was associated with the other three statuses (i.e., diffusion, moratorium, and achievement). If we do not analyze our educational approach carefully, we could leave open the possibility of taking an approach that serves as a barrier to identity development. Yoder (2000) discusses the importance of examining the multitude of barriers to identity development. She notes that barriers reflect socio-cultural biases and exist in multiple domains including parental domination, educational opportunity, and political restriction. Moreover, Yoder contends that in order to reach identity achievement barriers either need to be absent or young people will be forced to find a way to overcome the barriers. While some individuals may be able to overcome barriers, it is much more desirable to mindfully select an educational approach that is less likely to present these barriers.

Identity achievement barriers may emerge in the educational process. I have argued that various perspectives and their accompanying rationales should be shared in the educational process in order to promote the ability for exploration and move the individual toward an identity that is personally expressive. Thorough coverage of various perspectives becomes difficult if the topic or the sharing process generates discomfort or embarrassment for the person serving as the facilitator or instructor. Unfortunately, this barrier becomes much more likely in areas such as sex education because of the increased likelihood for discomfort or embarrassment. Those in a teaching role who are uncomfortable talking about the subject matter to be presented

may be inclined to hurry through certain portions of the material or to neglect it altogether because of their discomfort. Even in situations in which the potential learners are in need of the information, those facilitating the learning process may depart from the notion of complete topic exploration to ease their own discomfort. This is an unfortunate consequence that limits the educational experience of the learners involved and consequently may serve as a barrier to identity development.

Another potential barrier to identity development that may emerge in the educational process is lack of information or understanding on the part of the instructor. If the teacher lacks knowledge or has acquired inaccurate information, this almost certainly will interfere with an accurate and comprehensive presentation of information. As mentioned earlier in this section, providing inaccurate or incomplete information undermines the ability for exploration. Unfortunately, the uninformed or misinformed instructor may be unaware of the factual discrepancies or informational gaps and may unknowingly disadvantage learners by conveying this inaccurate or incomplete information. This possibility underscores the need to ensure that teachers are subject matter experts who possess accurate information in the content area in which they will be instructing students.

Moreover, a lack of agreement regarding learner readiness and the timing of the need for information can serve as a barrier to promoting exploration and laying the foundation for identity development. Instructors who believe that prospective students may not be fully prepared to understand the information that is to be provided or may be too young to be exposed to the information are likely to resist

engaging in the educational process. While it is always reasonable to consider learner readiness and the timing of needs in order to deliver messages in an age-appropriate and timely fashion, it is problematic when readiness and needs are present but remain unrecognized. This lack of recognition can prevent those who should be exposed to the needed information from receiving what they need to gain an understanding of the subject.

An additional barrier may arise when those in the teaching role do not believe in facilitating self-discovery to enable young people to make their own identity-congruent choices. Some people may not agree with the premise that encouraging each individual to engage in reflective cognitive and emotional analysis should be part of the educational process. It may also be the case that educators may be reluctant to provide complete and thorough information and may adopt the stance that only the perspectives they agree with are fit subject matter for their learners. This type of omission of information prevents a comprehensive exploration of the topic. These individuals may believe that young people should be told what to think and that their choices should be made for them. If we accept this perspective, then we must ask how young adults can be adequately prepared to make decisions if there was no preparation for this process during youth and adolescence. I would argue that the ability to make identity-congruent choices does not automatically occur upon reaching the age of legal maturity. Rather it is a process that must be discussed and experienced before any reasonable approximation of mastery may occur. Therefore, I

believe that this type of limitation is counter-productive to the education process and is yet another potential barrier to identity achievement.

Moreover, the role of our value system in shaping and influencing our opinions must be recognized. While it is acceptable to present facts in a straightforward, matter of fact manner, the same is not true for opinions and values. The optimal situation is one in which the existing range of reasonable opinions are presented. Although it is certainly acceptable and desirable to note objections and rationales associated with each opinion, it is undesirable to present an opinion in a way that either implies that it is fact or leads students to the conclusion that it is the only acceptable perspective. We must present both facts and opinions in a manner that accurately conveys the type of information being presented if we are to avoid the creation of an educational barrier and risk the possibility of moving individuals toward identity foreclosure by imposing our value system on the learners.

In addition to examining the foundation for exploration, critical reasoning, and the influence of social context, it is also important to consider identity achievement from the standpoint of psychological well-being. A significant number of studies have found a relationship between identity and well-being. Therefore, if we are engaging in an educational process that does not support identity development we may also be detracting from or damaging an individual's psychological health. Waterman (1982) outlined possible paths from various identity statuses to other identity statuses. He notes that identity achievement must always be achieved through identity moratorium and during this period exploration is the central activity.

It is not possible to move directly from diffusion or foreclosure to achievement because neither of these statuses involves exploration. Diffusion is the status most likely to reduce psychological well-being and foreclosure is the most likely to promote cognitive rigidity, which can become a permanent block to identity achievement. Therefore, from Waterman's perspective, it is important to examine our educational efforts to ensure that they do not facilitate stasis in diffusion or movement into foreclosure. Moreover, Berzonsky (1992) examined the relationship between identity style and coping strategies. He found that the diffuse and normative identity styles associated with Marcia's diffusion and foreclosed identity statuses were related to the use of avoidant coping. On the other hand, the informational style that is more characteristic of those in moratorium or achievement was associated with healthier problem-focused coping. This clearly suggests that individuals in identity diffusion or foreclosure are less likely to be in a position to utilize productive coping strategies.

Marcia (2006) furthered the consideration of the impact of identity development on psychological health by discussing the relationship between each of the non-achievement identity statuses and personality disorders. He notes that, although some foreclosures can be reasonably high functioning, they are still likely to present as rigid and cognitively constrained. However, on the other end of the spectrum, foreclosures can be quite authoritarian or even paranoid. Their rigid entrenchment can lead to obsessive-compulsive or paranoid personality disorders in very extreme cases. Moratoriums, while being in the somewhat natural and transitory state of identity crisis, can experience depression, acting-out, or attention-seeking

behaviors. Marcia indicates that more serious pathology usually does not occur unless there is premature labeling, overreaction on the part of others, or an encouragement to foreclose rather than seeing the exploration through. Lastly, diffusion is associated with the widest range of psychological functioning and the greatest probability of pathology. Marcia posits that some diffusions who have a flexible, go with the flow approach may remain fairly functional if they surround themselves with others who can guide them in a positive direction. However, diffusion unchecked is also associated with a whole range of personality disorders including avoidant, schizoid, and borderline.

Recent research also indicates that the cognitive and emotional styles associated with the identity statuses are also relevant to psychological health. Phillips and Pittman (2007) found that individuals with a diffuse/avoidant identity style demonstrated significantly decreased well-being on a variety of indicators including self-esteem, hopelessness, and lack of optimism. Additionally, Palen and Coatsworth (2007) found that personal expressiveness, flow, and goal-directedness were associated with higher psychological well-being. They postulate that involvement in identity-congruent experiences may protect against negative behavioral outcomes.

Just as physicians adhere to the Hippocratic oath promising to do no harm, so should educators strive to avoid harmful or unproductive outcomes. Although this may seem to be an obvious contention and may also seem to be something that could be accomplished quite easily from an educational standpoint, the ramifications of particular approaches require a thorough analysis before their potential for harm can

be completely understood. It is possible to have good intentions but to unknowingly promote a harmful or negative outcome. Due to the importance of the identity development process during adolescence, facilitating activities that encourage the developmental process and do not create barriers is ideal. In order to select an educational approach that maximizes the likelihood of identity development it is important to carefully analyze the ways that various approaches to sex education may influence the development process. Because it is also clear that identity statuses have a relationship with psychological well-being, striving to foster necessary exploration and the process of identity achievement is consistent with the promotion of psychological health. Therefore, evaluating educational activities that occur during adolescence such as sex education to determine their consistency with the process of identity achievement is imperative if we desire to aspire to do no harm and to promote healthy psychological development.

Moreover, in areas in which the best option is widely debated and each individual must make her own choice, simple delivery of information is necessary to the educational process but is not sufficient. The ideal educational process is one in which rational analysis, emotional introspection, and self-discovery are all facilitated. Perhaps we have missed an equally important question in focusing on the debate over what should be taught and where teaching should occur. It may be the case that the specific pedagogical approach is just as important as what we are teaching and where it is happening. So, how we are approaching the educational process becomes the paramount question.

Education in areas of personal choice should be identity centered. It does not make sense to use the same educational approach in basic computational mathematics that we would use in sex education. It is not necessary to evaluate if we feel that $2 + 2 = 4$ fits with our self-concept and our values. This basic computation is widely accepted as a fact. Within the realm of sex education, there are both facts and opinions. It is reasonable to discuss things such as the menstrual cycle, sexually transmitted diseases, and contraceptive method failure rates as facts. However, personal decisions about at what point an individual will engage in sexual behavior ultimately must be made by the individual herself. It is very reasonable to present important perspectives to be considered in making this decision that we feel may benefit the individual's health and safety. But it becomes problematic to present only one perspective as the best perspective that should be accepted by all.

It would not be reasonable, for example, to tell college students in the process of selecting a major that, because nursing is a field that has a high level of demand for new professionals, salary levels are reasonably high, and there is lower risk of being unable to find a job in your field, everyone should become a nursing major. Highlighting the advantages and benefits of this option is absolutely appropriate. But, each individual must decide if nursing might be the best choice for her. Some individuals may be better served choosing a major in the humanities or social sciences. This choice may bring greater risk of being unable to easily find a field-related job. However, pursuing a major that inspires intellectual passion and feels like a personal fit, may far outweigh any job search risks.

We should aim to equip young people to engage in a mindful, multifaceted self-discovery process and to make identity-congruent decisions. In order to maximize the possibility that this occurs within the education process, we must address the important question of how students are being taught and examine the pedagogical methods to evaluate their level of consistency with the identity development process.

Sex education approaches

There are three curricular sex education approaches: abstinence-only education, comprehensive education, and abstinence-plus education. In this section, I will discuss of each of these three curricular approaches.

Abstinence-only sex education

According to U.S. Social Security Act, Sec. 510(b)(2) of Title V, abstinence-only sex education is defined as follows:

1. It has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, physiological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity.
2. It teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children.
3. It teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems.
4. It teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity.
5. It teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.

6. It teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society.
7. It teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances.
8. It teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

There are certainly positive facets within this eight point definition. It is very important for young people to understand the benefits of choosing abstinence and how this choice might protect them from negative health or psychological consequences. For example, understanding that life threatening diseases may be contracted through sexual activity is extremely important for young people in making an informed decision about engaging in sexual behavior. So, points one and three of the definition are clearly beneficial to young people given that they mandate providing important information about the positive impact of abstinence. Many of the definition points underscore that sexual activity is something to be taken seriously given that the unintended consequences of careless sexual endeavors could be damaging and in some cases can create a lifelong impact. Providing a sense of the gravity of sexual activity and potential consequences is extremely important if young people are to make a fully informed decision about sex. Moreover, point seven alludes to the importance of assertiveness and setting personal boundaries. This

assertiveness instruction is likely to benefit young people not only regarding sex, alcohol, and drugs but in all areas of their lives by enabling them to self-advocate and remain true to their values and decisions. Proponents of this approach may feel that the extremely directive nature of the messages is highly desirable because it encourages young people to commit to an approach that can prevent them from experiencing negative consequences. Moreover, those who advocate for this approach may feel that by directing young people toward a particular set of values and behavioral choices that we are maximizing the number of young people who will make good choices about sexual activity and remain safe.

Proponents of abstinence-only sex education feel that there are significant advantages to choosing abstinence in addition avoiding negative health consequences. Many who embrace this perspective feel that sex should be reserved for the marital relationship and that those who do abstain until marriage have a greater sense of pride and self-worth because they remained pure for their life partner. From this perspective, those who do not abstain have diminished the importance of sex and taken away from special and sacred status that sex should have within the marital relationship. Moreover, those who advocate for abstinence also feel that remaining true to this value commitment can reduce stress and free young people from having to deal with the emotional and cognitive burdens of making decisions about sex. Making these choices can be extremely difficult and young people may subsequently struggle with regrets or may be worried about the potential for pregnancy and disease. Additionally, young people who abstain do not run the risk of encountering the

extremely negative psychological impact that can follow the unexpected termination of a sexual relationship. Young people may not be fully prepared for the emotional impact that the end of a sexual relationship can bring. So, choosing abstinence ensures that they will not be forced to deal with emotional outcomes that they may not be prepared to successfully resolve.

While benefits to health as well as intrapersonal emotional and cognitive experiences may result from choosing abstinence, there are also some points of concern. This definition focuses in large part on sharing expectations, suggesting specific behavioral proscriptions, and focusing almost exclusively on potential negative consequences of sexual activity outside of marriage. Moreover, the sentiments conveyed in the definition do not appear to allow for diversity of values or orientation. For example, point four notes that sex should occur within the context of marriage. This statement clearly implies that couples who share their lives but are not married are wrong if they are engaging in sexual behavior. Due to the fact that marriage between same sex partners is not legal in most states, point four also indirectly implies that heterosexuality is the acceptable standard and that homosexuality is not normative. Points five and six note that it is likely that sex outside of marriage and having children out of wedlock will have harmful consequences. Webster's dictionary defines the word likely as "reasonably to be expected". The message in these two points seems to be that negative and harmful outcomes will usually occur. This is certainly a statement of opinion with which some individuals would not necessarily agree. Had the phrase "is likely to" been

replaced with “might lead to” this point would have been more palatable.

Additionally, point six in particular has the potential to negatively impact the self-concept of a young person from a single-parent family who is exposed to an abstinence-only program. Their impression could be that they are the product of a situation that the program deems undesirable and that they are damaged or unacceptable in some way. So, in spite of some clearly positive elements, the definition of abstinence-only sex education may leave some young people feeling excluded or devalued.

From 2000 to 2008, we experienced an increased focus on abstinence-only education in the United States due in large part to the fact that the Bush Presidential administration only allowed newly allocated federal financial resources to be dedicated to abstinence-only sex education. This policy decision implies that these types of programs are more desirable than other approaches because they are either more effective, consistent with an agreed upon set of values, or both.

Proponents of abstinence-only sex education argue that because abstinence is the only 100% effective method of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections our sex education programs should be delivered in a way that stresses abstinence as the choice for all young people. Because of this unwavering belief in abstinence as the only option, proponents of these programs do not feel that discussing contraceptive methods as part of a sex education program is useful or necessary. From this perspective, discussion of conceptive use provides young people with information that will not be needed if learners follow the direction of the

program. When contraceptive methods are discussed, the focus is almost entirely on failure rates and their associated negative consequences. It is certainly very important for young people to understand the limitations and risks associated with contraception. Therefore, including this information within a sex education program is undoubtedly valuable. Yet there is significant debate about the appropriateness of omitting discussion of contraceptive use.

There are some who contend that discussing contraceptive use is tantamount to giving individuals permission to have sex outside of marriage. Moreover, there are those who feel that comprehensive sex education programs encourage sexual behavior and because of this they favor an abstinence-only approach to sex education. For example, Kasun (1994) argues that many sex education programs are far too explicit. She makes the claim that, because reported frequency of sexual activity has increased in previous decades and because more children are being born out-of-wedlock, comprehensive sex education and increased availability of contraception are failing to serve their purpose and may be to blame for these problems.

Some empirical studies support Kasun's position. One notable example is Goldfarb et al. (1999) who examined the effectiveness of an abstinence-based sexuality education curriculum on sixth through eighth grade students. At the one-year follow up, the treatment group reported lower incidence of sexual intercourse. Moreover, Denny, Young, Rausch, and Spear (2002) and Denny and Young (2006) examined the impact of a specific abstinence-only sex education program entitled Sex Can Wait that was delivered to elementary school, middle school, and high school

students. At the 18-month follow-up, students at all levels self-reported high levels of intent for abstinence and reduced participation in sex during the last month. Toups and Holmes (2002) conducted a literature review of abstinence-only sex education programs and noted that several studies indicate that these programs do positively impact the number of students who self-report abstinence attitudes. They conclude their research by noting that only 48% of teenagers reported having engaged in sexual intercourse in 1997 which was a decline from an average of 54% who reported engaging in sex between 1990 and 1995.

Unfortunately, Kasun's line of reasoning is flawed. Temporal proximity does not necessarily indicate causality. And, even if we were to assume that these factors such as out-of-wedlock births, comprehensive education programs, and contraceptive availability were causally linked, we cannot determine the direction of the causality. Perhaps it is equally if not more likely that increased availability of contraception occurred in response to some of the upward trends that Kasun cites. Also the use of the out-of-wedlock distinction is somewhat misleading. Kasun uses this term synonymously with teenage pregnancy. These two categories are not the same. Especially, in light of the fact that some people today are choosing to become single mothers and some couples in committed relationships who are not legally married are choosing to have children, the out-of-wedlock birth category includes many births that are not to teens and were not unplanned. Moran (2000) notes that "the explosion in rates of sexual activity among teenagers and teenage out-of-wedlock pregnancies

and births from the 1960s forward merely mimicked many of the same trends among older Americans” (p.231).

The empirical studies that support Kasun’s position also seem to have some limitations. Goldfarb et al. (1999) did find a lower incidence of sexual intercourse at the one year follow-up. Given the relatively young age of the participants, however, this study does not shed light on the impact of such a program for young people in their mid to late teens. Denny, Young, Rausch, and Spear (2002) and Denny and Young (2006) found high levels of intent for abstinence and reduced participation in sex during the last month at the 18-month follow-up of Sex Can Wait. However, the researchers note that the effect sizes were quite small and it is unclear how attitudes and behaviors might change over a longer period of time. Toups and Holmes (2002) discovered several studies that indicate abstinence-only programs positively impact the number of students who self-report abstinence attitudes and point to a six percent decline in sexual activity. They contend that this decline is due to abstinence-only sex education but do not explain how a causal link exists.

Some of the most commonly used abstinence-only curricula in recent years have been developed by an organization known as Choosing the Best. According to a December 2004 report by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, the two most commonly used abstinence-only curricula by schools receiving federal sex education funding were Choosing the Best Life and Choosing the Best Path. The website for the Choosing the Best organization summarizes each of these abstinence-only curricula. Both programs are delivered in

a series of eight 50-minute videos and accompanied by various in class discuss exercises. The program topics for both programs include gender differences in evaluation of sex, the emotional impact of sex, painful stories about alcohol and sex, the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases, a struggling pregnant teenage couple, personal stories about living with AIDS, testimonials from students choosing abstinence, and recommended techniques for dealing with sexual peer pressure and saying no to sexual activity. Consistent with the federal definition of abstinence-only education, the descriptions of many of the eight segments show a clear focus on communicating potential negative outcomes. Information about the biology of sexuality and reproduction, contraception methods, larger issues of sexual health other than sexually transmitted diseases, and diversity of sexual orientation are absent from both programs. Students who participate in a Choosing the Best program are likely to develop a clear understanding of the negative consequences of teen sex and refusal skills that may be useful in setting personal boundaries. These outcomes are certainly beneficial for young people. Proponents of the abstinence-only approach may argue that a program that explains the dangers, urges young people to choose abstinence and reinforces refusal skills provides everything that is needed for young people to successfully manage sexual pressures and decision-making. Moreover, the emphasis on committing to abstinence may help young people to experience a greater sense of pride and self-worth if they do delay sexual activity until marriage. This value commitment may also greatly reduce the stress and psychological burdens sometimes experienced by young people who get involved in sexual relationships.

On the other hand, those who oppose the abstinence-only approach feel that young people participating in these programs are not being fully equipped to understand sex and to make their own decisions. Collins, Alagiri, and Summers (2002) summarize abstinence-only education as promoting abstinence from sex, refusing to acknowledge that many teenagers will become sexually active, not teaching about contraceptive methods or condom use, avoiding discussions of abortion, and citing sexually transmitted diseases as reasons to remain abstinent. Critics of the abstinence-only approach feel that providing comprehensive information so that young people have this knowledge base. Even if they are not sexually active and do not intend to begin having sex in the near future, they will need to understand the biology of sex and facts about the use and effectiveness of contraceptive methods at some point in their lives.

Success of abstinence-only education is very often defined in terms of behavioral outcomes. More specifically, success is usually linked with the absence or delay of sexual behavior, pregnancy rates, and rates of sexually transmitted infections. Occasionally, attitudes toward abstinence and sexual activity are also examined. However, these variables are almost exclusively focused on the extent to which students have adopted the sentiments conveyed in the educational program. One of the primary studies that the Choosing the Best organization uses to establish its program effectiveness is a 2005 Institute for Research and Evaluation study by Weed and Anderson. In this study, which recognizing that some programs with a more comprehensive focus such as *Reducing the Risk* and *Becoming a Responsible*

Teen demonstrate a statistically significant reduction in sexual initiation, the authors go on to share the evaluation of the Choosing the Best curriculum which demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in sexual initiation as well. This study also measured six attitudinal variables: affirmation of abstinence, love justifies, personal efficacy, future orientation, peer independence, and behavioral intentions. Affirmation of abstinence was defined as the extent to which program participants recognized abstinence as the expected standard of behavior. Love justifies measured participants agreement with the sentiment that being in love makes sexual activity acceptable. Personal efficacy measures the ability to resist peer pressure to engage in sex. Future orientation measures the extent to which participants believe that sexual activity will jeopardize their future educational, career, and personal goals. Peer independence measures participants' ability to adhere to abstinence and to explain their reasoning to peers. Finally, behavioral intention measures the self-reported intent to remain abstinent. The authors noted that those individuals participating in the program were statistically more likely to report belief patterns favoring abstinence than the control group immediately after program delivery.

On the other hand, a substantial number of studies indicate that all behavioral outcomes are not necessarily consistent with the program goals. Grunseit et al. (1997) reviewed 47 studies examining the effects of sex education on young people's behavior. Of these 47 studies, 25 showed no change in levels of sexual activity after the education program, 17 indicated delays of onset of sexual activity, and only three studies indicated an increase in sexual behavior after the education program. Kirby

(2000) examined five studies measuring the effect of abstinence-only sex education and found that these programs did not delay the onset of intercourse. Bruckner and Bearman (2005) found that adolescents making a purity or virginity pledge did typically delay their sexual debut defined as engaging in vaginal intercourse by an average of one year for women and up to three years for men. However, the rates of sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections did not differ from those not making a pledge and pledgers were significantly less likely to use condoms upon sexual debut or to be tested and treated for STDs. They conclude that these virginity pledges that are often a component of abstinence-only sex education programs may not be the optimal approach for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases among young adults. They also found that those making virginity pledges were significantly more likely to report engaging in either oral or anal sex but not vaginal sex and only 30% reported condom use. Finally, they found that these pledges are not successful in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse until after marriage in that 88% of pledgers reported engaging in vaginal intercourse before marriage. So, it seems that these pledges may lead to the delay of sexual debut (i.e., vaginal intercourse) for some teenagers but that those who make these pledges are also more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors in the interim period and are less likely to practice safer sex by using protection.

In addition to the recent emphasis on abstinence-only sex education, it seems as though some programs have embraced truncated information and, in some instances, misinformation. In a 2003 documentary, *Texas Teenage Virgins*, the

attitudes toward sex education, expectations for purity pledges, and experiences of teenagers in Lubbock, Texas were explored. In the Lubbock community, abstinence is emphasized and many churches conduct programs for young people in which abstinence is highlighted as the only acceptable option. These programs also focus any discussion of contraceptives on failure rates and one program also likens teenagers who have sex to used toothbrushes. The teenagers who were interviewed discuss the various behaviors that their peers engage in to remain technical virgins (i.e., to avoid vaginal intercourse). They reported oral and anal sex are gaining popularity and that most teens in the community did not use condoms because they had been told they were not very effective. Moreover, interviews with a health care provider and a social worker in the Lubbock community confirmed the reports of the teens who were interviewed. They both indicated an increase in high-risk sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases in Lubbock teenagers.

These educational practices are not limited to the church environment or to Lubbock, Texas. Many school abstinence-only sex education programs have adopted a similar approach. Landry, Darroch, Singh, and Higgins (2003) conducted a national survey of school sex education practices and found that 39.7% of school programs emphasized the ineffectiveness of birth control methods and focused on abstinence as the only or best option. They also examined regional differences and found that the proportion of programs in both the South and the Midwest with these emphases was statistically significantly higher than other regions at 44.4% and 44.5% respectively. Moreover, they found that instructors who focused on teaching the ineffectiveness of

various birth control methods were significantly less likely to discuss proper use of contraceptive methods, sources for obtaining birth control, or STD prevention and treatment. It appears that those who approach sex education from this perspective may only provide information that they feel teenagers need to know based on their personal or community value system.

In a December 2004 report, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform discussed further evidence of abstinence-only program inaccuracies. It was discovered that 80% of the reviewed abstinence-only curricula examined contained false, misleading, or distorted information. In one example the failure rate for condoms was reported to be 31 percent when, in fact, it is closer to 3 percent. In another case young people were told that they could contract the AIDS virus via perspiration or tears. And in yet another example, one program reported that pregnancy occurred in one out of every seven instances in which a condom was used. It certainly could be argued that these approaches are intentional misinformation campaigns designed to incite fear and inertia. However, it is important for us to consider how prepared young people who are exposed to these programs will be and to what extent they have had an educative experience. It is understandable to prefer an educational approach that is consistent with an endorsed valued system. However, attempting to force young people to adopt a value system through scare tactics and misinformation is inappropriate, miseducative, and potentially damaging.

While some who are dedicated to the prevailing ideologies and approaches to sex education may retain confidence in the current abstinence-only focus, cross-

cultural comparisons suggest that U.S. sex education is not as successful as sex education programs in other countries. Weaver, Smith, and Kippax (2005) compared school sex education programs and behavior outcomes among teens in the Netherlands, France, Australia, and the United States. They found that the U.S. was the most focused on abstinence-only education while the other three countries had school sex education programs that were much more comprehensive in nature. In terms of behavioral correlates, U.S. teens exhibited substantially higher pregnancy rates, lower rates of contraceptive usage, higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases and infections, and a younger age of first sexual activity. These results underscore the positive effects of comprehensive sex education and refute the notion that providing comprehensive education increases the likelihood of sexual behavior and negative outcomes.

However, in spite of evidence suggesting that abstinence-only programs may not yield the desired results, proponents of this approach remain confident that it is the best approach to sex education. By presenting abstinence as the best choice for young people, highlighting the negative possibilities associated with sexual activity, and teaching assertiveness and refusal skills, those who favor abstinence-only programs feel that we are providing a simple, straightforward message that will enable students to make the best choice and protect their health.

Comprehensive sex education

In 1964 the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) was formed with a stated mission of regarding sexuality as a public health entity. In part, the aim of SIECUS was to lobby for scientifically based sex education. SIECUS publishes recommended guidelines for comprehensive sexuality education that are the product of a national task force group comprised of experts in the fields of adolescent development, education, and health care. The SIECUS guidelines for comprehensive sex education outline six key concept categories: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. Within the human development category the specific recommended topics include puberty, reproductive and sexual anatomy and physiology, body image, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Topics such as families, friendship, love, romantic relationship, marriage, and children are included within the relationship category. As a part of the personal skills category the guidelines recommend discussing values, decision-making, communication, assertiveness, negotiation, seeking help. Within the sexual behavior segment the focus is on sexuality during the life span, masturbation, abstinence, the human sexual response, sexual fantasy, and sexual dysfunction. The sexual health category includes a focus on reproductive health, contraception, pregnancy and prenatal care, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, and sexual abuse and violence. The sixth and final category, society and culture examines sexuality and society, gender roles, legal and religious considerations, diversity, as well as sexuality in the media

and arts. Each of the six key concept categories is divided into four age group levels and specific items in each subcategory are recommended based on appropriateness for the age group and learner readiness.

Proponents of comprehensive sex education note the importance of providing individuals with a thorough and accurate knowledge base that will allow them to have an understanding of their own bodies and the dynamics of sexuality. Unlike the abstinence-only sex education approach that limits discussion of contraceptive methods primarily to failure rates and stories of unintended outcomes, those who support comprehensive sex education stress the need for complete coverage of contraceptive methods and appropriate use practices for each method. Because those in the comprehensive camp feel strongly about promoting decision-making skill, they feel that individuals must have the knowledge that allows them to protect themselves if they do elect to engage in sexual behavior. Compared with abstinence-only education, the comprehensive approach is much more relativistic regarding sexual choices. Although the safety advantages of abstinence are shared, the comprehensive approach does not incorporate messages about abstinence being the expected standard or choice for all individuals. Moreover, the comprehensive approach is more inclusive of discussing differences not only in choices but in sexual orientation and does not put forward the same implicit endorsement of heterosexuality as was seen in the abstinence-only definition.

The SIECUS guidelines also outline four goal categories for comprehensive sex education: information, attitudes, values, and insights, relationships and

interpersonal skills, and responsibility. The guidelines argue for comprehensive and accurate information to be provided in all comprehensive sex education programs. There is also a recognition that young people need to have an opportunity to question, explore and assess their own attitudes and values about sexuality, gender, and society. Building a foundation for reciprocal and satisfying relationships is at the heart of the third goal. Lastly, the fourth goal promotes responsible decision-making and sexual behaviors. Clearly, while health behavior is included in the range of defined goals, the goal categories are defined more broadly in an effort to encompass the entire range of outcomes that are important for the educational process.

Although the aforementioned SIECUS comprehensive sex education goals focus not only on knowledge and health behavior but also on values exploration, providing a foundation for relationships, and promoting decision-making skill, the majority of the research that has examined success of these programs focuses largely on health behavior and outcomes (i.e., engaging in sex, pregnancy rates, contraceptive usage, sexually transmitted infections, etc.). This trend, of course, was also seen in research examining the success of abstinence-only programs. Acquisition of knowledge is also sometimes examined in these studies but the emphasis in the research is clearly on the behavioral elements.

Critics of the comprehensive approach suggest that providing this wide range of information may be seen as permission to become sexually active. Some in this camp may also feel that this approach is far too open-ended and potentially confusing for young people because its more relativistic nature does not identify abstinence as

the best choice. Moreover, just as concerns have been expressed about the accuracy of information in abstinence-only programs, there have also been concerns about the accuracy of information in comprehensive programs. In a May 2007 report entitled *Review of Comprehensive Sex Education Curricula* prepared by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) which is a division in the Department of Health and Human Services, specific concerns were noted about several more comprehensive curricula. The primary concern was what the authors felt was an overestimate of the effectiveness of condoms and spermicide. In the curriculum, *Be Proud! Be Responsible!*, there were two statements that suggested that spermicide use with condoms might reduce the risk of STD transmission. Similar criticisms were waged on *AIDS Prevention for Adolescents* and *Reach for Health* for one statement encouraging spermicide use. In the *Safer Choices* curriculum, one statement indicated a typical one-year failure rate of 12% for condoms while the authors of the report contend that the actual rate is 15%. The curriculum *Teen Talk* was criticized for a statement that noted sexually active individuals run the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease unless precautions are taken. The authors felt that this implied that condoms eliminate disease transmission risk. Both *Teen Talk* and *Making Proud Choices* were criticized for statements that condoms were highly effective in reducing disease transmission. The authors felt the phrase highly effective was too vague and might be misleading. *Making Proud Choices* was also criticized for two statements that implied safer sex was the surest way to avoid disease

transmission. The authors felt that this neglected abstinence as the only 100% effective method of preventing disease transmission.

Furthermore, critics of comprehensive sex education raise concerns that much more information than young people need is presented. From their perspective, we should be acutely focused on encouraging the most effective method for pregnancy and disease prevention. To present information on other approaches aside from abstinence, invites young people to consider a less effective method. As previously mentioned, there is also a concern that providing comprehensive information about contraceptive methods and proper usage sends a message to young people that it is acceptable to have sex.

Although some individuals who favor abstinence-only education convey concerns that comprehensive programs will encourage teen sex, the research does not validate this concern. Wight et al. (2002) examined the impact of a comprehensive sex education program entitled Sexual Health and Relationships: Safe, Happy, and Responsible. No differences in sexual activity were seen in sexual activity or sexual risk taking at age 16 when comparing the control group who did not receive the program and the experimental group who participated in the program. Moreover, McFarlane (2007) noted that an evaluation of abstinence-only sex education programs by Mathematica Policy Research found no difference in sexual behavior when comparing students who received abstinence-only education and those received more comprehensive education. Clearly, there is a significant amount of evidence that

suggests that students who are exposed to more comprehensive sex education programs are not more likely to engage in sexual behavior.

On the other hand, proponents of abstinence-only education would interpret the results of these two studies differently. Because no significant differences were found between the types of programs, one could make the argument that abstinence-only programs are equally viable and effective. Furthermore, due to the concern surrounding young people feeling they are being given permission to engage in sexual activity, abstinence-only advocates would argue that taking a comprehensive approach is certainly not worth the risk if some research indicates the two approaches may yield similar results.

However, given the number of studies that cite a lack of increase in sexual behaviors, many researchers contend that we should embrace a more comprehensive approach that includes an open discussion of biological processes, sexually transmitted diseases, disease and pregnancy prevention, and various perspectives about sexual behavior. Mabray and LaBauve (2002) suggest that abstinence-only sex education programs fall short of the ideal level of adequacy. The authors suggest that the best approach is a multidimensional program that includes participation on the part of both teens and parents and focuses on physical needs, emotional needs, and goal setting. Moreover, recent surveys conducted by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) indicate that 93% of American parents want their children to learn about both abstinence and contraception in high school. SIECUS is campaigning to prevent additional money from being devoted to

abstinence-only sex education programs in that these are not in line with the desires of the majority of parents and the research has yet to establish these programs as effective in terms of deterring sexual behavior and decreasing the incidence of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Even though behavioral outcomes may not always follow from an educational program, a recent study by Santelli, Lindberg, Finer, and Singh (2007) indicates that the pregnancy risk for women aged 15 to 19 fell 38% from 1995 to 2002. Through their analysis they determined that 86% of this decline was attributable to improved contraceptive use. Furthermore, Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty (2007) found that adolescents who received comprehensive sex education had a significantly lower risk of pregnancy than those who received abstinence-only education or no sex education. Unfortunately, however, Lindberg, Santelli, and Singh (2006) examined changes in formal sex education programs and found a substantial decline in formal instruction about birth control methods due to the upsurge of abstinence-only sex education programs many of which do not allow instruction about birth control. This trend is certainly a concern in light of evidence that suggests contraceptive knowledge and use is a substantial contributor to reducing teenage pregnancy.

Recently, after the examination of prominent research on the effectiveness of sex education programs, Kirby (2007) presented his findings to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. He noted that the research does not demonstrate that abstinence-only programs are more effective and, therefore, they should not be the only sex education programs that can be federally funded. He

went on to share that two-thirds of the 48 comprehensive sex education programs he reviewed had positive behavioral effects and that there was no evidence to demonstrate a comparable behavioral benefit of abstinence-only approaches. He contends that the myths surrounding comprehensive sex education are categorically false and that comprehensive approaches do not promote promiscuity. In fact, Kirby found that 40% of these programs delayed the initiation. Moreover, when individuals did choose to engage in sex, more than 60% of the programs reduced the incidence of unprotected sex. Therefore, based on the empirical research regarding health behaviors, Kirby contends that comprehensive sex education is clearly preferable.

As previously noted, opponents of comprehensive sex education maintain that these programs provide too much information and therefore may implicitly encourage sexual activity. However, in addition to the fact that the empirical research suggests little or no merit to the claim that comprehensive sex education increases the likelihood of sexual behavior, the line of reasoning behind this belief is also problematic. Those who object to a more comprehensive approach to sex education that includes discussion of sexual practices, birth control, and related topics believe that this information will promote sexual behavior. However, it is interesting to note that this line of reasoning does not seem applicable in various other instances of human behavior. It is unlikely that someone would argue, for example, that knowledge of seat belts and air bags in automobiles encourages driving or prompts the driver to get into an automobile accident. Similarly, it does not seem likely that one would claim that individuals should not be taught self-defense techniques

because this would lead them to commit acts of violence. Clearly, knowledge does not always lead one to adopt related behaviors. It is true that it is wise to protect members of our society from exposure to information that may bring them harm. For example, it is not ideal to expose people to information about making drugs or weapons. However, this type of information is significantly different because it is not something that most people have a legitimate need to know. Whereas, there is a widespread need for sex education but disagreement continues regarding the timing, the pedagogical approach, and the specific type of information to be included.

Abstinence-plus sex education

For many years, sex education approaches were discussed in a dichotomous fashion. A substantial amount of literature focused on approaches to sex education delineates only two rather than three approaches (i.e., abstinence-only and comprehensive). In recent years, however, the abstinence-plus label has prominently emerged in the sex education literature and a number of studies are focusing on these programs and their comparative success to other approaches.

Similar to the research examining comprehensive sex education, success of abstinence-plus programs is usually defined in terms of specific behavioral outcomes and to some extent on knowledge promotion. Kirby (2007) evaluated 30 abstinence-plus programs that focused on the biological aspects of maturation, birth control and sexually transmitted diseases, and an endorsement of abstinence as the best choice for

those who are not yet married. Kirby found that students who participated in programs that were more comprehensive in nature (i.e., that provided a range of factual information and differing perspectives regarding sexual activity) were not more likely to engage in intercourse. Additionally, Wiley and Terlosky (2000) echoed Kirby's findings and also found that abstinence-plus programs do not increase levels of sexual activity. These studies once again demonstrate that providing more information to young people about birth control does not necessarily lead to increased sexual activity as those who favor abstinence-only approaches have posited.

Underhill, Operario, and Montgomery (2007) examined positive effects of abstinence-plus programs on both health-related behavior as well as knowledge acquisition in 39 separate studies. Knowledge about HIV and AIDS were increased by 83% and condom use increased in 54% of the studies reviewed. Twenty-three out of the 39 trials produced what the authors termed a protective effect on at least one sexual behavior. Protective effects were defined as any behavior that served to reduce the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. Behaviors such as condom usage, abstinence from sex, and refraining from engaging in higher risk behaviors would all be examples of behaviors yielding protective effects. The authors go on to discuss the fact that proponents of abstinence-only sex education frequently claim that the abstinence-plus approach (i.e., promoting abstinence while providing comprehensive information) sends confusing messages to learners. They conclude by noting that the results do not substantiate the concerns about potential

confusion and the abstinence-plus programs have positive effects on both knowledge levels and health behaviors.

Thomas (2000) examined the effectiveness of abstinence-based curricula. In this study, abstinence-only and abstinence-plus approaches were studied separately. Thomas found significant positive impacts for the abstinence-plus approaches. Specifically, the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum was found to result in statistically significant improvements in student knowledge levels, reductions in sexual initiation, greater contraceptive use in those who did initiate sex, and the number of students who talked with their parents about birth control and abstinence.

Proponents of abstinence-plus feel that this approach captures the best of both comprehensive and abstinence-only approaches. Combining a broad range of important information with an emphasis on the advantages of abstinence affords students the opportunity to cognitively explore the possibility of delaying or engaging in sexual activity. Moreover, the argument could be made that abstinence-plus approaches are more comprehensive than those categorized as comprehensive due to the intentional focus on both approaches.

Some individuals contend that abstinence-plus education and comprehensive education are part of the same category because both approaches include instruction about contraceptive methods and acknowledge the reality of teenage sexual activity while also presenting the effectiveness of abstinence. In some instances these terms are used synonymously and interchangeably to refer to programs with this same basic focus.

There are a number of potential explanations that may shed light on the growing prominence of the abstinence-plus label. It may be the case that the use of this label is an attempt to circumvent some of the bias against comprehensive sex education by titling the programs in a way that clearly indicates that the advantages of abstinence are discussed. There is also a possibility that, because federal funding has exclusively been made available for those delivering abstinence-only programs, motivation to showcase abstinence in the hope of receiving funding may have contributed to this shift. However, regardless of the underlying explanation, the current prominence of the abstinence-plus label is undeniable.

Collins, Alagiri, and Summers (2002) note that abstinence-plus education promotes abstinence from sex but also acknowledges that many teens will become sexually active and provides information about contraceptive use and sexually transmitted diseases. From this definition it is apparent that abstinence-plus sex education model blends the emphasis on promotion of abstinence found in abstinence-only programs with communication of comprehensive information about contraception, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Based upon this definition as a clearly blended approach, I disagree with the position that comprehensive and abstinence-plus education are one in the same and feel that it is more appropriate to treat these as separate and distinct approaches. Although some may argue that the differences are slight due to the fact that comprehensive approaches discuss the potential benefits of abstinence, I feel that there is a meaningful and significant difference between inclusion of information and

promotion of information. Abstinence-plus education, while incorporating dissemination of information similar to comprehensive education, clearly defines a particular behavioral outcome as the best and identifies this as the behavior that individuals should choose. The name alone very clearly communicates that the focus is on abstinence with other topics added secondarily. Comprehensive approaches, on the other hand, discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with various behavioral choices but do not necessarily take the position that there is one correct behavioral choice. Because of this fundamental difference, I believe it is most appropriate to evaluate these approaches separately and to discuss them as distinct philosophies. This is especially important in order to develop a meaningful and accurate picture of these approaches within the context of identity development.

Evaluating sex education categorical definitions in the context of identity theory

In this section I will examine each of the archetypal definitions of the three approaches to sex education outlined in the previous section in the context of identity theory. My focus here will be to determine if any substantive differences exist in the extent to which these approaches as defined are likely to promote identity development and enhance the potential for identity achievement.

In order to promote the potential for identity achievement, the literature notes the importance of:

1. Promoting exploration to move individuals from identity diffusion to identity moratorium as a necessary step toward identity achievement (Marcia, 1987)
2. Exploration preceding commitment to allow for identity achievement rather than identity foreclosure (Marcia, 1987)
3. Enhancing one's ability to explore and promoting a positive attitude toward exploration (Grotevant, 1987)
4. Promoting an informational style in which individuals are engaging in critical analysis before making decisions (Berzonsky, 1989)
5. Ensuring a thorough, high quality exploration process that leads to personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1990)
6. Feedback within the social context that challenges us to explore our alternatives and think about differing perspectives (Kerpelman and Smith, 1999)

7. Encouraging creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation
(Kurtines, 1995)
8. Minimize or eliminate barriers (Yoder, 2000)

In the sections that follow I will be addressing eight important questions about each of the three defined approaches to sex education to determine the extent to which each approach is consistent with the variables noted above that are thought to promote identity development. I posing these eight questions, I will first examine the definition of each approach. Then, in the subsequent section, I will examine three sex education curricula to determine the extent to which the curricular approaches support the identity development process and if there are differences between the archetypal definitions and the operational realities of specific curricular approaches. The eight questions are as follows:

1. Is exploration promoted?
2. Are individuals encouraged to explore prior to value commitment?
3. Does the particular approach enhance the ability to explore and promote a positive attitude toward exploration?
4. Does each approach encourage an informational style as opposed to a normative or diffuse/avoidant style?
5. Are those who are exposed to the approach likely to have engaged in a thorough, self-discovery focused exploration consistent with personal expressiveness?

6. Does the feedback we receive within the social context challenge us to explore our alternatives and think about differing perspectives?
7. Is the approach consistent with creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation?
8. Are barriers to the identity development process minimized or avoided?

Abstinence-only sex education definition

Ironically, while identity theorists note that cognitive and emotional exploration is necessary for identity achievement, thorough exploration of the topic of sex is sometimes not embraced by proponents of the abstinence-only approach. This approach as defined in Title V embraces the presentation of a restricted range of information that truncates the exploration process. The underlying belief appears to be that delivering only the information that falls within the narrowly defined range of what young people need to know in order to abstain should be the educational goal. Furthermore, the information that is defined as necessary focuses on the dangers and negative consequences that can result from sexual activity, the potential benefits of abstinence, as well as the presentation of abstinence as the expected choice for everyone who is not married. So, while exploration of the prescribed information within the curriculum may be encouraged, a truly comprehensive self-discovery process is at odds with the narrow range of information and the associated behavioral proscriptions. It would be fair to claim that students who previously did not know much about the range of topics deemed appropriate for the program are being

provided with an opportunity to explore new possibilities and to assess their feelings about the level of fit with their current values and beliefs. However, only limited personal exploration appears to be encouraged prior to value commitment. In fact, the emphasis is largely on acceptance of and commitment to the idea that abstaining from sex until marriage is the expected standard of behavior. This can certainly be seen in the studies that incorporate a post-program attitude questionnaire to assess the proportion of participants who endorse abstinence related sentiments at the conclusion of the program. The emphasis and priority are clearly placed on committing to the ideals defined as correct by the program and this is viewed as a partial measure of success along with the number of individuals who translate this attitudinal commitment to behavioral restriction. Personal exploration, critical analysis, and identity-congruent self-discovery appear to be incidental or perhaps even irrelevant within this model. It could even be argued that exploration might be seen as negative due to the potential for interference with acceptance of the values and beliefs about sexual behavior. For this reason, those who endorse abstinence-only education may prefer a very restricted range of exploration so that participants can swiftly commit to the prescribed values and behaviors. While choosing to abstain from sex is a valid personal choice that has many advantages, the process for making this choice is critically important from the perspective of identity development. A multifaceted exploration that includes rational analysis of possible options, an emotional assessment of our reaction to various options, and an evaluation of which

perspectives are most identity-congruent must take place before a choice can be consistent with identity achievement.

From the perspective of identity development, the abstinence-only approach may be problematic in that we are creating conditions that encourage identity foreclosure, which Marcia defined as commitment that was not preceded by a thorough exploration process. With the lack of exploration that may accompany the abstinence-only approach, the likelihood of identity foreclosure is substantially increased. This, of course, is problematic and may serve to slow or stunt an individual's identity development. Foreclosure can be very seductive because it is a quicker and easier path than engaging in thorough exploration and introspective evaluation. It also presents a particular challenge because those falling into this status feel that they have achieved an identity because commitments have been made. Those who advocate for acceptance of abstinence-only approaches may not be concerned with this lack of self-discovery focused exploration and may feel their approach is superior because it quickly moves young people toward committing to what they feel are the correct choices. Even if the choice that is encouraged has significant benefits, this does not negate the fact that the approach may reduce the likelihood of identity achievement and funnel students toward foreclosure. Unfortunately, once the cognitive rigidity that often accompanies foreclosure sets in, it is likely to be extremely challenging for individuals to shed this rigidity and move forward toward exploration. Even if an individual in this particular situation does not

make a commitment in the absence of exploration, she is still left in identity diffusion having made no forward momentum in the identity development process.

Providing thorough and accurate information is necessary to build a foundation upon which personal exploration can occur. Given the aforementioned truncated range of information that is typically presented as part of abstinence-only education, the ability of the individual to explore which Grotevant cited as necessary for exploration may be hampered. Moreover, the Waxman report revealed that significant inaccuracies were found in some abstinence-only sex education curricula. So, not only is a restricted range of information included but some of the information that is presented may not be accurate. This yields a foundation for self-discovery exploration that is both too restricted and potentially unsound which in turn undermines the ability of the individual to engage in exploration, experience identity moratorium, and move closer toward identity achievement. Therefore, when the ability to explore is hampered we are increasing the likelihood that individuals will either remain in a diffuse state or commit prematurely and move into foreclosure.

Grotevant also stressed the importance of promoting a positive attitude toward exploration as this would enhance its likelihood. Promotion of a positive attitude requires appropriate modeling of exploration, presenting information in a way that acknowledges that there are various perspectives rather than a select number of correct perspectives, and encouragement or reinforcement of the self-discovery process. Educators operating according to the abstinence-only definition are encouraged to present the structured curriculum with its strictly defined range of

topics and information. The emphasis appears to be on transmission of carefully selected pieces of information rather than on examining the various perspectives that exist and discussing the merits of each. As previously mentioned, the sentiments and information are presented in a way that suggests they are the best and correct way to think about sex. This does not promote a positive attitude toward exploration and self-discovery because it implies that exploration is unnecessary due to the correctness of the information presented. Furthermore, if those participating in such a program were to attempt to question the shared perspectives or to ask about other perspectives, it is highly likely that the educator would feel compelled to indicate the information presented represents the correct viewpoint. This, in turn, would not yield an encouraging or reinforcing effect on individuals attempting to explore. So, it does appear that a positive attitude toward exploration cannot reasonably be expected to be an outgrowth of participation in an abstinence-only sex education program.

Berzonsky's informational style, which is characterized by research of available options, careful evaluation of all options, an assessment of our emotional response to the options, and decisions rooted in this identity-congruent analysis, is associated with progress toward identity achievement. Both the ability to explore and a positive attitude toward exploration are necessary for this style to emerge.

Unfortunately, due to the truncated range of information presented as well as subtle or more obvious modeling that discourages exploration of other perspectives, the informational style seems less likely to emerge as a result of abstinence-only sex education. The style that is far more likely under these conditions is the normative

style that is characteristic of those in identity foreclosure. Individuals who exhibit a normative style are likely to engage in imitation, to display conformity, to be both closed-minded and cognitively rigid. In instances in which individuals do not make a commitment but are impacted by the fear-based aspects of focusing significantly on various negative consequences a diffuse/avoidant style may emerge. This would yield a stasis in identity diffusion. Due to the adoption of an avoidant style, it may become more difficult for these individuals to move forward toward exploration and subsequent identity achievement.

Without a thorough, self-discovery focused exploration process, individuals cannot develop personal expressiveness, which Waterman (1990) cited as the hallmark of identity achievement. Those who are personally expressive can clearly articulate their value commitments and the reasoning behind those commitments. In the absence of this extensive exploration attaining personal expressiveness is not possible. Given the aforementioned truncation of exploration that is likely within the abstinence-only sex education model, the capacity for personal expressiveness will be similarly diminished. While it is quite likely that learners exposed to abstinence-only education may be able to communicate specific value commitments, it is much less likely that individuals with such a narrow range of exploration would be able to clearly outline the reasons for their commitments and contrast their position to other possible views. In such a situation we have an understanding of behavioral edicts that have been provided without a grasp of the comparative advantages of these positions. If such an individual were to become involved in a discussion or debate about various

value positions, she would be unlikely to have the level of understanding necessary to fully defend her commitment. From a psychological standpoint, this could be very frustrating and unsettling especially in circumstances in which an individual was pointedly questioned regarding his or her values and beliefs.

Due to the emphasis on attitudinal acceptance, it is unlikely that those participating in abstinence-only sex education and accepting the premises of the program would receive challenging feedback from authority figures in the social context as Kerpelman and Smith (1999) suggest is needed to incite exploration. This type of challenge encourages individuals to think about perspectives they may not have considered otherwise, to analyze the merits of their own position, and to defend the comparative strength of their position. Without this challenge, Kerpelman and Smith contend that exploration becomes less likely to occur because of a lack of encouragement to move beyond one's comfort zone. It is much easier to simply adhere to our previously acquired values and beliefs as opposed to challenging and questioning. While some individuals may self-initiate an examination process, many individuals benefit from being guided toward exploration. Moreover, for those individuals who are still in identity diffusion, the abstinence-only approach as defined would not move them toward moratorium by promoting exploration but rather would either allow them to linger in diffusion or to impose foreclosure.

On the other hand, those students who were not inclined toward abstinence would be receiving a large quantity of challenging feedback. So, the argument could be made that in these instances students may be receiving identity-related benefits via

the opportunity to explore a perspective that was formerly unfamiliar to them. This could certainly support their self-discovery process and allow them to assess the extent to which abstinence feels like the best choice for them. However, the benefits of this approach for this specific group of students may be offset by the fact that the information is featured as the correct choice and this in turn may discourage self-discovery and assessment of identity congruence.

The Title V definition of abstinence-only education does not appear to be consistent with Kurtines (1995) co-constructivist perspective in which creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation are important for developing a critical identity. Creativity can only flourish if a foundation has been set to consider as many perspectives as possible. Conversely, creativity will be inhibited or stifled in a situation in which only a truncated range of perspectives is provided. Rather than suspension of judgment, the abstinence-only education approach seems to impose judgment. Abstaining from sex until marriage is deemed the correct and accepted position and other competing perspectives are consequently characterized as incorrect and less worthy of consideration. Furthermore, implicit judgment is passed on diverse lifestyles and sexual orientations via the wording of the eight-point definition of abstinence-only education. Because the definition clearly indicates that sexual activity is only appropriate within the context of marriage, individuals who are not heterosexual and cannot legally marry in most states are judged by this definition to be inappropriate. Similarly, heterosexual adults in a committed, long-term relationship who are engaging in sexual activity are also implicitly inappropriate

within this definition. Given that creativity is hampered and judgment is imposed, moving forward with a rational, critical analysis is extremely difficult. Various perspectives may not come to light in the abstinence-only educational process. Even if diverse perspectives do arise, it is unlikely that they would be given an initially equal footing for consideration. Rather than hearing a message regarding the comparative merits of a differing perspective, the message characterizes different perspectives as less worthy and at odds with the accepted standard or the best choice.

Unfortunately, barriers to identity development and achievement do not seem to be minimized within this educational approach. In fact, the abstinence-only approach appears to be quite barrier laden. The aim of the approach is to promote endorsement and adoption of abstinence-only perspectives and values. While the individual educator and her or his particular approach can either lessen or enhance the number of barriers that exist, the Title V defined approach taken at face value encourages a variety of proscriptive and non-inclusive attitudes. Abstinence is said to be the standard for adolescents and this message reinforces beliefs about young people not needing information about birth control methods, not being ready for this information because they are too young to be engaging in sexual activity, and the undesirable nature of young people making their own identity-congruent sexual choices and decisions. If educators embrace these beliefs, their approach will echo the abstinence-only definition and will not be consistent with an open, educative process that promotes personal exploration and identity development. Moreover, the Title V definition embraces specific value positions as accepted facts. The definition

communicates a pessimistic and heteronormative message that does not allow for individual diversity or the possibility for equally valid personal choices that are not synonymous with exclusively negative message about sexual activity outside of marriage. Presenting specific opinions as facts rather than exploring the existing range of opinions also presents a significant barrier to the educational process.

Overall, as defined within Title V, abstinence-only sex education exhibits many inconsistencies with those factors that are considered important for healthy identity development and achievement. Moreover, abstinence-only approaches encourage a normative informational style, which is more likely to lead to identity foreclosure and therefore may serve as a roadblock to identity achievement.

Comprehensive sex education: SIECUS definition

Given that the comprehensive sex education approach is built upon sharing a broad range of information and a variety of perspectives, exploration is inherent in this approach. The philosophical foundation of this approach appears to be that fully informing individuals about all aspects of their bodies and their sexuality is the ideal within the sex education context. While abstinence-only sex education has a specific eight point definition, comprehensive sex education as defined by SIECUS is much more extensive. The six key concept categories (i.e., human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture) have a plethora of topics nested within each of the categories. Human development encompasses not only our biological development but our emotional, intellectual and

social growth as well. Within the concept category of relationships, various types of relationships and their importance to our lives is considered. The personal skills category focuses on values, decision-making, communication, assertiveness, negotiation, and help seeking. The sexual health concept category is designed to focus on sexuality throughout the life span, masturbation, abstinence, the human sexual response, sexual fantasy, and sexual dysfunction. Within sexual health concepts such as contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and sexual abuse are discussed. The sixth concept category, society and culture, focuses on gender roles, legal and religious perspectives, diversity, and sexuality in the media and arts.

Moreover, the SIECUS definition goes on to delineate four goals of the education process (i.e., information; attitudes, values, and insights; relationships and interpersonal skills; and responsibility) that should be addressed across the key concept categories. The goal of information is intended to support the presentation of a comprehensive range of facts related to sexual development and activity. The attitudes, values, and insights goal is intended to help young people reflect on societal and familial views about sex and to begin to make their own assessment about what they believe and what fits with who they are as a person. The third goal, relationships and interpersonal skills, is focused on communication, refusal, and assertiveness skills as well as promoting individual decision-making and the ability to form satisfying relationships. Finally, responsibility is focused on remaining true to our personal choices and values, setting boundaries with others, and protecting our health

and safety. As opposed to presenting behavioral proscriptions, the goals of comprehensive sex education are designed to provide thorough and complete information about important topics, to engage the learner in a thoughtful analysis of various perspectives, and to promote careful introspective analysis prior to personal choices.

The nature of this approach encourages individuals to move from identity diffusion in which they have not explored information and established a knowledge base to identity moratorium in which the individual is fully engaged in cognitive and emotional exploration in an effort to become equipped to make commitments at a future point in time. This is extremely favorable within the identity development context due to the fact that identity achievement can only be reached through the moratorium status. Although advantages and disadvantages of various behaviors and perspectives are presented within the context of comprehensive sex education, specific perspectives or values are not presented as the best for all individuals. Due to this departure from the abstinence-only education approach, the significant danger of identity foreclosure that is present within abstinence-only approaches is minimized within the comprehensive sex education context. This is highly advantageous from the identity development standpoint due to the fact that foreclosure can become a significant barrier to further identity development and may jeopardize the prospect of identity achievement.

The ability to explore is promoted within the context of comprehensive sex education due to the emphasis on presenting complete and accurate information,

which Grotevant stated was necessary for promoting this ability. This in turn lays a solid foundation upon which self-discovery and exploration can occur. The multifaceted SIECUS definition of the comprehensive education process has both breadth across many concept categories and depth within each topic along with the focus on the four overriding goals. Thinking about the topics from differing perspectives and making a personal decision after careful evaluation is central to the comprehensive approach and the SIECUS goals. Clearly, those who are equipped with knowledge, critical analysis skill, and encouragement for personal reflection and self-assessment via the comprehensive education process will attain an enhanced ability for exploration and identity development. Due to the importance of including a variety of perspectives, it is vital that comprehensive educators include the merits and advantages of abstinence. While this is clearly a desirable practice according to the SIECUS definition, educators must be certain they are not undermining discussion of abstinence due to their own concerns about abstinence-only programs and messages. This would be just as problematic as the elimination of more comprehensive topics such as birth control methods from the abstinence-only programs.

Due to the fact that exploration is such an integral part of comprehensive sex education, the multifaceted nature of the exploration process should be modeled for learners. This, of course, contributes to the promotion of a positive attitude toward exploration. Moreover, because the goals of comprehensive sex education are aligned with examination, personal introspection, rational analysis, and choices made

after engaging in self-discovery, exploratory attempts are likely to be encouraged and reinforced in the comprehensive education context. This encouragement serves as a positive reinforcer which, from the perspective of Skinner and others in the field of behavioral psychology, makes the exhibited behavior more likely to occur in the future. And, quite naturally, the positive consequences are likely to yield a positive affective state and attitude toward exploration.

Because the comprehensive definition encourages broad coverage of a variety of important topics, this approach as defined by SIECUS avoids encouragement of the diffuse-avoidant style. The aim is clearly to facilitate consideration of a wide range of important topics. This is directly in opposition to procrastinating or avoiding consideration that can leave a potential learner lingering in identity diffusion. Due to the non-proscriptive approach regarding sexual values, the SIECUS definition of comprehensive sex education avoids facilitation of the normative style, which is also problematic due to its relationship with cognitive rigidity and identity foreclosure. Comprehensive sex education as defined with the SIECUS guidelines is embodied by a thorough presentation of a wide range of important information along with personal exploration. This is most consistent with Berzonsky's (1989) informational style in which a careful analysis and subsequent identity-congruent choices result. This style is the most likely to be exhibited by those who are on the path to achieving an identity. So, of the three styles, it seems that comprehensive sex education is most allied with the informational style and hence is better positioned to promote identity development.

In order to achieve personal expressiveness, one must be able to both express her value commitments and the reasoning behind these commitments. Due to the fact that comprehensive sex education is intended to address the six broad key concept categories as well as to encourage an examination of attitudes and values, it is likely that participants in these programs would be well equipped to share the reasoning or rationale behind any value commitments. What is less clear is how likely specific value commitments would be at the conclusion of the program. This is likely to vary from individual to individual and depend on the specific length and pedagogical approach of the particular program. Value commitments are consistent with either identity foreclosure or identity achievement. Given that foreclosure is synonymous with premature commitment to a value perspective provided to the learner, it is not necessarily a disadvantage if learners participating in comprehensive sex education remain in moratorium at the conclusion of the program. It is better to continue the examination and personal exploration process that keeps an individual in identity moratorium as opposed to making a premature value commitment that would place an individual in foreclosure. So, while personal expressiveness may not be fully achieved as a result of a comprehensive sex education program, it does appear that a foundation that may yield personal expressiveness is likely to result.

In outlining the four SIECUS goal categories of sex education, the importance of providing an opportunity for young people to question, explore, and assess their own attitudes is noted within the second goal category, attitudes, values, and insights. Given that the word question appears in this goal description, it seems apparent that

the intent is for challenging feedback to occur within the program to encourage the questioning and exploration process. This coupled with the emphasis on sharing a wide range of information and ideas seems to encourage exploring alternatives and examining different perspectives. So, the definition of comprehensive sex education is certainly consistent with receiving challenging feedback that promotes this exploration. However, this particular question cannot be fully answered without considering the curricular details and the specific approach of the educator leading the program. The word feedback implies that a discussion or dialogue is occurring between the educator and the learners. More specifically, the word challenging suggests that learners are sharing possible perspectives and that the educator is then leading the learners through a process in which they are asked to think about why they suggested a given perspective, what other perspectives might be, why different individuals might have different perspectives, and what beliefs or values are most consistent with each perspective. So, as was the case with personal expressiveness, it is clear that the definition is consistent with encouraging challenging feedback in the social context but whether or not this comes to fruition depends upon the particular program and educator.

The comprehensive sex education definition does encourage Kurtines' three processes (i.e., creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation) that are necessary to promote identity achievement. In order to attain creativity within this model, individuals must be able to generate as many alternatives as possible for consideration. Given the broad range of information that is provided within the

comprehensive approach to sex education, the ability of the learner to generate alternatives is significantly enhanced when compared with an approach in which only a restricted range of information is provided. Because perspectives are presented for consideration without identifying a particular perspective as the best choice or correct answer, this supports the ability of the learner to be more objective and suspend their judgment during the exploration process. Moreover, the presentation of a wide range of facts coupled with encouragement to explore one's own values and perspectives, promotes the likelihood of critical evaluation by the learner. This, of course, makes successful moratorium and subsequent identity achievement more likely.

While no approach to sex education is completely free of barriers, comprehensive sex education as defined by SIECUS does not create additional identity achievement barriers. Barriers related to the comfort or skill level of the educator as well as intrapersonal or interpersonal barriers related to the learner and her or his relationships, influences, or cognition, can potentially be present in any educational environment. However, if we think specifically about the comprehensive approach to sex education as defined by SIECUS, it is clear that adherence to the defined approach would minimize barriers to identity achievement due to the compatibility with the SIECUS approach and the factors that have been identified as important for identity achievement. Given the amount and breadth of information that is recommended for delivery to learners, stasis in identity diffusion is not supported. Moreover, refraining from recommending one way of thinking or type of behavior as best for everyone but rather encouraging multifaceted exploration of possible

behaviors, their associated risks, methods for maximizing health and safety, and many related topics, discourages foreclosure and promotes the necessary status of moratorium and the paramount self-discovery that is necessary prior to identity-congruent value commitments and identity achievement.

Overall, the SIECUS definition of comprehensive sex education appears quite consistent with those approaches recommended in the identity development literature. When reviewing the eight questions constructed for evaluating the consistency of the educational approach with promotion of identity achievement, the approaches recommended by SIECUS appear likely to promote the identity development process. The responses to the eight questions were primarily affirmative which is in direct contrast to the evaluation of the abstinence-only definition in the context of these questions. The recommended comprehensive sex education practices are significantly more consistent with the variables and processes identified as important for identity achievement within the literature. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the comprehensive approach as defined may have significant advantages in the promotion of identity achievement.

Abstinence-plus sex education definition

Given that abstinence-plus programs do provide comprehensive information about birth control, contraceptive usage, sexually transmitted diseases, and related topics, it would be fair to say that exploration is promoted. However, because this model as defined emphasizes abstinence as the best option for young people, it is

questionable whether or not learners would feel encouraged to explore prior to value commitment. A range of comprehensive information is provided within this model and this does provide a reasonable foundation for the exploration process. But when this is coupled with the denotation of a particular course of action as the desirable selection, some learners may be inclined to simply adopt the value suggestion due to the fact that they see exploration as a waste of time because the correct answer has already been identified. If this does occur, these learners would have fallen into identity foreclosure by adopting the value structure without engaging in exploration. On the other hand, however, the dual focus of abstinence-plus education may provide an equally or more comprehensive range of information which would be beneficial to cognitive exploration and the identity development process. Provided that abstinence is presented as an important and viable option to be carefully considered but information about using birth control and disease prevention methods is also presented for those who may choose to become sexually active, the barriers to exploration and self-discovery can be avoided.

As was the case with comprehensive sex education, providing knowledge and information provided does enhance each learner's ability to explore. So, in this respect the abstinence-plus sex education approach could certainly be viewed as consistent with promoting identity achievement by laying the necessary conceptual foundation for exploration and the related identity moratorium status. But, again, curricular approaches that focus on abstinence promotion may create a situation in which the tools are present but no motivation exists to utilize these tools because one

option is presented as the ideal solution. Those learners who take on this perspective are much less likely to have a positive attitude toward exploration because it does not seem to them to be necessary. The likelihood of a positive attitude toward exploration within the abstinence-plus approach will depend on a number of factors. Certainly, the forcefulness of the promotion of abstinence as the desired choice is likely to impact the learner's attitude toward exploration. As the level of promotion of abstinence increases, the likelihood that exploration will be seen as unnecessary increases and in turn undermines positive attitudes toward exploration. Therefore the learner's attitude toward exploration could be quite mixed within the abstinence-plus model. However, various approaches and behaviors are being shared and discussed. As previously mentioned, this could make an individual's attitude more positive because a broad range of information is being presented as a part of the program. So, the precise curricular approach will determine the level of success in promoting the multifaceted exploration necessary for identity development.

While it is fair to say that learners would not be left to linger in identity diffusion, the abstinence-plus approach could encourage both the normative and informational styles. Coverage of a wide range of comprehensive sex education topics is consistent with the informational style. However, identifying one option as the ideal choice for a particular group may yield a normative style due to the potential for imitation and conformity. Given these potentials, this particular approach could have either a mixed or uncertain result. The amount of emphasis on abstinence as the best choice, the extent to which learners are dissuaded from exploring because they

see it as unnecessary, and the level of attachment to abstinence as the correct choice for all individuals will all affect the possibility of adopting a normative style. As each of these three variables increases, the potential for learners to develop a normative style grows. On the other hand, if the presentation is less skewed, learners engage in exploration, and learners do not immediately attach to abstinence as the best choice, an informational style becomes more likely.

Both understanding the reasoning behind a value commitment and developing the capability to express the commitment are required for personal expressiveness. Given that the range and breadth of information included within the abstinence-plus approach is similar to what we would find within the comprehensive approach, this is supportive of personal expressiveness. However, personal expressiveness could be limited if learners foreclose on abstinence as the correct value choice and fail to attend to the additional perspectives and information. The ability to thoroughly elaborate on the reasoning behind one's choice is hampered if the focus is primarily on promotion of a particular perspective.

As mentioned in the discussion of comprehensive sex education, the level of challenging feedback from the social context will potentially vary from educator to educator. The amount of discussion and tendency to question learners when they propose a possible position will be very important. Kerpelman and Smith's (1999) contention is that we need incongruent feedback to encourage a full exploratory process. The amount of challenging or incongruent feedback within the abstinence-plus educational program could be truncated if abstinence is promoted as the one

desirable choice for young, unmarried individuals. It is somewhat awkward to suggest that one position is the ideal and then to challenge students who accept this ideal in an attempt to encourage them to consider other perspectives. This, in fact, could seem very confusing to learners. Moreover, given that the abstinence-plus approach as defined communicates that abstinence is the best choice for young people, educators may feel disinclined to challenge students who seem allied with this perspective because it may seem to them that the students have received the message and the goal of the educational process has been achieved. So, it seems clear that the likelihood of challenging feedback within abstinence-plus programs depends on the extent to which abstinence is stressed to the exclusion of other perspectives and information. Provided that abstinence is presented along with information about contraceptive use and ramifications of choosing to be sexually active, an element of challenging feedback may be built into the approach because these two distinct possibilities are being discussed.

Because a wider range of information is provided within the abstinence-plus framework, creativity (i.e., the ability to list or generate many possible alternatives) is promoted. However, when we examine the likelihood for suspension of judgment, the result may not be similarly positive. If a particular behavioral option is presented as the best choice, judgment is encouraged rather than suspended. This, in turn, sets up the critical evaluation process for potential failure. It is extremely difficult to analyze all options and to make one's own decision while being willing to accept a perspective that may be contradictory to one's previously held beliefs, if the options

are not being presented as equally worthy of consideration. Once again, the outcome will depend on the particular approach and the extent to which abstinence is featured as the option that should be selected. If the presentation is very balanced, suspension of judgment will be encouraged which then makes critical evaluation more likely to occur.

Barriers to identity development may or may not be minimized or avoided within this model. Identity foreclosure becomes a possibility whenever a particular choice is being promoted and identified as the best. Learners may also come to view exploration as unnecessary and may gravitate toward what is presented as the correct answer. It is quite paradoxical that a wide range of information can be presented but the possibilities for exploration and forward movement toward identity achievement may be curtailed by the promotion of a particular perspective as the best for all young people. However, as previously noted, the dual focus of the abstinence-plus curriculum has the potential to be extremely consistent with promotion of identity development. If handled in a balanced and comprehensive manner that invites students to reflect on which choices might be best for them, barriers may be largely avoided.

There are several points of consistency between the abstinence-plus approach and the important benchmarks for identity achievement. A broad range of information is provided which enhances the learner's ability to explore. Those engaged in exploration move into identity moratorium, which is an important and necessary status for identity achievement. The possibility for an informational style

and creativity are also present within this model. However, the potential exists for inconsistencies with the important benchmarks. Motivation to explore may be reduced if a particular option is promoted as the best. Under these circumstances, identity foreclosure and the development of a normative style become more likely and providing challenging feedback to learners becomes an awkward process in which learners may feel they are receiving contradictory messages. Overall, the consistency with identity achievement benchmarks could be mixed and the extent of the inconsistencies is likely to vary somewhat among curricula and educators depending upon how heavily the message of abstinence is featured. Abstinence-plus methods have the potential to match or exceed the consistency of comprehensive approaches with identity development benchmarks. The end result regarding the level of consistency depends on the particulars of the curricular approach.

Evaluating specific curricular approaches in the context of identity theory

In this section I will examine one specific curriculum within each of the three approaches to sex education. Through this examination, I intend to determine if differences exist between the archetypal definitions and the operational specifics of each curriculum. I will also examine the level of consistency with the promotion of identity development and achievement exhibited by these curricular approaches. To engage in this examination, I will first describe the structure of each curriculum as well as any recommended approaches to delivering the content. I will then once again pose the eight questions listed below that were derived from the identity development literature in order to determine if there are differences between the identity development potential of the archetypal definitions and the operational realities of specific curricular approaches.

1. Is exploration promoted?
2. Are individuals encouraged to explore prior to value commitment?
3. Does the particular approach enhance the ability to explore and promote a positive attitude toward exploration?
4. Does each approach encourage an informational style as opposed to a normative or diffuse/avoidant style?
5. Are those who are exposed to the approach likely to have engaged in a thorough, self-discovery focused exploration consistent with personal expressiveness?

6. Does the feedback we receive within the social context challenge us to explore our alternatives and think about differing perspectives?
7. Is the approach consistent with creativity, suspension of judgment, and critical evaluation?
8. Are barriers to the identity development process minimized or avoided?

Abstinence-only curriculum: Choosing the Best Life

Choosing the Best Life was noted in the 2004 Waxman congressional report as the most commonly used abstinence-only curriculum and was selected for evaluation based on its prominence. The program objectives are virtually identical to the eight point Title V definition of abstinence-only sex education. This is likely due to the fact that schools were previously only able to receive federal funding to support sex education if the selected curriculum strictly conformed to this sanctioned definition. The curriculum consists of eight lessons each of which has a video segment and associated content in the user's manual. Each of the lessons is somewhat scripted in that the educator's manual has specific questions to ask and standardized responses or comments. The summary of the eight lessons in the paragraphs that follow is based on a review of the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum manual (Cook, 2003).

Lesson one is titled "sex, emotions, and self-respect" and discusses gender differences in how sex is viewed as well as six possible negative emotional consequences of teen sex. The video for this segment shows young women talking about the emotional aspects of sex and young men discussing the importance of the

physical aspects of sex. This video is useful in that it provides an opportunity for students to consider both physical passion and emotional attachment. Given that the emotional consequences associated with sexual activity may be overlooked, this segment is helpful in increasing awareness of the emotional impact of sex. But, these materials present a very gender stereotyped framework and do not acknowledge that young women may be motivated by physical factors or that young men may have an emotional investment. The six possible negative consequences of premarital sex that are presented in lesson one are worry, regret and guilt, impaired personal development, fear of future relationships, lowered self-esteem, and depression. It is plausible that these consequences may occur after engaging in premarital sex and, therefore, it is undoubtedly beneficial for students to be presented with these possible outcomes and to have a chance to consider how they would feel if they were to experience some or all of these outcomes. However, there is absolutely no acknowledgement in this lesson of the possibility of any positive consequences or pleasurable outcomes associated with sexual activity. Even though the word possible is included when describing negative outcomes, the implication seems to be that negative consequences are a likely outcome in most or all cases. This lesson ends by discussing the ways that abstinence can strengthen an individual's sense of self-respect. This concluding discussion presents some very worthwhile considerations. Individuals who stand firm for their beliefs and behave in a way that is consistent with their values are quite likely to feel a sense of pride and enhanced self-respect. Moreover, treating sex as a serious matter, carefully contemplating sexual activity,

and abstaining until certain about having sex will almost certainly yield much more self-respect than engaging in casual and frivolous encounters. However, the possibility of making a decision to have sex and retaining one's self-respect is not addressed.

Lesson two is titled "sex, alcohol, and respect". The primary focus of this lesson is to stress the possible negative consequences of teen alcohol use. The lesson begins with a video segment that discusses why the combination of teen drinking and sexual activity can be problematic. The video interviews young people who made poor decisions under the influence of alcohol. Lesson two also discusses the effects of alcohol consumption, potential negative consequences of casual sex, and date rape. Overall, the information presented in lesson two is clearly germane to the health and safety of all young people.

Lesson three, "sex, STDs, and honesty", focuses on contraction of sexually transmitted diseases as well as their symptoms and consequences. The video segment that accompanies this lesson displays graphic genital photos of individuals who have severe symptoms of chlamydia, pelvic inflammatory disease, syphilis, genital warts, and herpes. After the video, symptoms and long-term consequences of the various STDs are discussed. Then program instructors are asked to facilitate an exercise questioning safe sex. A fill in the blank exercise is also provided for the group. The correct responses to be solicited from the group include that large proportions of condom users do not use them correctly, condoms are made of rubber so they can break, and that actual use effectiveness of condoms is much less than the published

effectiveness. At the end of the fill in the blank exercise, instructors are asked to read aloud the question “is safe sex safe enough” and the correct answer provided is “no”. The final message is that abstinence is the only 100% effective method of protection. This is a true statement and helping young people to understand that there is some amount of risk involved in protected sex is important. Young people also need to be aware of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases and these extremely graphic photos are likely to have a significant impact. But, consistent with the abstinence-only framework, proper contraceptive use is not discussed.

Lessons four and five are focused on case study examples. In lesson four, “sex, pregnancy, and responsibility”, students are asked to watch a video of a young teen couple dealing with pregnancy as well as interviews with a number of young parents some of whom are single. The challenges and stresses of teen pregnancy are discussed along with the physical pain of pregnancy and the labor and delivery process. After the video, students are asked to discuss the challenges and problems presented by teen pregnancy and how teen pregnancies can change lives. Students are also asked to engage in an activity about reducing the risk of teen pregnancy. During this activity, students are referred to a chart that lists various methods of contraception, failure rates for typical users who may not use methods consistently and correctly, and HIV/STD prevention. Published laboratory effectiveness rates are not included on this chart. For example, condoms are listed as having a 15% failure rate for typical users who do not use methods consistently or correctly. Then program facilitators are asked to conduct an exercise with six playing cards. Five

regular cards and the joker are shuffled and students are asked to draw a card. Every time someone draws a joker they are told they would be pregnant or have gotten someone else pregnant. Though this is a useful illustration, this exercise seems slanted toward undermining the student's view of condom effectiveness and assumes that they would be unwilling or unable to use condoms consistently and correctly.

Lesson five, "sex, HIV/AIDS and compassion", focuses on HIV and AIDS transmission, symptoms, and the impact on people's lives. The video segment for lesson five shows young people visiting an AIDS clinic and meeting individuals who are dealing with the disease. After the video, the symptoms and progression of HIV and AIDS is shared with the group. Additional time is also spent on transmission of HIV through sexual activity. In the final portion of the lesson, abstinence is presented as the only method that eliminates the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS via sexual activity.

Lesson six is titled "sex, love, and choices". In this lesson a video of young people who have chosen to remain abstinent and who are sharing their reasoning for why they feel this is the best choice is shown. Immediately after the video participants are asked to engage in a discussion about making choices in which they are asked three questions: why the teens in the video chose abstinence, why sexually active teenagers are choosing to become secondary virgins, and how abstinence helps a relationship develop. Each of these three topics is useful to discuss and explore. However, during this question exercise, no questions are posed regarding the reasons some individuals may choose to engage in premarital sex. So the other side of the

issue is not explored. After this questioning exercise, students are asked to list reasons for choosing abstinence and reasons some teenagers choose to have sex. This type of comparison-contrast exercise has the potential to help young people to look at both options side by side. Unfortunately, given that the question exercise was only focused on helping students think through the reasons for choosing abstinence, it is quite likely that the list of reasons to abstain will have been formulated during the discussion whereas students will be left to quickly generate reasons for choosing sex on their own. This creates some inequity and makes the comparison exercise somewhat less effective. At the end of this exercise, students are encouraged to acknowledge the superior strength of the reasons for not engaging in sex and the script invites the educator to remark that choosing to have sex can have negative consequences and that abstinence results in different consequences and brings an individual freedom. This lesson concludes with an exercise that asks students to list their life goals and to list one or more ways that remaining abstinent could help them reach their goals. At the end of this exercise, students are invited to sign an abstinence freedom pledge indicating their commitment to remain abstinent and to list three people to with whom they will share their decision in order to be accountable. This type of behavioral contract could certainly encourage the value commitment to be longer lasting and more stable. But there is a possibility that some students may feel pressured to conform since it may be quite obvious who is completing a pledge form in the classroom setting.

Lesson seven is entitled “sex, limits and self-discipline” begins with a video and discussion segment that outlines five primary sources that make teens feel pressured to have sex: hormones, media, advertising, peers, and relationships. In the discussion of hormones, the general topic of biological drives or desires (i.e., sleeping, eating, anger, sexuality, etc.) is introduced and the message is delivered that giving in to our desires can cause problems. Overeating, not studying, and not practicing for athletics are all given as examples of the problems of not controlling our desires. The media portion of the discussion notes that television shows and movies often have sexual content that depicts sex outside of marriage as acceptable and enjoyable. There is also a discussion of the advertising approaches that include sexual content and how seeing sex everywhere may make teens feel that sexual activity is necessary to be part of society. The peer segment reviews the power of peer influence and includes subtle encouragement for program participants to associate with those committed to abstinence because they may become influenced by friends who feel premarital sex is acceptable. Last, the relationship discussion focuses on the fact that having a boyfriend or girlfriend may make an individual want to consider sex so developing assertive refusal skills becomes important. The final portion of this lesson reviews the “Set it!, Say it!, Show it!” technique. This technique encourages students to set personal boundaries, stay out of environments or situations that might make physical contact more likely, and develop a set of refusal responses to sexual invitations.

In the final lesson, “sex, saying no, and courage”, there is an initial video segment that suggests that those who choose abstinence have greater personal worth, encourages refusal, highlights the benefits of group dating, and discourages teens from being in situations that might lead to sex. After the video, the set it, say it, show it technique introduced in the previous lesson is reviewed and specific techniques for demonstrating refusal nonverbally and verbally are discussed. The Yes-No-Yes technique is introduced in which teens are encouraged to say something favorable about the person, give their reasons for saying no, and suggest alternatives to sex. Finally, role-playing exercises are conducted to give participants a chance to apply the refusal techniques.

Within this curricular approach, exploration is relatively truncated. In each of the eight lessons, a particular position is taken and the vast majority of the exploration that takes place is of pro-abstinence sentiments. Occasionally, some time is spent on the opposing perspective but the amount of time spent and depth of coverage is substantially less. It also seems that in many cases the opposing position is presented in order to quickly reject this position and to underscore the superiority of the favored position. However, it does appear that there is substantial exploration and elaboration of the abstinence-only perspective. Students are asked to watch eight different video segments that have been created to illustrate the reasons why abstinence is best. There are also many discussion activities and exercises that ask students to identify and elaborate on the reasons to remain abstinent. While some amount of exploration is taking place, the quality of exploration is limited due to the inequity of time spent

on various perspectives and the presentational approach that indicates the desired or best perspective during the process. The absence of open, more objective inquiry in favor of an approach that features a particular perspective as best in contrast to other perspectives prevents a thorough exploration which would be necessary to move learners into identity moratorium and toward identity achievement.

Exploration prior to value commitment is almost certainly not occurring within this approach. Because abstinence is continually featured as the correct choice in each lesson, it seems that the objective is for value commitment to be occurring simultaneously with or perhaps even in advance of the truncated exploration that is taking place. There is a difference between presenting various approaches and clearly explaining the significant advantages of abstinence so that learners may carefully consider the information and come to their own decision and featuring abstinence as the choice for all young people and encouraging learners to accept this premise at each stage in the curriculum.

Because exploration is occurring even though it is primarily within the restricted range on the abstinence-only paradigm, it could be argued that the ability to explore is being enhanced to a certain extent due to the possibility for transferability of the skills used in portions of the program. While this point may be at least somewhat valid, facilitating the ability for thorough explanation of multiple perspectives is in jeopardy because this is not modeled within the curricular approach. The exploration that takes place is quite in depth and detailed with respect to the perspective considered to be best but very limited and cursory in the case of other

perspectives or approaches. This model encourages learners to identify abstinence as the best perspective, devotes a great deal of time exploring and elaborating upon this perspective, and examines other perspectives in very sparing amounts. Given the type of exploration that is modeled, it seems fair to say that thorough and comprehensive exploration is not promoted via this curriculum. Therefore, it is quite questionable if this approach could lay an adequate foundation to fully move learners into identity moratorium. Moreover, in light of the encouragement toward specific value commitments from the first lesson forward, the likelihood for identity foreclosure in lieu of moratorium is increased.

Although there is some exploration occurring, it is quite constrained in scope and structure. So learner attitudes toward exploration could be quite mixed at best. Some learners may view the process as unnecessary because the correct answer has been provided. This may send a message that the exploration process is not needed and is a waste of time. And, even for those who embrace the type of exploration that occurs within the curriculum, they may develop a belief that inequity in the exploration process is acceptable. It may appear to these learners that as long as some attention is paid to differing perspectives regardless how slight and what we believe to be the best perspective is examined at length then appropriate exploration has occurred. This could lead learners to feel confident about a process that is at least somewhat if not largely incomplete. Overall, attitudes toward exploration could be mixed or possibly skewed negative direction as a result of program participation.

In order for an informational style to develop learners must research available options, carefully evaluate these options, and make a decision that is grounded in their careful analysis. Unfortunately, within the context of Choosing the Best Life the prerequisites for developing an informational style are not provided. As previously noted, review of possible options is not complete or equitable. Therefore, the research of available options is incomplete. The program does include some evaluative activities. However, these are not structured in a fashion that allows for objective and open discussion of options. Certain ideas and positions are encouraged through the activities and scripted responses are included for facilitators to identify abstinence-related perspectives as superior. So while program proponents might claim that evaluation does occur within the program, it does not meet the benchmark of careful evaluation of all options spelled out by Berzonsky. As a result, decisions made by participants are not grounded in their own multifaceted evaluation but in what has been presented to them as the desirable choice. Rather than aligning with the informational style, this is synonymous with the normative style in which conformity to a presented standard guides the adoption of values and behaviors. This, of course, places the participant in a passive position in which she is the recipient of recommendations rather than an active evaluator and decision maker. Clearly, progress toward identity achievement is hampered in this situation given that the participant in this type of program is more likely to move toward identity foreclosure due to the alignment with the normative style and the lack of true exploration needed to move into moratorium.

In evaluating the likelihood that personal expressiveness will be promoted through the *Choosing the Best Life* program, it does seem quite likely that those who have participated in the program would be able to both express their value commitment and also provide reasons for this commitment. Each of the eight lessons is geared toward promoting the choice of abstinence and providing reasons that this choice is superior as well as negative consequence that may occur by making other choices. Because this is continually reinforced during the program, it seems very probable that most if not all participants would be able to express that abstinence is the best and list at least some of the reasons given during the program. However, this appearance of personal expressiveness is in a sense a masquerade. These individuals have not achieved true personal expressiveness because they have not engaged in the thorough exploration that is a necessary foundation for achievement of this identity milestone. Even though program participants may give the impression of personal expressiveness when asked about their values, their comments are more similar to political talking points that one has been encouraged to adopt as opposed to a mindful decision made after careful personal analysis.

Challenging feedback from the social context is highly unlikely within this curriculum. Lesson seven notes the power and dangers of peer pressure and the fact that young people may be influenced to do things that are not what they would choose. Ironically, however, the emphasis within the program seems to be on using this pressure to encourage conformity to the abstinence standard. In lesson six, learners are given the opportunity to sign an abstinence pledge in a room full of their

peers with their facilitators present. Some teens might feel inclined to simply complete this pledge if others in the room are doing the same for fear of being noticed and questioned if they do not. Also, with the facilitator present some participants might be worried about being put on the spot or viewed negatively by the facilitator if they refuse to complete the pledge. Participants are also encouraged to shy away from friends who have different perspectives because they might consider or be influenced by these perspectives. The recommendation in lesson seven is to surround one's self with individuals who have chosen abstinence. This, of course, runs counter to the idea of enhancing challenging feedback from the social context because surrounding ourselves with like-minded individuals is highly unlikely to yield any type of incongruent feedback. The one element of the program that comes closest to providing feedback about different perspectives occurs in the role-playing exercises when students are asked to have a mock conversation with individuals who are espousing other value positions. While alternative positions are raised in this context, it is not for the purpose of open discussion and contemplation but simply an exercise in debating and challenging values other than abstinence.

Within Kurtines' co-constructivist framework, creativity is likely to be limited due to the relatively truncated exploration occurring within the program. In this model, creativity is only facilitated if an individual can explore as many options as possible. Limiting the range of perspectives or the amount of attention given to differing perspectives certainly does not support creativity. The second aspect of this framework, suspension of judgment (i.e., objectively reviewing all perspectives), is

certainly absent within the Choosing the Best program. In fact, it would be fair to say that this program encourages judgment throughout given that abstinence is continually showcased as the best of all behavioral options for unmarried individuals. Since creativity is quite limited and suspension of judgment is completely absent, the critical evaluation process in which a substantial number of perspectives are carefully and objectively considered before making a decision becomes much less likely. The strength with which the abstinence approach is marketed to participants is not consistent with the promotion of critical evaluation. If a program participant were able to successfully engage in critical evaluation, this is more likely to occur in spite of rather than because of the program.

Unfortunately, the *Choosing the Best Life* program appears to enhance rather than minimize barriers to identity development. Exploration, which is necessary to move individuals into moratorium, is approached in a skewed and limited fashion. An encouragement toward value commitment is occurring from the very beginning of the program rather than allowing exploration to take place initially. The messages are heavy-handed and consistently reinforce the idea that abstinence is the best choice. This marketing approach encourages a normative style and each of these barriers is consistent with identity foreclosure, which can become a severe roadblock to true identity achievement. And, in an effort to minimize the possibility of challenging feedback or identity moratorium, learners are asked to limit their contact with individuals having different perspectives so that they are not influenced these individuals.

Overall, the curricular approach of the *Choosing the Best Life* program is not consistent with the elements deemed essential for facilitating identity achievement. Exploration is limited and inequitable. Value commitment is not delayed until after the exploration process has taken place. Since some exploration does occur, this program may enhance the ability to explore to some extent. However, these enhancements could not be expected to be at the level we would expect for a more thorough exploratory process. Attitudes toward exploration could be compromised by the continual presentation of the choice that is labeled as correct within the program. This undermines the exploration process as it makes it seem unnecessary. The lack of thorough exploration coupled with the encouragement to adopt a particular belief pushes learners away from an informational style and toward the normative style and possible identity foreclosure. Although program participants may give the impression of personal expressiveness, they have not built their value commitments on high quality exploration and therefore have not truly developed personal expressiveness. Challenging feedback is limited at best if not entirely absent and discouraged. Judgment is not suspended but rather encouraged from the very first lesson. So as was the case with the Title V definition of abstinence-only education, the curricular approach is linked with many likely barriers to identity development.

This is not to say that there is nothing presented in the *Choosing the Best Life* program that is of value. There are certainly pieces of information included in the program that are useful and important. For example, understanding the consequences

of sexually transmitted diseases, understanding that contraceptive devices are not perfect in preventing pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, are understanding that abstinence is the only method of prevention that is 100% effective are all important facts. Moreover, the exercises geared toward building assertiveness and refusal skills are useful and may have some transferability to other areas of the participants' lives. However, the fact that some elements of the program are useful does not change the fact that within the context of identity development the program appears quite incompatible. It is ironic that the program is entitled "Choosing the Best Life" because self-discovery and the personal choice process are not emphasized. A more fitting title for the program might have been "Accepting the Recommended Practice" since this is clearly the emphasis throughout and unfortunately may be a potential recipe for identity foreclosure.

Comprehensive curriculum: Making Proud Choices!

The *Making Proud Choices* curriculum is one of the most commonly used comprehensive sex education curricula. The program objectives include (Jemmott, Jemmott, and McCaffree, 2006):

1. Increased knowledge about prevention of HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.
2. More positive attitudes and beliefs about condom use.
3. Increased confidence in their ability to negotiate safer sex and to use condoms correctly.

4. Increased negotiation skills.
5. Improved condom use.
6. Stronger intentions to use condoms if they have sex.
7. A lower incidence of high-risk sexual behavior.
8. A stronger sense of pride and responsibility in making a difference in their lives.

This curriculum is divided into eight, one-hour modules. Similar to the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum, the *Making Proud Choices* curriculum is somewhat scripted and provides recommended instructor comments throughout the entire curriculum. During activities that require student responses, a list is provided for instructors so that they can be sure certain key responses are shared. The summary of the eight curricular modules in the paragraphs that follow is based on a review of the *Making Proud Choices* curriculum manual (Jemmott, Jemmott, and McCaffree, 2006).

Module 1 is titled, “getting to know you and steps to making your dreams come true”. After a short overview of the program, creation of group discussion rules, and an opportunity for all students to introduce themselves, this module begins by inviting students to think about and discuss the meaning of the words proud and responsible. Once the general definitions have been established these words are applied to the sexual context and students are asked about the advantages of being proud and responsible. The next module activity is a brainstorming exercise about teens and sex. Students are first invited to generate reasons why teens have sex. The

instructor follows up with a comment about the importance of engaging in safer sex. Students are then asked to generate possible consequences of sex and ways to prevent negative consequences of sex. In the last segment of the module students are asked to complete an exercise detailing their short-term and long-term goals. Students are then asked to think of possible obstacles to achieving their goals. Instructors are directed to make sure that the student list includes sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Finally, students are asked how the obstacles on the list can be avoided and the instructor summarizes by indicating the rest of the modules will focus on making proud and responsible choices, avoiding risky behavior, and using condoms if students have sex.

Module 2, “the consequences of sex: HIV infection” begins by reviewing facts about HIV and AIDS including methods of transmission. Students are then asked to watch a video segment that includes people with HIV talking about how they contracted the virus. Afterward, students are asked to discuss the messages from the video including the behavioral advice given. The next activity invites students to examine statements about HIV and AIDS and to make a judgment about whether they are facts or myths. Finally, an HIV risk continuum is presented that classifies behaviors into no risk, low risk, and high-risk categories. In summary, instructors are asked to note the importance of understanding the level of risk associated with various behaviors and that the intent is to help students make proud choices and to be responsible and use a condom if they choose to have sex.

Attitudes and beliefs about HIV/AIDS and condom use is the third module. This module begins by dividing the students into six teams that correspond to a particular character in the video to be watched. Each group is asked to watch the video from the perspective of their particular character and respond to a variety of questions about the behaviors, feelings and motivations of the character. The questions are designed to elicit responses regarding why condoms were not used in some circumstances. Some questions also related to parental communication depicted in the video. At the end of this activity, the instructor is directed to note that abstinence is the only 100% effective method of avoiding HIV and AIDS but that if students choose to have sex they should use a condom. The last activity in this module asks students to act out scenarios that could present themselves on a hotline for teen questions. Students are divided into pairs and one student assumes the role of caller and the other of hotline counselor. After all groups engage in the mock exchange, the class discusses all questions and the advice given as a group.

Module 4, “strategies for preventing HIV infection: stop, think, act” begins with an introduction to the stop, think and act problem-solving method. Students are encouraged to stop and calm themselves as well as to identify their feelings and the other person’s feelings. The thinking step encourages students to ask clarifying questions regarding what they want, what they need to know, and the various alternatives and consequences. Finally, during the act step students are encouraged to evaluate the information, make what they feel is the initial best choice, reevaluate with help if needed, and make a final choice. After the fundamentals of this

technique are presented, students are asked to read over a case study and describe how the young people did or did not stop, think, and act. Next, students are asked to watch two video vignettes portraying young people who engaged in unsafe sexual activity and to identify how the result would have been different had they applied the stop, think, and act technique. This module concludes with a game of AIDS basketball that is designed to test students' HIV and AIDS knowledge.

The fifth module, “the consequences of sex: STDs and correct condom use” begins with a presentation covering the types of sexually transmitted diseases. Methods of transmission, symptoms, and treatment options are discussed. There is also specific discussion regarding the fact that not all STDs are curable and that you often cannot tell that someone has an STD by looking at them. During the final portion of this activity, students are asked to reflect on the emotional impact and life altering consequences that can result from contracting a sexually transmitted disease. The next activity is a game to illustrate transmission probabilities. Students randomly draw cards with various behaviors that are associated with different disease outcomes. Students who draw condom cards do not contract a disease but those who draw an unprotected sex card are told they would have contracted a sexually transmitted disease. The summary of this activity stresses the importance of condom use. After a quick activity reviewing statements about safer sex, this module concludes with a condom use activity. Various types and brands of condoms are discussed as well as the timing of use. Steps for proper condom use are reviewed and students are given an opportunity to practice putting condoms on a model.

Module 6, “the consequences of sex: pregnancy and contraception”, begins with an activity that asks students to discuss myths and facts about pregnancy in order to help students understand the realities of pregnancy. Students are then asked to watch a video about teens dealing with pregnancy to help them understand the real life impact of becoming a parent during the teen years. After these two initial activities, the instructor facilitates a discussion and demonstration of various birth control methods in addition to condoms (i.e., spermicidal foam, female condoms, birth control pills, Depo-Provera shots). During the final portion of this module, potential negative attitudes about using and purchasing birth control are addressed and the importance of making proud and responsible choices by acquiring protection for sex is discussed.

Developing condom use skills and negotiation skills is covered in module 7. The module begins with a review of the steps for proper condom use. After the review is completed the instructor facilitates a discussion about how to make condoms fun and pleasurable. The next activity invites students to discuss the arguments against condom use and to come up with rebuttal responses to challenge these arguments. In the final portion of this module, the SWAT technique and refusal skills are introduced. The SWAT technique consists of four steps: say no to unsafe behavior, explain why, suggest alternatives, and talk it out. After this discussion students are asked to observe two role-plays and to use an observer checklist to identify steps from the SWAT technique and refusal skills. At the end of this final

activity, students are encouraged to use these approaches and skills to decline invitations to engage in unsafe behavior.

The eighth and final module is titled “enhancing refusal and negotiation skills”. At the beginning of this module, students are asked to review the SWAT technique and refusal skills by watching a video clip and using the observer checklist to identify instances of these approaches. Following this review activity, students are given five different situations in which one partner has reservations about using condoms and asked to create a role-play that demonstrates effective use of the SWAT techniques and refusal skills. Upon completion of the role-play activity, the instructor facilitates a discussion about the importance of talking to partners about condom use. To conclude the program, students are asked to share what they learned and the instructor closes by noting that practicing safer sex is a proud and responsible choice that can help students achieve their goals.

While there are certainly positive aspects to this curricular approach, there also appear to be some missed opportunities in sharing the advantages of abstinence. There were several instances during the course of the program that safer sex was referred to as the best way to reduce the chances of pregnancy and disease. While this statement may be true for those who have decided to become sexually active, abstinence is the most effective method for pregnancy and disease prevention. This is only stated in explicit terms once during the program. Additionally, a primary focus of the program seems to be to promote an understanding of safer sex practices and the skills needed for their implementation. This is certainly an important and valuable

goal. However, program students have only a few opportunities to engage in self-discovery reflection. After the module 1 exercise in which students are asked to think about their goals and dreams, all subsequent reflection exercises are more empathetic in nature (i.e., asking students to think about how they would feel if they were the person in one of the presented situations). The stop, think, and act technique does include contemplation of what the students might want as part of the five questions to be asked during the thinking step. But beyond mentioning the question about what students want, no emphasis is placed on discussing self-discovery and the process of personal choice.

Because a wide range of information is shared it would be reasonable to say that exploration is promoted to a certain extent. However, the focus seems to be largely on condom use and safer sex. So, the exploration process is somewhat truncated due to the lack of discussion of the potential advantages of abstinence. There is a reasonably comprehensive discussion of birth control methods and proper use that was not included in the *Choosing the Best* curriculum. At the same time, this curricular approach still exhibits somewhat restricted exploration due to the fact that abstinence is mentioned only briefly on a handful of occasions. There are a number of instructor comments that seem to neglect abstinence as a viable choice. Other comments indirectly hint at abstinence (e.g., stating many students may not yet need birth control information) but do not recognize it directly. On balance, the amount of exploration seems somewhat greater than what was observed in the *Choosing the Best* program due in large part to the discussion and demonstration of contraceptive

methods. However, the range of exploration is somewhat limited which is not ideal from the identity development perspective. Students may enter the early stages of identity moratorium after participating in the program but they may not make substantial strides toward identity achievement due to the relatively restricted range of exploration.

Because students are not asked to express a value commitment during the program, it is reasonable to say that exploration is occurring prior to value commitment. This is in direct contrast with the *Choosing the Best* approach that encouraged students to sign an abstinence pledge during the educational program. So, while this encouragement increased the potential possibility of foreclosure, similar dangers do not appear to exist within the *Making Proud Choices* curriculum. It is somewhat likely that at the conclusion of the program students will remain in identity moratorium because the exploration process needed to achieve an identity is not yet completed. The exploration that takes place may have laid an initial foundation that may inform future value commitments. So, in this way a small amount of progress may occur toward identity achievement.

The ability of students to explore does seem to be promoted to some extent due to the fairly wide range of information that is shared within the program. However, the level of promotion is not ideal due to the aforementioned truncation with respect to the benefits abstinence. Although abstinence is mentioned directly at one point in the program and alluded to indirectly as a possible choice in a handful of other instances, the message that comes through most clearly is that students should

use condoms if they have sex and that this is regarded as a proud and responsible choice. Highlighting the health benefits of using condoms is certainly valuable but this alone does not help students to discover how they feel about sexual activity at this point in their lives and what choice might be most identity-congruent. While providing information can be an important part of exploration, students also need an opportunity for self-discovery based reflection in order to make choices that are likely to be consistent with their emerging identity structure.

Attitudes toward exploration will likely be affected positively as a result of the program. In addition to the amount of information presented, there are a variety of group discussion and brainstorming activities in which students are asked to share possible examples of the topic under discussion. Because student contributions are encouraged, this is likely to communicate the desirability of soliciting and considering a variety of perspectives. Even though abstinence is only mentioned at a few points during the program, it is not disparaged or discussed as an incorrect perspective. While students may not have the opportunity to consider abstinence in much depth, they will not be given the impression that the perspective is incorrect or unworthy of exploration. So, negative attitudes toward exploration do not seem likely as a result of *Making Proud Choices* program participation.

Given the range of information that is covered in this program, it seems unlikely that a student would adopt a diffuse-avoidant style. While particular value commitments are not promoted during this program, it could be argued that certain students may develop elements of a normative style due to the continual messages

about condom use. It is possible that an individual could perceive the take away message to be use condoms when you have sex. However, being sexually active is not being promoted as the best choice for all young people. Of Berzonsky's three styles, the informational style is the most likely to be promoted. Because students may not be in a position to assess all possible positions and engage in substantial personal reflection, this style may not be fully achieved during the program. It is reasonable to suggest that elements of this style will be encouraged and students may move closer to adopting an informational style.

Because of the aforementioned less than thorough nature of the exploration, the development of personal expressiveness is less likely. Students will absolutely be acquiring important pieces of information that may be essential to their particular value commitment. This could yield progress toward eventual personal expressiveness. However, due to the relative lack of self-assessment and reflection opportunities, a fully supported and articulated value commitment may need significant additional time to develop. The *Making Proud Choices* curriculum focuses acutely on understanding the personal risks that accompany risky behavior and the strategies for making choices to minimize this risk. This is a valuable focus and certainly supports health-promotion goals. However, without dedicated time to engage in cognitive and emotional self-discovery, developing a complete understanding of which choices are most identity-congruent and the reasons for their congruence is less likely.

Because the *Making Proud Choices* program is so focused on the benefits of safer sex practices, challenging feedback from the social context becomes somewhat less likely. It is extremely unlikely that any participants would argue for unprotected sex. So, the only available perspective that could be considered challenging is abstinence, which is not discussed in any detail. An activity inviting students to articulate the advantages of abstinence as well as the reasons young people may choose to be sexually active but to maintain safe sex practices would have been helpful in promoting the challenging feedback that can assist young people to advance through identity moratorium toward identity achievement.

Restricting the range of possibilities explored is inconsistent with creativity. Given that some exploration is occurring, creativity is not absent. However, the full range of creativity is probably less likely due to the limitations of the exploration process. Suspension of judgment seems reasonably likely within the program. No particular value positions are promoted and the comments alluding to abstinence indicate that some students may not need birth control information at this time. So, neither abstinence nor sexual activity is framed negatively. A certain amount of critical evaluation is possible for program students. However, their gains in this area may not be as strong as they might have been had more reflection on abstinence been included in the program.

It appears that some barriers to identity achievement may be related to this curricular approach. The primary issues seem to be the lack of discussion about the benefits of abstinence and the potential reasons for this personal choice as well as the

information delivery focus that does not allow for many opportunities for self-discovery and reflection activities. The end result is more limited exploration than what would be ideal which limits challenging feedback as well as the possibility for full development of an informational style and personal expressiveness. Students may make some progress into moratorium but the likelihood of nearing achievement at the conclusion of the program is not particularly strong.

While some congruence exists between this curricular approach and the practices most consistent with identity development theory, it is clear that gaps exist between the curricular realities and the ideal practices. Moreover, even though the program is advantageous in many respects, it does not live up to the SIECUS definition for comprehensive sex education. The SIECUS definition fared extremely well in the context of the eight important questions regarding identity development. However, while the pedagogical approach of the *Making Proud Choices* curriculum has some favorable points of consistency with identity development theory, there are many potential areas for improvement.

Abstinence-plus curriculum: Reducing the Risk

Reducing the Risk is a very prominent abstinence-plus curriculum. The program objectives are (Barth, 2004):

1. Evaluate the risks and consequences of becoming an adolescent parent or becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease.

2. Recognize that abstaining from sex or using contraception are the only ways to avoid pregnancy, HIV, and other STDs.
3. Conclude that factual information about contraception and protection is essential for avoiding pregnancy, HIV, and other STDs.
4. Demonstrate effective communication skills for remaining abstinent and avoiding unprotected sex.

The curriculum is presented in sixteen modules or classes. The summary of the sixteen classes in the paragraphs that follow is based on a review of the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum manual (Barth, 2004).

Class 1, “abstinence, sex and protection”, has two variations (pregnancy prevention and HIV prevention). After a general introduction, class 1 begins with an introductory role play between two young people (Lee and Lee), one who wants to engage in sex even though they do not have protection and one who resists moving forward without protection citing concerns about pregnancy and HIV. In the end, the resisting partner gives in and the couple gets pregnant or contracts HIV. Next, students participate in a risk awareness and assessment activity for either pregnancy or HIV depending upon the focus selected. The pregnancy risk activity focuses on understanding that pregnancy is extremely likely when engaging in unprotected sex. Students draw numbers that correspond to particular scenarios and the instructor reveals how many students became pregnant according to the random drawing. Students then complete a reflection exercise noting the pregnancy risk associated with

unprotected sex and writing a narrative about how their lives would change and why this might be undesirable. The HIV risk activity has a very similar structure except students draw different colored cards that are associated with behaviors that having differing levels of risk (i.e., abstaining, protected sex, unprotected sex, and sharing needles). The level of risk associated with each activity is discussed after the instructor reveals which card color is associated with which behavior. To conclude this lesson the class returns to an alternate version of the role-play in which the resistant partner holds firm and the couple does not experience a negative outcome.

Class two is focused on abstinence. The first segment deals with communicating about abstinence. Students revisit the role-play between Lee and Lee in order to identify statements that fall into communication, relationship building, and planning categories. After this exercise, the instructor shares facts about abstinence with the group. The last portion of this class is focused on reasons for abstinence and students are asked to complete a personal reflection sheet focused on what abstinence means to them. In the lesson summary, instructors are asked to acknowledge the potential challenges with remaining abstinent, that students must think carefully about what is right for them, and that if they are unsure waiting is better than having regrets.

Class three deals with refusals. Students are given an assignment to answer some questions about adolescent affection and sexual activity. They must also write down how they feel their parents would answer the same questions. They are then given an assignment to talk to their parents and ask these questions. Next examples verbal and nonverbal refusals are discussed. Students are then asked to engage in

three different role-plays each of which has an ineffective and effective refusal version.

Class four which is focused on using refusal skills builds on the foundation that was developed in class three. The first portion of the class is a quiz on a review of the refusal methods covered in class three. Following this activity, students are asked to generate situations or statements that young people would find difficult to refuse. Then these statements are read to the group and students are asked to share possible responses. The last portion of the class is devoted to several role play exercises conducted in small groups. Two students read through the role play while the remaining members of the group use an observer checklist to identify examples of verbal and nonverbal refusals, repeated refusals, suggesting alternatives, and relationship building. To conclude the instructor leads a group discussion to review how it felt to use the refusal skills, any barriers to using the skill, and how the scenarios were like real life. The class is also asked to share the biggest impression the role-play made and how they might use these skills in the next week.

Class five introduces students to delaying tactics. After a short review of class four, possible delaying tactics are introduced. These tactics are intended to be used when a difficult situation arises in which students are uncomfortable moving forward but need time to figure out exactly how they want to refuse. Five tactics are recommended including making a statement to delay, taking a delay action, creating space, ending the situation quickly, and making a statement that builds the relationship. After learning about these methods, students are asked to engage in

another role play using the same method described in lesson four along with an observer checklist to look for the five delay tactics. At the end of this class, the methods are reviewed and students complete a quiz.

Class six discusses avoiding high-risk situations. The assignment to talk with one's parents that was distributed in class three is due at the beginning of class six. The class is asked to discuss their parents' answers to the questions, if the answers were what they expected, if the answers gave them some new ideas, if they disagreed with their parents on any items, and if they would talk to their parents about these topics again. The second portion of the class is devoted to recognizing signs of caution and signs of an impending sex crisis. The focus of this presentation is to help students recognize when they or their significant other may be starting to think about the possibility of having sex. Students who pick up these signs are encouraged to develop a plan for a potential conversation about sex and for obtaining protection if they decide to have sex. Students are then asked to complete a planning worksheet outlining responses to various signs of sex. The final class activity asks students to identify myths and truths about sex and protection.

Class seven focuses on getting and using protection. This class begins with a lecture on methods for preventing pregnancy. Methods that do not work and methods that can be very effective with correct use are discussed separately. Students are given a shopping information assignment for which they must visit a store and find three types of condoms and one type of contraceptive foam that is available. They must write down the product details, reflect on their comfort level shopping in the

store, and note the hours the store is open for business. To summarize the lesson, instructors note that, while abstinence is the only 100% effective method, there are a variety of methods that can be very effective for preventing pregnancy and disease.

Class eight continues the discussion of getting and using protection. This class starts off with a detailed discussion of condoms and a demonstration of proper condom use. Students are then given an assignment to visit or call a health clinic to obtain information about available services and costs. Students are also given a second assignment to describe the route and transportation method they could use to get to the clinic from their home. In the last portion of the class students are asked to complete a reflection worksheet detailing their personal assessment of pregnancy prevention methods noting the methods with which they would be most comfortable and which methods seem to be the best choice for them. Students are also asked to review an HIV prevention worksheet. In summary, instructors note that not all students may need this information now but that they will need it at some point in their lives. The importance of understanding these methods and skills before having sex is stressed.

Class nine deals with knowing and talking about protection. The initial activity for class nine is a review discussion about myths and truths regarding protection methods that were originally presented in class six. After this review, the discussion turns to the impact that peer-to-peer communication can have on judgments about sexuality and protection. Students are encouraged to make their own decisions rather than simply accepting the views of their friends. Then students

are asked to read through two role-play exercises (one about condoms and the other about birth control pills) in order to think through responses to contrary or ill-informed comments.

Class ten is a skills integration class in which refusals and delaying tactics are revisited and generating alternatives is discussed. Students are asked to review two situations in groups to determine what alternate actions could be taken. The first situation is one in which two young people are alone in a sibling's apartment and the second in one in which the two young people are alone and find the condom they were planning to use is gone. Students are asked to consider how the young people might either avoid sex or avoid unprotected sex and to list alternative actions. The final portion of the class is devoted to two role-playing activities in small groups. In both scenarios a dating couple has an opportunity to be alone and one partner wants to have sex and the other partner is not ready. Lines are scripted for the partner who wants to have sex but unscripted for the partner who is not ready. Each student is to take a turn responding as the partner who is not ready while the rest of the group uses observer checklists to look for refusals and delaying tactics.

Class eleven is a skills integration class in which discussing protected sex and avoiding unprotected sex are discussed. The first role-play exercise asks the students to imagine they have a younger sister who is considering having sex but they feel she is too young. They must then generate responses to her arguments for having sex. After this activity the instructor leads a class discussion about the best reasons not to have sex, the reasons to have sex, and good ways to encourage young people not to

have sex. The last activity is another role-play exercise dealing with a scenario in which a couple has had unprotected sex once but one partner wants to start using protection. Students are asked to generate possible approaches to negotiating for condom use.

Class twelve focuses on preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The primary focus of this class is for the instructor to share a variety of facts about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. Students then participate in an activity in which they draw the name of an STD and must write down five facts about the disease. The instructor then asks students to generate a list of ways all sexually transmitted diseases are alike and how HIV differs from many other diseases. At the end of the class a homework exercise is assigned that asks students to reflect on how contracting HIV would change their life.

Class thirteen reviews HIV risk behaviors. This class begins by discussing behaviors that are high, moderate, or no or low risk. To more clearly illustrate the risk levels they are presented in a continuum and each is assigned a color (i.e., red for high risk, yellow for moderate risk, and green for no or low risk). Note cards with 23 behaviors listed are distributed and the student groups are asked to decide where each behavior belongs on the risk continuum. After all groups have completed the discussion, the risk behaviors answer sheet is distributed and each behavior is discussed.

Class fourteen deals with implementing protection from STD and pregnancy. The first activity is to delineate the steps to protection. Students complete a

worksheet that asks them to respond to a variety of questions in three distinct areas (i.e., talking to their partner about protection, purchasing condoms and foam, and using the condoms and foam). After completing the worksheet students are asked to form small groups and to develop a role-play that addresses the steps to protection outlined in the worksheet. Student groups then share their role-plays with the class. In closing, the instructor discusses the importance of planning for protection.

Class fifteen covers sticking with abstinence and protection. This class begins with a review of the homework exercises from classes seven and eight (i.e., the shopping information form and the visit or call a clinic assignment). Students then complete an exercise in which they are asked to generate doubts they might have about abstaining or using protection. Then they are asked to generate thoughts or actions that can help them to eliminate doubt and stick with either abstinence or using protection.

Class sixteen is a final skills integration class in which students discuss sticking with their choices and avoiding unprotected sex. Students are presented with two stories about two young people who are considering having sex. Students are then asked to generate reasons to have sex, reasons to wait, actions that will delay sex, and ways to stick with protection. At the end of this class, students are asked to engage in a reflection exercise to make a list of what they learned in the program and what they have discovered about themselves.

This curricular approach has many advantages and strengths. All names used in the role-play exercises are gender neutral which avoids gender stereotyping. The

emphasis on role-play exercises gives the students a chance for both cognitive and behavioral exploration in a safe environment. Not only can they think through the options, but they can also rehearse possible behavioral strategies. There are also many instances in which students are asked to engage in personal reflection to assess how they are feeling and what they may find to be the best decision. The curriculum thoroughly examines the potential ramifications of both abstinence and sexual activity. However, students are not asked to endorse a particular course of action during the program.

Exploration is certainly promoted within the *Reducing the Risk* program. A wide range of topics is discussed during the sixteen class sessions. Both abstinence and more comprehensive topics such as sexual health and birth control are covered in great detail. In addition to the presentation of a wide range of important information, students are asked to participate in a myriad of role-play exercises designed to simulate situations in which they must contemplate options, assert their values and beliefs, and negotiate to move forward in a way that is consistent with their personal choices. So, the exploration promoted within this program is not simply limited to cognitive or intellectual exploration. Intrapersonal and behavioral exploration, both of which are critically important to the multifaceted analysis necessary for self-discovery and identity-congruent decision-making, are also promoted.

Students are not invited or encouraged to commit to a particular choice during the program. Because the focus of the program is on multifaceted exploration and not on asking students to pledge to make a particular choice, exploration prior to value

commitment is definitely occurring. There are many exercises that involve personal reflection on life goals, outcomes of particular sexual behaviors, and student reaction to potential outcomes. These exercises in conjunction with the informational presentations provide a particularly desirable pedagogical combination because they establish a foundation for the introspective cognitive and emotional analysis that is needed to make identity-congruent choices.

The ability to explore also appears to be enhanced through this program. There are several reflection and research assignments required. These assignments not only guide students through exploration during that phase of the program but also teach the students how to explore on their own after the program concludes. For example, students are required to visit a store and visit or call a clinic as part of two assignments. This shows students how to get information about products and services and helps them to mentally prepare to purchase or utilize services that they might need. Even if these young people were to move to another city or state, they have acquired a behavioral approach that will allow them to get this information wherever they are. Also, as a result of having done these assignments, their comfort level with acquiring this information is likely to be increased.

In addition to the promotion of the ability to explore, student attitudes toward exploration will likely be influenced positively. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, student comfort level with exploring and finding information is likely to rise. Negative emotional reactions such as embarrassment and undesirable behavioral responses such as avoidance become less likely as comfort level increases.

Additionally, because ongoing exploration and open discussion is both modeled by instructors and is a fundamental part of the pedagogical approach, students are likely to develop the impression that exploring is desirable. Moreover, because their contributions to the class will be valued and encouraged, they are more likely to develop a positive response to exploratory activities.

The informational style seems the most likely of Berzonsky's three identity styles to be encouraged via exposure to the *Reducing the Risk* program. Those developing this style are inclined to carefully evaluate information, engage in an introspective analysis, and select the perspectives that are most identity-congruent. Due to the amount of information that is provided, it is extremely unlikely that students could remain in a diffuse-avoidant state. Moreover, because options are discussed without indicating a particular option as the one that all students should accept, the normative style is also not likely to be facilitated within the program. Due to the careful presentation of various perspectives and information along with encouragement to reflect on one's own feelings and reactions, this program is most consistent with the necessary elements for the informational style.

It seems reasonable to posit that a foundation for personal expressiveness will be facilitated for those participating in the program. Specific value commitments are not elicited during the program. It is unclear if students will make a specific commitment or if they will remain in moratorium at the end of the program. It may be the case that they are still engaging in exploration and reflection at the conclusion of the program and therefore may not be ready to make a particular commitment.

Even if this is the case, however, a foundation for personal expressiveness is likely to have been formed. Personal expressiveness exists when we are able to express the reasoning behind our value commitments. Given the very thorough nature of the information delivered along with the ample number of opportunities for students to engage in personal reflection, students are likely to be well positioned to achieve personal expressiveness.

According to identity control theory (Kerpelman and Smith, 1999), social context and influences are important for identity development. They note that a certain amount of challenging feedback from the social context is important for identity development in that it encourages us to explore perspectives that we may not have otherwise considered. The *Reducing the Risk* program does a better job of engaging the social context and eliciting feedback than either of the other two programs. Not only do the discussion and role-play activities invite feedback but students are also asked to complete an assignment that requires them to ask their parents about teen sexual activity and behavioral options. This ensures that students have a discussion with their parents to find out their perspectives and increases the likelihood that ideas they may not have considered might be shared.

The wide range of information discussed is consistent with enhancing creativity within Kurtines' model. Being presented with a wide variety of perspectives seems consistent with the generation of a variety of options that is necessary for creativity. Given that particular perspectives are not identified as correct for all individuals but rather presented along with associated advantages and

considerations, suspension of judgment seems likely. Because both creativity and suspension of judgment appear to be supported, a rational, objective analysis is likely to be facilitated and critical evaluation is more likely to develop.

As previously mentioned, no educational environment or approach can be barrier free. There are always potential barriers that may arise due to the comfort level, expertise, and motivation of the teacher. Environmental factors as well as student variables can also detract from the educational process. However, focusing specifically on the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum and evaluating the likelihood that barriers might be created through the recommended pedagogical process, it does not appear that this program creates any additional barriers.

Overall, the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum is very consistent with identity development principles. Moreover, it demonstrates more consistency with the ambitious SIECUS definition of comprehensive sex education than the comprehensive curriculum, *Making Proud Choices*, discussed in the previous section. While the analysis of the definition of abstinence-plus sex education within the context of identity development theory suggested the possibility that a foreclosure encouraging approach may be possible, the pedagogical reality of the *Reducing the Risk* program does not appear to encourage foreclosure. The program is quite comprehensive and maintains a balance between informing students about the benefits of abstinence and educating them about safer sex practices. Students have the opportunity to build a behavioral repertoire via the role-playing exercises that are a core feature of the program. Moreover, students are invited to engage in a number

of reflection exercises that ask them to evaluate their own emotional and cognitive reactions to various possibilities and situations. This, in turn, facilitates the self-discovery process and increases the likelihood that students will be in a position to make identity-congruent choices. Based on these three curricular analyses, it seems clear that the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum has the highest level of consistency with the identity development and achievement process.

Discussion of sex education in the societal context

Within the context of the eight important identity development questions, the SIECUS defined parameters of comprehensive sex education were more consistent with the identity development process than the definitions of abstinence-only and abstinence-plus sex education. However, when examining the three specific curricular examples, the abstinence-plus curriculum, *Reducing the Risk*, was much more congruent with identity development than its abstinence-only and comprehensive counterparts, *Choosing the Best Life* and *Making Proud Choices*. This discrepancy underscores the fact that each curriculum should be evaluated based on its own merits and not simply by virtue of the archetypal label applied to it. In this particular case, the abstinence-plus curriculum was more comprehensive when measured against the SIECUS definition than the comprehensive curriculum. So, these categorical labels may not accurately reflect the level of consistency of a given curricular approach with the identity development literature.

In the analysis of sex education definitions, there were some important questions raised about the potential level of consistency of abstinence-plus approaches as defined and identity development principles. Promotion of abstinence, which is a part of the abstinence-plus definition, could potentially take on many forms. Some methods of promotion might be inconsistent with the identity development process. However, in the case of the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum, promotion of abstinence manifested as highlighting the potential benefits of choosing

abstinence. This, in turn, yielded the aforementioned high level of consistency with identity development principles that surpassed the categorical definition.

While the SIECUS definition of recommended comprehensive sex education practices was very consistent with the factors that are important for facilitating identity development, the comprehensive curriculum, *Making Proud Choices*, was not as aligned with identity development principles. Due to a failure to include discussion of the benefits of abstinence and the potential reasons this might be a desirable behavioral choice, exploration within this curriculum was not entirely adequate. Moreover, while there were some opportunities for students to reflect on their feelings and analysis, self-discovery was not promoted at a level that fully supports the identity development process. So, even though there were many beneficial aspects to the curriculum, it did not measure up to the high level of consistency exhibited by the SIECUS definition.

Both the abstinence-only definition and the *Choosing the Best Life* curricular approach were similarly inconsistent with identity development principles. This should not be surprising in light of the fact that the program objectives for the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum were derived directly from the eight-point Title V definition of abstinence-only sex education. Truncated exploration that excludes an explanation of contraceptive use, encouragement of one specific value commitment, an absence of self-reflection and critical analysis opportunities, and a lack of self-discovery and personal choice promotion, combine to produce an approach that is barrier-laden and inconsistent with movement toward identity achievement.

Given the relatively poor performance of both the abstinence-only definition as well as the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum in light of the eight identity development questions in addition to the fact that relatively few empirical studies demonstrate lasting benefits that exceed those produced through other approaches, it is reasonable to ask why the abstinence-only approach to sex education gained such prominence particularly during the majority of the last decade. The recent period of exclusive endorsement of abstinence-only sex education is cause for significant concern. It seems as though the Bush Presidential administration proceeded with a staunch dedication to the abstinence-only agenda that neglected both the research on the effectiveness of sex education programs as well as public opinion about the value of comprehensive sex education. In this section, I will discuss our recent societal focus on abstinence-only sex education, outline factors that may have contributed to or reinforced this focus, and discuss how these factors may have interfered with openness to more comprehensive approaches to sex education.

Reacting to the findings in the 2004 Waxman House of Representatives report as well as trends in the years since the findings were published, Santelli (2008) noted that the federal government had spent over one billion dollars on abstinence-only education programs containing medical inaccuracies and no substantive information about birth control methods. He goes on to contend that these approaches cannot be regarded as providing medically accurate information and hence may actually be jeopardizing the health and even the lives of teenagers and young adults. Santelli (2008) concluded by stating that politics should not drive public health practice but

rather research should inform us about public health and that this information should then guide public policy.

Unfortunately, in the recent political climate, those who attempted to focus on the accuracy and effectiveness of abstinence-only programs were sometimes subjected to very negative consequences. A 2007 editorial published in the *Lancet* detailed the congressional testimony of Richard Carmona, former U.S. Surgeon General, who stated that he had been muzzled by the Bush administration during his 2002-2006 term in office. He described being blocked from sharing views about abstinence-only sex education that were at odds with the position of the Bush administration. Moreover, it has also come to light that researchers who were scheduled to present their work at a Center for Disease Control (CDC) conference were prevented from doing so because their research suggested a link between abstinence-only sex education and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases. According to the author, the CDC caved under political pressure and replaced these researchers with others whose views were consistent with the Bush administration's political positions on sex education. The editorial concludes by stressing that those appointed to promote public health should not be constrained by a political agenda that prevents them from properly fulfilling their role.

Additionally, instead of addressing the potential shortcomings of abstinence-only sex education, Dailard (2006) notes that the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families under the direction of the Bush administration revised the definition of abstinence to include any sexual activity including but not limited to sexual

intercourse. It is believed that this action was taken in response to the aforementioned Bruckner and Bearman (2005) research that demonstrated an increased likelihood for abstinence-only sex education students to engage in alternatives to vaginal intercourse (i.e., oral or anal sex). So, it appears that the underlying belief was that changing the definition of abstinence would address this problem. At the same time the definition was changed, the Bush administration announced a plan to dedicate a continually increasing amount of funding to abstinence-only sex education. This action prompted an outcry from both Michael Leavitt, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and Henry Waxman, Democratic Congressional Representative, who co-authored a letter indicating that the Bush administration response was tantamount to clinging to an ideology that neglects the realities of program effectiveness on teen sexual activity, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Moreover, Constantine (2008) noted that recent policies have not been based on a solid rationale or philosophy but rather strong ideological affinities that are not supported by the current research. Those supporting the abstinence-only sex education curriculum certainly must believe that this information is what will benefit young people in our nation today. However, he contends they are so entrenched in this belief that they are unable or unwilling to look at the evidence and to question their policy decisions.

In an effort to better understand the disparate sex education viewpoints, McKay (1997) proposed two distinct ideological perspectives: a restrictive and

permissive sexual ideology. The restrictive ideology, according to McKay, is rooted in Christian religious traditions and continues to have a considerable influence on thinking about sexuality. The permissive ideology, on the other hand, construes sexual behavior as a natural and pleasurable part of being a human being. These two ideologies drive dramatically different approaches to sex education. Those who embrace the restrictive perspective favor sex education that is focused almost entirely on abstinence while those allied with the permissive perspective encourage a more comprehensive approach to education. McKay feels that we have been unable to achieve an affirmation of diversity of sexual ideologies and that, for the most part, those in each camp are pitted against one another.

Clearly, this debate is very contentious and divisive. Those who do not believe that abstinence-only sex education is an effective or desirable approach are unable to understand how the proponents of abstinence-only programs can tout superiority in light of a plethora of evidence that suggests otherwise. However, in order to bridge this ideological gap and to increase the chances of building some amount of consensus regarding how to best move forward with sex education, we must attempt to understand the root causes that may have led some members of society to develop the firmly held belief that promoting abstinence is necessary and important.

In examining the reasons why the abstinence-only perspective is embraced by a substantial segment of the population, it is important to analyze historical considerations related to our view of sex and sex education. It appears that our

society has experienced an ongoing level of discomfort with sexual behavior. Maddock (1997) points out that the sexual climate present in the United States through the twentieth century was influenced by the ideas of eighteenth century Europe. He notes that Victorian values and attitudes held by our society emphasized traditional gender roles and particular definitions of favorable and unfavorable behavior for women and men. Social appropriateness and restraint were looked upon favorably while indulgence and assertiveness were not seen as desirable. This emphasis on Victorian values shaped a societal tendency toward harsh judgment of sexual behavior and particularly on sexual behavior outside of marriage. Specific anecdotal examples of this judgment pattern are not hard to find. For example, Moran (2000) points out that the Flappers of the 1920's were looked on with disdain for breaking away from the aforementioned Victorian values of restraint and social decorum. It is clear that as a society we have a tendency to carefully scrutinize the behavior of others and at times this focus is acutely directed toward young people. Looking at our history over the last century, examples of the scrutiny of unrestrained behaviors are not hard to find. For example, the Flappers of the 20s, those who listened to rock and roll music in the 50s, or those who embraced the sexual revolution of the 60s were all seen as problematic by some members of society. It seems that the youth of today are often characterized as having loose morals or as behaving undesirably no matter when today happens to be. So, it appears that a substantial segment of our society has been continually concerned that our moral

standards are being diminished by the behavior of the younger generations and that it is important to do something to reinstate this lost morality.

Furthermore, some people believe that the need for sex education and the incidence of premarital pregnancy is a relatively recent phenomenon related to the declining morality of young people. However, the historical evidence is at odds with this belief and demonstrates quite clearly that premarital sexual activity most certainly was occurring from the earliest days of our history as a nation. Smith and Hindus (1975) note that in the 1600's during a time when strict punishments and fines were sometimes imposed on those found guilty of sex before marriage, the rates of premarital pregnancies continued to rise. According to Smith and Hindus, the number of punishments (i.e., whipping or fines) given in Essex County, Massachusetts from 1643-1652 was only 14 but rose to 196 between the years 1668-1682. Moreover, Rhode (1994) noted that an estimated one in three seventeenth-century Chesapeake immigrant brides and one in ten New England brides were pregnant. She also notes that by the late eighteenth century an estimated 30 percent of brides were pregnant. Premarital pregnancy was significantly lower by the mid-nineteenth century, at around 10 percent, but rose to approximately 23 percent by the end of the nineteenth century. According to Moran (2000), religious conversion in the nineteenth century was encouraged in the hope that this would control youthful sexuality. Clearly, this approach did not produce the desired effect. Moving into the twentieth century, Rhode (1994) observed that premarital sexual activity jumped sharply during the 1920s and then remained stable until the late 1960s. She also

points out that, interestingly, in the late 1960s and early 1970s our country saw its first widespread perception of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, even though the birth rate among adolescent females had actually been dropping since 1957 and continued to fall until 1983.

There are those who believe that even though premarital sex has always occurred that the behavior has become more prominent in recent years due to the widespread availability of contraceptives and exposure to sexualized content via the media. However, the research does not support this contention. Finer (2007) examined trends in premarital sex in the United States from 1954 to 2003 and found that the proportion of individuals who reported engaging in premarital sex and the age of sexual debut has remained relatively stable during this 50 year period. In this study, the level of premarital sexual activity of 10 year cohort groups (i.e., 1954-1963, 1964-1973, 1974-1983, 1984-1993, and 1994-2003) was assessed. The 1994-2003 cohort group exhibited a very slight decrease in reports of premarital sex but this decrease did not meet the level of statistical significance. So, in essence, this data points to the fact that premarital sex is a relatively common phenomenon that is not restricted to those who are teenagers and young adults today.

The historical facts clearly indicate that sexual activity among young, unmarried people is not a new phenomenon. However, while these facts are available if sought out, they are not widely publicized. As a result, some misperceptions and assumptions continue to exist about the extent of the differences in sexual activity over time. These inaccurate perceptions serve as a barrier to understanding sexuality

and to lead people to cognitively compartmentalize the issue and define it as a recent problem. However, based on the historical data, it is clear that young, unmarried people in every generation have been sexually active. Therefore, we are not dealing simply with a moral weakness of the youth of recent generations but rather an ongoing behavior pattern that spans the generations.

This tendency to think of young people as more inappropriate or immoral than member of previous generations is unfortunate. The drive to physically express romantic love is simply part of the human experience. Recognition of this reality serves to underscore the importance of improving our approaches to sex education. Even if we personally regard sexual activity before marriage as problematic, the historical data illustrates that this behavior has been occurring with some degree of regularity in our country since it was founded. Refusing to accept the realities of human behavior and expecting young people today to conform to a standard that previous generations were unable to attain is not productive or helpful in developing sex education programs. If a behavior is normative and is likely to continue to occur, it is desirable to provide the best possible educational experience so that young people can make identity-congruent choices and potentially negative behavioral outcomes can be minimized or perhaps eliminated.

The Title V definition of abstinence-only education denotes that abstinence until marriage is the expected standard of behavior. This definition echoes teachings within various religious traditions stating explicitly that sexual activity should occur only in the marital context. Perspectives grounded in the Christian religious tradition

and conservative social values are often associated with the promotion of abstinence. Those espousing these views typically focus on maintaining strong moral standards and preserving one's purity until marriage.

A societal trend that is important to consider when evaluating the viability of abstaining until marriage is the average age at first marriage. In general, people in the United States are waiting longer to marry. Schoen and Standish (2001) noted that the average age for first marriage has risen substantially to 26.6 for women and 28.6 for men. Because these are average ages this naturally means that some individuals are waiting until age 30 or later to marry. With these continued increases in the average age for marriage and given the fact that many individuals choose to cohabitate and to become involved in long-term committed relationships prior to marriage, it is extremely challenging to remain abstinent until marriage. Moreover, Finer (2007) notes that it is not surprising to find that premarital sex is a normative behavior especially in light of the fact that most people in the current era are marrying in their mid-to-late twenties. When examined in this fashion, the proscription to abstain until marriage seems questionable in that members of today's society would be required to exercise restraint for a much longer duration than our historical counterparts and to refrain from a behavior that research has clearly identified as normative.

It is generally a wise practice to consider the relevance of a prescribed set of behaviors and values within the context of the current realities of our world. Restricting ourselves to historical viewpoints prevents us from growing and progressing as a society. While history can and should inform our thinking, it is

important to promote a contemporary understanding of human interactions and behaviors so that individuals are in a position to make choices that fit the reality of the world in which they live today. Put simply, it is not practical to expect abstinence until marriage from all individuals in contemporary society.

Another important variable that may have contributed to abstinence-only fervor was the discovery of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Although many generations have been concerned about contracting sexually transmitted diseases, early diseases such as gonorrhea and syphilis were treatable and usually not life threatening. However, with the discovery of HIV and AIDS in the 1980's, fear about the potentially life-threatening impact of unprotected sex permeated the nation. The emergence of AIDS led to a significant psychological turning point in our views regarding sexual behavior. Diminished morality, premarital pregnancy, and treatable illness, no longer were the predominant focus. At this point in our history, sexual activity became potentially lethal. In all likelihood, this reality had a significant emotional impact for anyone who was sexually active as well as parents who were concerned about protecting their children from harm. Moreover, due to the fact that some level of disease contraction risk exists when engaging in protected sex, it is not surprising that the motivation to promote abstinence would be enhanced given that it is the only entirely risk free alternative. So while some had encouraged abstinence over the years due to the view that it was the morally superior path, there was at this point in our history an even stronger case for its importance in the realm of personal health.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, abstinence-only advocates express concern that providing contraceptive information could be taken as permission to engage in sex provided that protection is used. Given the added element of life-threatening risk associated with AIDS, some individuals may have experienced significant anxiety about the potential for young people to contract HIV even if they were using protection. This concern may have contributed to the motivation to withhold discussion of contraceptives and proper usage techniques. While this protective drive is understandable, it is unfortunately short sighted. Withholding information does not guarantee inaction. It simply increases the likelihood that young people will be ill-informed and unprepared to make personal choices about sex and protection.

In addition to the fact that withholding information began to gain favor in the backdrop of AIDS, a renewed emphasis on communicating life-threatening risks emerged. It is clearly important for young people to understand these risks. However, the communication sometimes seemed to take the form of a fear campaign including a dialogue of dangers, contamination, and contraceptive failure rates. There appeared to be a hope that the combination of lack of information combined with scare tactics would yield sexual abstinence. However, this type of approach was unsuccessful in producing the desired inhibition of behavior.

There is some indication from psychological research that warning statements and behavioral discouragements may produce a behavioral increase. Bushman and Cantor (2003) describe the forbidden fruit effect in their research dealing with

television warnings about sexual content and violence. Instead of decreasing the likelihood of program viewing, these warnings sometimes make individuals more likely to watch the program. The effect is strongest for individuals in their teenage or young adult years. The forbidden fruit effect is based on reactance theory (Brehm, 1972) that states when individuals feel their freedoms have been restricted they will be motivated to reclaim this freedom. So informing young people that they should not engage in a behavior may actually make the behavior more rather than less likely. If we evaluate abstinence-only sex education in light of the forbidden fruit effect, the abstinence-only approach seems unlikely to produce the desired behavioral consequence and in fact may make some young people more interested in becoming sexually active. Telling young people that sexual activity is reserved for married people and that they should not be engaging in the behavior certainly gives sex a forbidden status. According to reactance theory (Brehm, 1972), young people receiving these messages may be highly motivated to explore the restricted or forbidden experience in order to demonstrate their freedom to make their own choices. This forbidden fruit effect may also explain why the “Just Say No” drug prevention campaign of the 1980’s was not particularly effective. It seems that we may be inclined to reject authoritarian positions about what behavior we should or should not exhibit and that the likelihood of rejection is particularly strong during the teen to young adult years. We need to be cognizant of this possibility and use it to inform our understanding regarding the effectiveness of sex education approaches.

Moreover, we sometimes neglect to consider the power of external influences such as messages from peers or exposure to sexuality in the media. If we say in a formal sex education context that young people should not engage in sex but expose them to a wide variety of sexualized messages and programming in the media, young people are receiving mixed messages. If adolescents have the perception that their friends are sexually active and see repeated sexual depictions in television and movies, this may overpower the abstinence-only message delivered in the confines of one educational program. For example, Chia and Lee (2008) found that students perceived their peers to be more sexually active than was actually the case and that this misperception was due in part to the students' own media consumption. It does seem to be the case as well that what we learn about our peers can affect our own behavior. Henry, Schoeny, Deptula, and Slavik (2007) found in their longitudinal study of 15- to 18-year-old students that having a friend who had sex without a condom was a significant predictor in the probability of personal unprotected sex. Because of the potential power of external influence, it is important to recognize the need to provide much more than a simple proscription to avoid engaging in sex. We must instead recognize these influences, encourage young people to be aware of their potential power, and discuss the process of making one's own identity-congruent choices. This, of course, may not guarantee that students will be immune from the effects of peer pressure but it may increase the number of young people who make their own choice and resist peer influence.

In addition to the attempts to dissuade all young people from engaging in premarital sex that are part of the abstinence-only approach, some cautionary statements seem to be gender specific. Certain messages within the abstinence-only sex education context suggest a concern about young women being adversely affected because of sex. Fine (1988) argues that within sex education we find a discourse of victimization particularly in the case of young women. Young women are seen as potential victims who need to be protected from the ills that premarital sex can bring such as loss of purity, pregnancy, and disease. She contends that there is little if any recognition that young women can experience and be motivated by their own sexual desire. Examples of this discourse of victimization can be seen in the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum. In scenarios or role-play activities in which one partner was initiating, the young woman was portrayed as being the recipient of sexual advances from a young man that she was obliged to resist. Moreover, in the first module, gender differences with respect to sex are discussed in a very stereotyped manner. Young men are characterized as simply being motivated by physical pleasure while young women are characterized as being motivated by emotional needs. There is absolutely no recognition that young men may have emotional needs and young women may be motivated by their sex drive. Fine argues that shifting to a discourse of desire is crucial within the realm of sex education. From her perspective, it is important for young people to understand that they are all motivated to a certain extent by physical needs and pleasure seeking. She contends that providing this

discourse of desire is much more beneficial, particularly for young women who can take ownership of their sexuality as opposed to viewing themselves as victims.

Fine (1988) also contends that married heterosexuality is typically presented as the standard for sexual practice in the sex education context. This ideological facet is built into the abstinence-only definition of sex education. The message seems to be that there is one ideal standard (i.e., remaining abstinent until after one enters into a heterosexual marriage) and anything that deviates from this standard is deemed undesirable or incorrect. Additionally, the success of abstinence-only programs is often defined primarily in terms of the level of acceptance of the presented values and the associated behavioral compliance. Defining program success simply in terms of a specific behavioral outcome substantially impacts the pedagogical process and reduces the program to a series of behavioral instructions. Rather than sharing information and promoting critical thinking, reflection, and self-discovery, this authoritarian pedagogy invites learners to accept a one size fits all behavioral proscription.

Another implication of promoting one standard of sex within the context of heterosexual marriage is that other sexual orientations are completely excluded. Since a substantial number of individuals are not heterosexual, this emphasis is likely to leave some young people feeling invalidated. It is difficult enough in our society for young people who are not heterosexual to come to terms with their sexuality and identity. Sending a message that sex within the context of heterosexual marriage is the normal and expected standard clearly communicates that they are abnormal and

undesirable by virtue of their different orientation. This is also completely at odds with fostering identity development. Rather than promoting self-discovery and subsequent identity achievement, foreclosure on the expected standard is obviously the goal.

While one could make the argument that moving forward with a particular educational approach that we believe may be successful is reasonable, during a substantial portion of the last decade our country seemed to exhibit an inability to learn not only from our own research but also from the rest of the world. Sex education research from other countries is replete with evidence suggesting that comprehensive approaches to sex education are the most effective. In the aforementioned 2005 study, Weaver, Smith, and Kippax compared sex education programs in the Netherlands, France, Australia, and the United States. They found that the U.S. teens had the least exposure to comprehensive sex education and they exhibited substantially higher pregnancy rates, lower rates of contraceptive usage, higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases and infections, and a younger age of first sexual activity. However, even though these results clearly indicated that our approach was the least effective, there was no recognition during the previous Presidential administration that we might be able to learn something from the more successful approaches used in other countries. Unfortunately, our country sometimes exhibits an ethnocentric perspective. Many citizens in our society see our nation as distinct and believe that our country is the best in the world. While this pride is positive in many respects and may be warranted in certain areas, it sometimes

prevents us from being open to approaches that have been successful in other parts of the world. In the case of sex education, our ethnocentric tendencies have served as a barrier to improving our educational practices.

Overall, there are a variety of historical and cultural variables that have reinforced the notion that an abstinence-only approach to sex education was the most desirable. However, blindly operating from this perspective has failed to ensure that sex education is giving young people what they need to understand their own sexuality and to make identity-congruent decisions about sexual behavior. Moreover, Diorio (2001) asserts that when we do not present the existing diversity of views about sexuality and sexual activity we harm our students. He goes on to say that sex educators have a moral responsibility to ensure that diverse perspectives are included in the educational process. In the next section, I will present recommendations for a sex education pedagogy that moves away from the constraints that led to a focus on abstinence-only education and progresses toward an identity-centered approach that provides a comprehensive presentation of information and diverse perspectives.

Recommendations for sex education pedagogy

Our recent focus on abstinence-only sex education has produced some unintended negative effects and has not moved us closer to meeting the needs of young people. The abstinence-only approach has not only short-changed students of important practical knowledge but has also attempted to impose specific value positions on all students. However, we should not be focused on transmission or imposition of values in the education process but rather personal evaluation of values. We have a rich diversity of thoughts, feelings, temperaments, predispositions, experiences, and values in our country and our world. It does not seem logical to posit that there is one value position that will be the best fit for an entire society of diverse individuals. Instead of attempting to indoctrinate young people to accept a value we should be helping students to evaluate the possibilities and to make an identity-congruent, personal choice that is seated in self-discovery and self-reflection.

Reflecting on the tension between indoctrination and personal choice, McKay (1997) states that the lack of tolerance between those holding restrictive and permissive ideologies is problematic and incongruent with democratic values. He contends that democratic societies are founded on moral pluralism which embodies tolerance and respect for the differing opinions of members of our society. Freedom of belief is to be accepted and promoted as a part of democratic values and in order for students to achieve this freedom they must be able to critically evaluate options and make their own decisions. He concludes by stating that, if we as a society are committed to acceptance of pluralism and diversity, we must apply these same values

to differing views on sexual ideology and accept this diversity of beliefs. This, then, should logically lead us away from the restrictive ideology and toward a more comprehensive approach that is inclusive and democratic.

Continuing the discussion regarding the importance of personal choice, Archard (1998) delineates two possible approaches to sex education: the retreating to basics strategy and the conjunctive-disjunctive strategy. The retreat to basics strategy is one in which an agreed upon code of sexual behavior is taught while the conjunctive-disjunctive strategy focuses on teaching the facts of sex education along with all the possible interpretations of these facts. He notes that both of these approaches have shortcomings in that it would be difficult or impossible to agree upon one sexual code of behavior and we may not feel comfortable or justified in teaching all perspectives on sexual behavior (i.e., perspectives of rapists or pedophiles). Due to the potential drawbacks of each of these opposing strategies, the debate regarding which approach has the most merit is likely to continue. Archard (1998) argues for approaching the educational process in a way that is most consistent with the conjunctive-disjunctive strategy and recommends that our approach to sex education promote freedom and autonomy. “We should be as free in our sexual lives as it is alleged we should be in every other part of our life. And we should teach sex in a way that is consistent with that ideal. The onus is on the critic to show why it should not be thus” (p.448).

Analyzing the appropriateness of discussing values in the context of sex education, Halstead and Reiss (2003) argue that sex education is value laden and that attempting to teach value free sex education would not be possible. They note, however, that before the aims of sex education can be addressed and achieved two primary tasks must take place: determining what educational needs exist and working toward a consensus on values related to sex education. Teachers, they suggest, must engage students about values and dedicate themselves to work toward providing the information that is needed by students but do so in a way that does not reveal their own value position or encourage one particular position. This allows both for the presentation of possible value positions and protects the choice of the individual.

In addition to focusing on a comprehensive range of important information in the sex education process, values and their relationship to possible personal choices should certainly be discussed. Moreover, the focus of sex education should be on equipping each student to contemplate and reflect on what might be the best value or behavioral choice for her. Taking an authoritarian stance in which students are invited to accept the provided value positions could cause some young people who might have chosen abstinence of their own accord to reject this option because they feel their freedom is being constrained due to psychological reactance (Brehm, 1972) or the forbidden fruit effect (Bushman and Cantor, 2003). We need to recognize the need to equip young people to make personal choices because ultimately they will be making these choices. As McKay (1997) and Archard (1998) both suggest, we

should recognize and embrace personal autonomy and democratic ideals in the realm of sexual behavior.

Given that Schwartz, Kurtines, and Montgomery (2005) found that cognitive and emotional evaluation enhances self-construction and self-discovery which are necessary for identity development, it is vital to evaluate the extent to which our educational approach creates an opportunity for these processes. We should strive to facilitate the self-discovery and reflection needed to make an identity-congruent choice that supports the identity development process and movement toward identity achievement as opposed to leaving young people in the stasis of identity diffusion or pushing them toward identity foreclosure. In the two sections that follow, I will delineate various recommendations for sex education pedagogy. In the first section, I will identify pedagogical practices found in the reviewed curricula that are consistent with the identity development process. In the second section, I will discuss additional recommendations that will be important to consider if we wish to move sex education in a more identity-centered direction.

Recommended practices found within reviewed curricula

I have identified nine important practices from the three reviewed curricula that are important to the sex education process and that are also essential for supporting identity development. These nine recommendations are listed below and will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this section.

1. Provide thorough, accurate information about pregnancy, sexually transmitted, diseases, contraceptive methods, risky behaviors, and potential harmful consequences.
2. Discuss the reasons young people may choose to engage in sex, the reasons for abstinence, the signs of sex, and alternatives to sex.
3. Discuss external influences such as peers and the media.
4. Invite students to identify life goals and reflect on the impact of pregnancy or contraction of an STD.
5. Use gender neutral language.
6. Implement role-play and hands-on activities.
7. Require a parental communication activity.
8. Teach assertiveness skills and behavioral implementation.
9. Reflect on learning and self-discovery.

Clearly, providing thorough and accurate information about pregnancy, disease, contraceptive methods, and safer sex practices is very important to the sex education process. Both the *Making Proud Choices* and *Reducing the Risk* programs focus on providing this wide range of information. Even if teens choose not to be sexually active, they need a knowledge base about these topics because the vast majority of people do become sexually active at some point. Plus the development of this knowledge base via delivery of comprehensive information supports the exploration that is needed for identity development. Additionally, informing students

about the level of risk associated with particular behaviors as well as any harmful or negative consequences is also an important part of the wide range of information that should be shared during exploration promotion. This enables young people to have the knowledge necessary to make safer choices and to be able to evaluate the range of possibilities in order to make identity-congruent choices.

Beyond the presentation of comprehensive information, examining the reasons why young people have sex and engaging students in a discussion about these reasons and the rationale for choosing abstinence is highly beneficial. This practice was seen to differing degrees in all three curricula but was most prevalent in the *Reducing the Risk* curricular approach. Reviewing these potential options promotes exploration as well as providing challenging feedback from the social context, which also promotes the identity development process. Through this type of discussion, students have an opportunity to hear both perspectives which automatically provides some challenging feedback for those who may have a pre-existing belief about which course of action is most desirable. For those who have not formed potential beliefs exposure to this discussion promotes an exploratory process and a vicarious experience of challenge from the social context.

In addition to presenting a range of comprehensive information and discussing various perspectives, it is important to address the issue of social influence. Making students aware of possible external influences helps them to better deal with these messages and recognize their potential impact. This topic was a primary focus within the seventh module of the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum and it was this curricular

approach that devoted the most time on this topic. Unfortunately, the introduction of these concepts in this curriculum was also paired with practices that inhibit identity development such as encouragement to foreclose on a particular value position. However, the discussion of external influences is important if we are to promote the ability of an individual to make identity-congruent choices. Having an opportunity to mentally prepare for receiving various messages and to understand the importance of making one's own judgment as opposed to simply adopting a message is very beneficial to the identity development process. Developing this understanding can steer students away from foreclosing on the beliefs of others and toward engaging in the exploration associated with moratorium which is necessary to attain identity achievement.

Another activity that promotes identity moratorium is asking students to delineate their short-term and long-term life goals and the potential impact of an unexpected pregnancy or disease contraction. All three reviewed curricula invited students to consider their life goals during the course of the educational program. Prior to engaging in this type of activity, some students may not have been asked to consider what they would like to achieve during their lives. This exploratory activity can both underscore the importance of careful consideration of the personal choices we make and assist young people in identifying what is important to them. This is an essential part of the self-reflection and self-discovery process that is necessary for identity development and making identity-congruent choices.

While the type of information presented and the types of activities that we assign students are very important, the way we present information and the language we choose is also extremely significant. The use of gender neutral language is highly desirable because it helps to avoid gender stereotyped portrayals of sexual desire and behavior. This practice was very successfully implemented throughout the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum. All role-play characters were assigned gender neutral names (e.g., Lee and Lee) which did not cast a particular gender as the initiator and did not imply a heterosexual interaction. This is in stark contrast to the approach taken in the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum that was almost exclusively gender stereotyped. Avoiding these gender stereotypes helps to normalize sex drive for both young women and men. It also allows for a range of sexual orientations. In the context of identity development, this gender neutral presentation may be helpful in avoiding potential barriers to identity development. Sending a stereotyped message to young women that suggests they are not motivated by physical desire may create some confusion or cognitive dissonance when young women find themselves being driven by sexual attraction. Moreover, constructing role-play activities that depict only heterosexual interactions could lead bisexual and homosexual individuals to feel excluded and invalidated. These types of stereotypical and invalidating messages could create barriers and internal conflict that may make it difficult for young people to move toward identity achievement.

Another curricular approach that supports the exploratory process is the opportunity to engage in role-play activities or to participate in a hands-on, real life

projects. These activities and projects can provide learning experiences that may not be possible through discussion alone. This adds an important layer to the exploration process and allows students to experience the concepts in a concrete fashion. While all three reviewed curricula included role-play activities, only the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum incorporated hands-on assignments such as finding contraceptives in a local store and visiting a clinic. The various role-play activities in each of the reviewed curricula allow students a safe venue for behavioral exploration with little to no interpersonal consequences. This allows students to experiment with different methods of responding to others and to find a way of approaching romantic invitations that is both comfortable for them and consistent with their identity-congruent choices. The hands-on assignments allow students to gain real life experience with obtaining birth control and/or health services before these are needed. This helps students to confront their emotional reactions and work through any reticence or anxiety they might have about these activities. Both the role-play and hands-on activities enrich the exploration process. These activities also bolster an individual's ability to explore on her own after the educational program has ended.

Encouraging parental communication through an assigned exercise can ease student anxiety about questioning parents regarding sexual activity and contraception. This particular approach was included in the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum. Not only does this provide an opportunity for students to hear their parents' thoughts and recommendations but it also can open a line of communication that may not have been opened previously. This enhances the thoroughness of the exploration process

by providing an opportunity to hear the parental perspective. Moreover, this assignment can diffuse anxiety that young people might have about bringing up the topic of sex with their parents because they are bringing it up in order to complete the required assignment. This may reduce the emotional pressure a student might feel because, although she may be curious about these topics, asking the questions in the context of an assignment alleviates the fear that heightened parental anxiety or scrutiny may result. This reduction of anxiety may also contribute to improved attitudes toward exploration.

Teaching assertiveness skills and how to set boundaries with others both verbally and behaviorally is useful not only within the realm of sexual activity but in many areas in young people's lives. Various strategies for asserting oneself are seen in all three of the reviewed curricula. Once students make decisions about what they feel is the best fit for them, it is important for them to be able to communicate their identity-congruent choices to others in a direct and assertive manner. Formal instruction in assertiveness and refusal skills allows young people to develop the skill set to successfully express their personal choices and maintain appropriate boundaries with others. While this element of the sex education curriculum may not directly contribute to a student's ability to make identity-congruent choices, it can prevent backward identity momentum that could occur if young people allow the influence of others to sway them from their decisions.

Finally, the opportunity for reflection on learning and self-discovery that was included in the last unit of the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum is a valuable exercise.

Inviting students to review the information they gained through participation in the program helps to underscore the scope of the exploration process and solidify new learning. Also, self reflection allows students to delineate what they have discovered about what is most important to them. This was certainly a positive aspect of the program but was limited to the last class within the program. So, while this type of activity is beneficial, it ideally should occur more frequently throughout the program rather than on one occasion at the end of the program.

Clearly, there are a variety of pedagogical elements present in the three reviewed curricula that are consistent with the identity development process and have the potential to promote identity achievement. These approaches may also enhance student knowledge without creating identity development barriers. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue for the inclusion of these nine pedagogical practices in sex education curricula.

Additional recommendations for sex education pedagogy

In addition to maintaining the approaches included within the reviewed curricula that demonstrate consistency with identity development principles, there are a variety of additional pedagogical approaches that may enhance our ability to support the self-discovery and identity development process. Recommendations for pedagogical practices not found within the reviewed curricula are listed below and will be discussed in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

1. Recognize sex drive and sexuality as a normal human experience and avoid characterizing sexual behavior as negative or forbidden.
2. Discuss various types of love and relationships as well as the role that sex plays in a romantic relationship.
3. Recognize and discuss the influences within the social context (e.g., peers and the media) and describe discrepancies between the portrayal of sex via external messages and real life sexual activity.
4. Share information regarding the potential disadvantages of early sexual experience from the standpoint of pleasure and intimacy.
5. Consider building the recommended approaches into a human relations curriculum beginning in late elementary school and continuing through high school rather than presenting sex education in one separate programmatic module that is outside the regular curriculum.
6. Focus on self-discovery within the educational process and attempt to provide a foundation for students to self-reflect and to make identity-congruent choices.

Within the sex education context, sex drive and sexuality should not be characterized as negative or problematic but rather as a normal part of the human experience. Additionally, a substantial part of sex education should be focused on human sexuality. Young people need to understand that humans are sexual beings and that it is normal to experience sexual feelings. As Fine (1988) suggests a

discourse of desire is important within the sex education process. This type of discussion and evaluation helps adolescents to mentally prepare for feeling intense sexual attraction and to think through how they feel they should respond. It is also important for the diversity of sexual orientations be presented in the sex education process as opposed to presenting heterosexuality as the only possibility or acceptable choice. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents may feel invalidated by curricular approaches that focus only on heterosexuality. Normalizing sexuality and diversity of orientation removes the forbidden, taboo, or stigmatized status that is sometimes given to sexuality. Presenting sexuality as a normal human experience would help to avoid both potential forbidden fruit effects due to reactance and feelings of exclusion or ostracism. This nonjudgmental approach facilitates exploration and encourages positive attitudes toward exploration. Moreover, coupling suspension of judgment with a comprehensive presentation of possibilities makes both an information style and critical evaluation more likely. Overall, this pedagogical approach enhances exploration, reflection, and self-evaluation, which are all paramount to the promotion identity development.

While discussing sexuality as a normal part of the human experience moves us beyond simply establishing a knowledge base regarding the mechanics of sex and contraception, each of these topics should be discussed in the context of love and relationships. Teaching young people about the theory and research related to the experience of love, the components of love, and the various types of love can help them to understand that love is more than just physical passion. A loving relationship

involves both intimacy and commitment along with passion (Sternberg, 1988). Understanding the components of love can help students to understand the difference between sex in the context of a loving relationship and sex in response to sexual attraction or infatuation. This in turn can help young people explore under what relationship conditions they feel sexual activity should occur and make a decision about the relationship context that they feel is appropriate for their own sexual expression to emerge.

Although the *Choosing the Best Life* curriculum did introduce the topic of external influences such as peers and the media and this was included in the previous section as a desirable practice, discussion of these influences needs to be enhanced beyond the approach taken in this program. Young people should be mentally prepared to receive these messages. They also need to understand that what they hear from friends or see on television may not accurately represent sexual activity in real life. Reports from peers can obviously be ill-informed and theatrical portrayals of sexual activity routinely depict two people experiencing strong attraction, quickly progressing to sexual activity, and both experiencing ultimate pleasure relatively easily and immediately. It is important to acknowledge in the sex education process that sex can be a very pleasurable activity but that pleasurable sex often does not happen as automatically as television and movies would have us believe. We should promote an understanding of the fact that a high level of intimacy and good communication about desires is necessary to yield a pleasurable sexual experience. This type of challenging feedback in the educational context is essential in order to

dispel the distorted beliefs that may be promoted through external messages that young people receive from peers or the media.

Additionally, discussion regarding the potential disappointments and shortcomings of early sexual experience from the standpoint of pleasure and intimacy seems to be missing from sex education approaches. Highlighting the fact that young people may be too uncomfortable or embarrassed to attain the level of intimacy and communication necessary to yield an enjoyable sexual experience may provide useful insights for sex education students. Discussing potential sexual problems or disappointments may also be useful. For example, sharing the fact that some young men may reach orgasm prematurely while some young women may be unable to achieve orgasm may provide insight into the potential challenges of uninformed and inexperienced sexual partners. Video vignettes in which adults frankly discuss disappointments or regrets from their early sexual experiences could be quite enlightening for young people as well. Most programs emphasize negative consequences associated with sexual activity from the standpoint of pregnancy and disease but do not discuss drawbacks associated with a lack of knowledge about sexual pleasure or a lack of readiness for true sexual intimacy. This focus could help young people to understand the importance of waiting until one is ready for sexual intimacy in a relationship and the fact that sexual experiences may not be enjoyable if they engage in these activities before they are cognitively and emotionally prepared. Discussion of these topics would add significantly to the breadth of exploration in the

sex education process and would make an informational style, critical evaluation, and personal expressiveness more likely to develop.

Additionally, rather than setting sex education apart from the typical educational curriculum, it should be woven into the fabric of the standard curriculum for preadolescents and adolescents. Approaching sex education as a special curricular endeavor labels it as unusual or outside of the normal educational process. Moreover, delivering sex education as a one-time program of various modules does not provide an opportunity to revisit and reinforce the material throughout preadolescence and the teenage years. This limits the scope of possible exploration and increases the possibility that some information may not be remembered when it is needed. This stand-alone approach also implicitly communicates that this subject matter is somehow different from other topics about which young people need to learn. This separation from the standard curriculum may give sex education programs a taboo status, which may then encourage the aforementioned forbidden fruit effects. Just as sexuality should be presented as part of the normal human experience, sex education should also be included as one of many important curricular areas to be addressed throughout K-12 education. Clearly, the information presented should be age appropriate and should build in complexity over time. One method of achieving this goal might be to include human relations in the K-12 curriculum. This would allow for age appropriate discussions of sex education concepts beginning in late elementary school and continuing through graduation. Including this content within a

human relations course would also more easily allow the material to be presented in the context of human love and relationships.

Finally, we should focus on self-discovery within the educational process and attempt to provide a foundation for students to self-reflect and to make identity-congruent choices. Although the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum did provide one opportunity at the end of the program to reflect on self-discovery, these opportunities should be pervasive throughout the sex education process. It is clearly important to provide thorough, accurate, and comprehensive information related to sex and sexuality. However, while providing this information is absolutely necessary, it is far from sufficient. It is crucial to strive to create a foundation upon which young people can build identity-congruent personal choices. This cannot be achieved by delivering authoritarian behavioral directives. It also does not necessarily follow from a comprehensive presentation of important information. We must incorporate an intentional focus on self-discovery throughout the educational process in order to successfully promote identity development.

Moreover, we must respect the autonomy and uniqueness of our students. Although they may be younger and less experienced, their bodies and their lives are their own. Ultimately, young people will make their own choices despite whatever anxiety we may feel about this eventuality. Parents and educators are often motivated to try to protect the younger generation and to prevent them from making mistakes they might later regret. While this motivation is quite positive in some respects, it may sometimes tempt us to tell young people what to do rather than helping them to

discover what is best for them. Young people must live their own lives and establish their own unique identities. We cannot do this for them. Ironically, if we try to dictate the personal choices of young people, we push them toward identity foreclosure, a normative style, and create a significant identity achievement barrier.

To avoid educational practices that hinder identity development, we must evaluate the consistency of pedagogical practices with identity development theory. We must contemplate if our pedagogical approach minimizes potential barriers and supports thorough exploration prior to value commitment, a positive attitude toward exploration as well as the ability to explore, an informational rather than normative or diffuse-avoidant style, personal expressiveness, challenging feedback from the social context, and achievement of critical evaluation via creativity and suspension of judgment. To the extent that our pedagogy is consistent with these vital elements, our approach is more identity-centered.

Freire (1998) argued that teaching is not simply transferring knowledge to students but rather the creation of the possibility for knowledge to be constructed or produced. This powerful realization is absolutely essential if we are to move toward identity-centered sex education pedagogy. While providing information to students is a fundamental part of the sex education process, an equally vital task is to create the conditions under which students can begin to discover their own thoughts and feelings about sex, sexuality, love, and relationships. From these self-reflections, students can begin to evaluate their priorities and their level of comfort with specific values and behaviors. Hopefully, after careful consideration and evaluation of the

level of fit, young people will be in a position to make identity-congruent personal choices, express their value commitments, and demonstrate these choices and commitments through their behavior.

We cannot achieve the goal of promoting identity development in the sex education process by presenting a comprehensive range of discrete facts. While it is useful to understand pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and contraceptive methods, these pieces of information do not enable us to fully understand our sexuality or our values and priorities in this context. And, despite our desire to protect young people, assisting adolescents in finding their way in the realm of sexuality cannot be achieved by simply endorsing particular values or behaviors. Our aim in sex education must not be merely on delivery of facts or issuing behavioral dictates but rather on facilitating a process that helps students discover who they are and what they value. Ultimately, sex education pedagogy should be designed to guide and support students on the journey of their lives, establishing their identity.

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