Beyond the classroom: A critical understanding of community-based sex education

By

Krys Merritt

B.A., University of Victoria, 2021

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

© Krys Merritt, 2026

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/ Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Beyond the classroom: A critical understanding of community-based sex education

By

Krys Merritt

B.A., University of Victoria, 2021

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Supervisor

Depart of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Dr. Darlene Clover, Supervisor

Depart of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Abstract

Community-based organizations, which operate within the context of marginalized populations, are well-positioned to provide comprehensive sex education to individuals who are often underserved. Comprehensive sex education integrates the social dimensions of sexuality by addressing individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that shape sexual health. In contrast, school-based sex education is inconsistently implemented, resulting in inadequate sex literacy, particularly among those for whom such education is inaccessible or unrealistic. Marginalized communities are systemically placed at greater risk for negative sexual health outcomes and are less likely to access relevant sex education. This study sought to understand the justifications, perceived effectiveness, and discourses surrounding sex education programs offered as community services. To achieve this, sex educators working in community-based organizations were interviewed, and critical discourse analysis was applied to examine how community-based sex education can either disrupt or reinforce the power dynamics underlying inequities among vulnerable populations. The findings indicate that these educators identified dominant discourses influencing their work and described how their practices aim to address these issues by prioritizing collective action, honouring lived experiences, fostering agency, and explicitly challenging normative definitions of sex and sex education.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee…ii

Abstract…iii

Table of Contents…iv

Acknowledgements…vii

Chapter One – Introduction…1

1.1 Community-based Organizations…6

1.2 The Research…9

Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework…16

2.1 Inside the Frame…18

2.2 On 'Earning a Living'…21

2.3 Neoliberalism in Social Services…25

2.4 The Present Context of Sex Education…29

2.5 The Condition of Designations…31

2.6 Sex Education in Community Contexts…36

2.7 Putting it into Praxis…39

2.8 Conclusion…40

Chapter Three – Methodology and Research Strategies…46

3.1 Orientation & Methodology…48

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis…50

3.3 Methods…52

3.3.1 Ethical Considerations…53

3.3.2 Confidentiality…55

3.3.3 Free and Informed Consent…57

3.3.4 Recruitment and Sampling…58

3.4 Data Collection…60

3.4.1 Interviewing…60

3.4.2 Supporting Materials…61

3.5 Data Analysis…………………………………………………………………...63
3.5.1 Findings……………………………………………………………...….64
Chapter Four – Analysis…………………………………………………………….67
4.1 Introducing the Participants…………………………………………………….69
4.2 Confronting the Prevailing Social Order……………………………………….70
4.2.1 The True Cost……………………………………………………………71
4.2.2 Enduring Values…………………………………………………………73
4.2.3 Relationship to the Body Politic………………………………………...75
4.3 Parts of a Whole………………………………………………………………...77
4.3.1 Sequestered Education…………………………………………………..77
4.3.2 Visions of Collaboration………………………………………………...79
4.4 Lived Experience…………………………………………………….…………80
4.4.1 Mutual Understanding…………………………………………………..81
4.4.2 Embodying Values………………………………………………………82
4.4. 3 Meeting Respective Needs……………………………………………..85
4.5 Provocative Modalities………………………………………………………….87
4.5.1 Levelling Authority……………………………………………………..87
4.5.2 “Take out the Vibrators…………………………………………………89
4.5.3 Normalizing Sex………………………………………………………...90
4.6 Conclusion……………………….……………………………………………..92
Chapter Five – Discussion & Conclusion……..…………………………………………94
5.1 Unavoidable Neoliberal Authority…..………………………………………….94
5.1.2 Conservative Values……………………………………..……………96
5.2 Queering Sex Education…………………………………..…………………97
5.3 (Un)findings……………………………………………………………………99
5.4 Limitations and Future Research……………………………………………...102
5.5 Recommendations……………………………………………………………..103
References…………………………………………………………………………..107
Appendices…………………………………………………………………………121
Appendix A………………………………………………………………………121

Appendix B……………………………………………………………………..126

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the sex educators who participated in this study. It is a privilege to highlight the essential work you do to advance human rights, particularly for those most marginalized in our community. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Catherine McGregor and Dr. Darlene Clover, for their dedication of time, energy, and expertise in guiding me throughout this process. Finally, I am deeply appreciative of my partner, friends, and community, whose unwavering support and belief in me have been a constant source of encouragement. Thank you.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Roaming the streets of a run-down neighbourhood wasn't uncommon as I was growing up. I was doing just that on a sunny day in 2008. In this neighbourhood, one had to be extra careful not to misstep for fear of ending up in a water-filled ditch that lined the sidewalks of this area. Sure, the water was gross because these ditches acted as a haphazard attempt at drainage for the city. But the real concern was the rats, or, more specifically, muskrats. As semi-aquatic animals, the ditches provided excellent habitats for these unusually large rodents, to the extent that this city earned a top 20 spot among British Columbia's 'rattiest' cities (Balzer, 2024). When my mom and I moved there she would characterize the muskrats as 'small dogs' - a comparison that always made me laugh. Picturing the rats as domesticated pets made light of how horrified I was that we lived amongst them. I don't remember exactly what I was up to that day, but because I was with a group of kids who also neighboured the muskrats, I can guess that we were either walking to the local Walmart, searching for an abandoned house to check out, or planning that evening's shenanigans.

At around ten years old, I was the youngest in our group as the other neighbourhood kids were entering high school the next school year. I was learning my time's tables during the day and sneaking out of our mouldy basement suite to vandalize public infrastructure at night. Being on the other side of a bridge with no bus fare meant we were stuck getting into trouble locally, and even though we were committing petty crimes in broad daylight, we didn't get caught or scolded. We had the lack of supervision that most kids could only fantasize about. Looking back, I wonder if my mom (who was my sole guardian at the time) thought my attachment to these teens was a free babysitting arrangement. I thought I was hanging out with friends, finally cool

enough to be a part of a group. Unfortunately, neither was true. I'm sure these teens thought I was 'mature for my age' and tolerated me as a hanger-on. Moreover, my mom was glad to be free of parenting obligations for an afternoon. At least this is what I deduce as an adult, reflecting on this time in my life.

For me, this day was ordinary; however, as an outsider, you may wonder what a kid was doing with a group of teenagers who were trespassing, stealing and tagging bus-stop benches with Sharpies. For context, I was the only child of a mother who struggled with severe addiction and mental health issues who was often a victim of intimate partner violence. A couple of years later, at 12, I was taken into foster care, where abuse was less explicit but equally impactful. Having no supervision, role model or safety at home, I reached the stereotypical angsty teen attitude earlier than my peers. The opportunity for boundary testing and risk-taking that comes with adolescence emerged in me a lot sooner than most. Circumstances combined with an abundance of adverse childhood experiences meant that I grew up fast and, as such, was always mistaken as older than my true age. Despite this, a universal childhood experience is the embarrassment that comes with your parent's actions. You know, the cringe behaviour when parents try to act cool or 'hip.' I experienced this humiliation when the group of us delinquents ran into my mom. As she approached us in a particularly jubilant mood, I realized she was sporting a pair of makeshift earrings. The earrings were red and yellow squares, and as I looked closer, it became apparent that they were flavoured condoms pierced with earring hooks (cherry and banana, respectively). I don't really remember our conversation, but I do recall thinking it was gross that she would be so open about her sexuality, and I felt worried that her perceived belligerence would risk my acceptance into the group of teens.

Mature for my age or not, I didn't know what condoms were used for. I knew that they had to do with sex, but nothing beyond that. You would think my mom would have taught me early on about sex and sexuality, considering her apparent sex-positive attitude; however, that was not the case. She was open about sexuality with me, but in the sense that she lacked boundaries instead of mentoring me about safe sex. Upon reflection, I wonder what kind of sex education my mom had – did she even have information to impart to me? Did she know that those condoms weren't effective if they had punctured holes in them that made them into earrings?

I wouldn't receive any formal sex education until grade five, and then subsequently in grade ten, when the BC public school curriculum currently suggests it should be taught. Although my memory is hazy, I would define the sex education I had as a conservative, biological essentialist approach (Jones, 2011). This approach was characterized by a focus on bodily functions, reproduction and anatomy from a cis-normative and heterosexual framework (Jones, 2011). I learned about how bodies change at puberty, the risks of sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne diseases (STBBIs) (however back then they called them STDs, sexually transmitted diseases), and how to reproduce, but nothing about pleasure, consent, identity, or healthy relationships.

By contrast, a comprehensive sex education considers all these aspects of sexuality (SIECCAN, 2019). Comprehensive sex education (CSE) is an evidence-based approach to teaching sexuality by addressing all determinants of health which impact sexual wellness (SIECCAN, 2019). This approach to education views sexuality as a phenomenon that unfolds throughout people's lives and is shaped by intersecting factors, including but not limited to biological, social, legal, and spiritual influences (SIECCAN, 2019). What stands out about the

Sex Information and Education Council of Canada's (2019) latest Guidelines for Sexual Health Education is the emphasis on safe relationships free from discrimination and violence, as it exemplifies how sexuality is not just a biological experience.

Overall, it's safe to say that my education was not comprehensive, and my parents could not fill the gaps in my knowledge. Unfortunately, a combination of an afflicted childhood and inadequate sex education resulted in my learning things the hard way. Regardless of my perceived maturity, the truth was that I had little to no knowledge about sex, consent, abuse, sexual orientation and gender identity. Quite the opposite was true; I had a skewed understanding of these things because the behaviour modelled to me as I was growing up was broadly characterized by unhealthy relationships. Even though I am talking about this in the past tense, I still have a long way to go in learning and unlearning what healthy sexuality means to me. I was late to figure out a lot of things, my gender identity and sexual orientation included. I only began to understand consent in 2018 with the #MeToo movement. I am privileged to have come this far because many people with similar backgrounds do not get the same opportunities. The addiction, mental health challenges, poverty and abuse that shaped my childhood don't play as significant a role in my life as they once did. Thanks in part to evading these outcomes, I chose a career in social services. I am uniquely positioned to support people who have the same experiences that I did because (for better or worse) I bring a profound understanding of what it means to be vulnerable. I cannot say for certain that CSE at school would have been a protective factor for some of the experiences I had growing up, but according to SIECCAN (2019), vulnerable populations should have access to sex education as they (we) are at increased risk of negative sexual health outcomes; CSE "is especially important…[for] populations who have experienced discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization, or unequal access to services" (p. 30). The

importance of marginalized populations having access to CSE is not only to mitigate the rate of STBBIs and unintended pregnancies. While physical risks, outcomes and issues related to the act of sex are important, this is only one aspect of sexuality. Sexuality is woven into every human experience (Le Grice & Braun, 2018); it is socially constructed and significantly influences how people experience their realities. CSE attempts to incorporate the social aspects of sexuality into its curriculum by addressing individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that inform sexuality (SIECCAN, 2019).

For example, sexuality at the community level looks at access to CSE in various settings, including, but not limited to, school (SIECCAN, 2019). However, sex education in public schools is unreliable, politically charged and unregulated. Provinces and territories are responsible for their respective sex education curriculum, and individual school districts and educators within those school districts are responsible for implementation (Menon, 2022). As a result, what is taught depends greatly on who is teaching (Black et al., 2024).

The lack of oversight of sex education at school leads to inconsistency across classrooms; the educator's level of training and personal values play a significant role in sex education delivery (Black et al., 2024). The outcome is a spectrum of knowledge, where some students receive no education, and some have a comprehensive experience. At least this is the case in BC (Action Canada, 2020; Black et al., 2024); other provinces and territories have different curricula, values and approaches to sex education. For example, Alberta is attempting to pass legislation that mandates parents to opt their children *in* for sex education, rather than opt-out (Sousa, 2024). This legislation is underpinned by the 'parental rights' argument against sex education at school, where 'angry parents' believe that school is overriding parental decision-making about what, how, and when kids learn about sexuality (Hilton-O'Brien, 2024, para.18).

Regardless of opt-in/out processes, rhetoric about sex education has led people to believe the (erroneous) assumption that the information will persuade kids into having sex (Dreweke, 2019). Discourses that argue sex education leads to children having sex have been dubbed "promiscuity propaganda" (Action Canada, 2020, p. 12; Dreweke, 2019, p. 29). These perceptions are common despite evidence that comprehensive sex education delays sexual initiation, empowers youth about their sexuality, and encourages contraception use (Dreweke, 2019; Kirby et al., 2007). As a risk-based discourse, promiscuity propaganda and parental rights arguments oppose the inclusion of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity information at school, arguing that teaching children about 2SLGBTQ+ experiences and identities will force children to become transgender (Ronson, 2023). Being transgender is not something that happens through education about diverse gender identities; instead, the lack of understanding and awareness of gender non-conforming folks leads to discrimination, bullying and hostility against 2SLGBTQ+ students (Ronson, 2023). All this is to say that even if marginalized children, youth and families have access to public education, sex education that is comprehensive and evidence-based is the luck of the draw. Where, then, can marginalized youth and adults receive comprehensive sex education? If vulnerable people are at an increased risk of negative impacts on sexuality (SIECCAN, 2019), how can sex education be made accessible to us? If CSE is available to vulnerable groups, could it mitigate some of these negative impacts?

Continuing My Story

As was the trend when I lived with my mom, our living situation became increasingly dire. One night, I wanted to sneak out of the house, but I worried my mom would catch me. So instead of staying in, I thought it was a good idea to commission my mom's boyfriend to help me. I told him I needed to go hang out with my friends that night and asked him to vouch for me

if my mom noticed I was gone. He did not aid nor abet my escape plan. Instead, he tattled on me, and that was the last time I tried to make a break for it past midnight. However it was no matter, because shortly after this incident we were evicted and landed at a women's shelter for women and their children fleeing abuse. This was not the first time we stayed in a space like that, and it would not be the last. I was sort of happy we were leaving though; I hated the ditches, the rats, and the boyfriend.

It is surreal at times to be 'on the other side' of social services, now as the provider instead of the recipient. For some time, I even worked at a transition house similar to the ones we frequented when I was young. Working at community-based organizations has helped me understand how these spaces serve their clients and society more broadly. Community-based organizations are non-governmental/non-profit/charitable organizations "that [represent] a community or a specific part of a larger community, and targets meeting a specific need in that community" (Adebayo et al., 2018, p.2). As an example, a transition house for women ending an abusive relationship represents women who are victims of intimate partner violence. They serve the need for women who require a safe and confidential place to land and determine their next steps. Transition houses are one example of a community-based organization, but there are many others. Across the jobs I have held, I have consistently been responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating programs meant to support service users (people who are part of the community, who access the organization to meet a need, also known as clients). These programs form the foundation of a community-based organization, as they are how community needs are met. Drawing on the previous example, transition houses will offer safe shelter, as well as programs that help clients obtain identification, find employment, or navigate the justice system. Programs are funded through a patchwork of sources, including income from the

provincial and federal governments, grants, and/or private donations. Although they may be accountable to government ministries, these community-based organizations are stand-alone entities that provide services to meet an identified need for vulnerable folks. While some programs may have operational restrictions contingent on funders, my experience is that there is considerable room to develop programming and services that exclusively meet the community's needs.

As spaces that work within the context of marginalized populations, community-based organizations are well-positioned to provide comprehensive sex education to vulnerable individuals (Fisher et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2011; McCarthy et al., 2015). Many programs that address issues within marginalized communities intersect with sexuality. Street-involved youth who do not access school could access sex education at a youth centre (SIECCAN, 2019). People who use drugs or sex workers may avoid formal health services due to stigma and fear of retribution; however, they will access spaces that provide harm reduction services that provide condoms and lube (SIECCAN, 2019). People within the 2SLGBTQ+ community are less likely to access sexual health services due to discrimination (Andersen et al., 2015) but may feel safer in spaces that are within and run by the queer community. CSE deliberately includes vulnerable communities, and contains critical information that can support the agency, human rights, and empowerment of folks who are traditionally excluded from sex education. My experience reading the literature on CSE is that education, which occurs outside of schools, is often an afterthought despite being a component of CSE that spans the lifespan and encompasses settings specifically serving populations at a higher risk of adverse sexual health outcomes (SIECCAN, 2019).

As this story has illustrated, my lived experiences gave me a strong motivation to learn more about and explore how community-based organizations approach and implement sex education. I see the importance of having accessible, contextualized, and relevant sex education in a context that is familiar to learners; for some, it may even be the first time they have learned about sexuality. Sex education is a critical component to understanding and relating ourselves and others, giving people the ability to make informed choices about their lives. Suppose sex education was included in programming at the shelters I stayed at. In that case, I wonder if my mom would have learned about healthy relationships, navigating consent, and where to access sexual health care. I cannot say if it would have been beneficial for her or had an impact on both of our future relationships, but there is evidence that sex education "prevent[s] physical, sexual, and emotional violence in relationships" (SIECCAN, 2019, p. 17). My personal account exemplifies the opportunities that community-based organizations have to empower service users through sex education, and it also conveys my rationale for addressing this topic. I have worked as a leader in community organizations for over seven years, as I profoundly empathize with people who are denied equity due to circumstances beyond their control. However, a part of my healing journey is a recognition that although I am an educated, privileged person with lived experiences who is able to support others through social services, the familiarity of my clients' circumstances feels insurmountable at times. Most days, I feel that social services provide what Elliot Currie terms "conformist interventions", which individualizes problems and seeks solutions that only support the client to "accept the typically bleak conditions of life" (Currie in Goddard & Meyers, 2017, p. 160). Removing myself from social services or social-justice adjacent work is not the solution to my alienation, but I wanted to find some way to contribute to a better system that addresses social issues and people's suffering as a result of these issues in a

more comprehensive, critical and inclusive way. I see sex education in community-based organizations as a viable undertaking that works toward equity and empowerment, so I dedicated my thesis topic to exploring how and why organizations in my community are teaching sex education.

The Research

My research focused on connecting with agencies that are already doing this work. I spoke with educators and leaders who could share their experiences teaching sex education in a community setting. I wanted to know how they thought about their programs, how they implemented them, and how they rationalized sex education when faced with limited resources and funding. Through this study, I sought to understand the justifications, perceived effectiveness, and discourses surrounding sex education programs offered as a community service. The research also sought to validate these programs and provide ideas that might inform future efforts to include sex education within additional community-based organizations. The approaches of participant organizations demonstrated that it is possible and practical to teach sex education in the community, and it is plausible that more organizations could replicate similar programs.

It was also crucial for me to look at community-based sex education from a broader perspective. Systemic issues are woven into every aspect of this study; there would be no need for sex education in organizations if school-based sex education were effective and accessible (Gupta et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2011; Secor-Turner et al., 2017). To go even further, there would be no need for community-based organizations if our systems did not perpetuate inequity for some people in order to maintain power for those who already have it. Knowing that marginalized communities are established systemically to be more at risk of negative sexual

health outcomes and less likely to have access to relevant sex education (Landry et al., 2011), there is a requirement to unpack why this is the case using a critical lens. Through a critical examination of sex education and community organizations, I sought to contribute to the broader epistemology of sex education. The knowledge shared with me through the research process enabled me to frame it in a way that supported awareness of our social contexts, calling into question the hegemonic ideologies we assume to be the natural order of things. A critical analysis served to demonstrate how sex education (specifically in the community context) can potentially disrupt or reflect the power dynamics that underpin inequities of vulnerable populations. In summary, my study aimed to examine sex education across various societal levels, with the belief that structural factors influence individual experiences, and these experiences inform resistance efforts against those structures (Hall, 2009). To understand this in the context of community-based organizations, I endeavoured to answer the following questions:

1. How do community-based organizations implement sex education as a service?
    a. How do the clients/learners influence sex education within community-based organizations?
    b. How do the educators within community-based organizations perceive and/or assess the effectiveness of their sex education service?

2. How does the community-based organization justify sex education as a service?

    a. What themes and messages are used in community-based organizations' content for their sex education services?

    b. How do themes/messages reinforce or challenge dominant discourses and approaches to sex education?

My methods to respond to these questions included speaking with sex educators within organizations, as well as analyzing educational content they used to facilitate their respective sex education programs. I spoke with a total of four educators across two organizations. The participants described their experiences teaching sex education to their clients and how their organization meets the needs of the service users through sex education. I chose to use semi-structured interviews to guide conversations between myself and the participant(s). Semi-structured interviews were beneficial in this study because the questions acted as guideposts for each research objective (Brinkman, 2020). It was important to me that participants felt safe and comfortable discussing their experiences, as sex education is highly politicized, and sexuality is a sensitive topic. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to guide the conversation topics regarding the participant's work experience, rather than pry for personal disclosures that are not the focus of this study and may not be safe to explore within the context of research.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I requested access to each organization's educational material used to facilitate their sex education programs. The educational content provided insight into how the organization discussed and taught topics related to sexuality. By exploring how sex educators facilitate learning, I was able to comprehend the broader context of the program. Discourses, messages and ideas that organizations decided to include in their curriculum were reflective of how community-based sex education either acted as a counter-hegemonic way of thinking (hooks, 1994) and/or a perpetuation of power imbalances within the larger economic and political society in which it operates (Apple, 1999). Making sense of how participants were "constantly engaged in the negotiation of knowledge, social relations, and identity" (Apple, 1999, p.162) as sex educators in the community yielded key insights into the initial inquiries that guided this research.

Using critical discourse analysis, I examined the educational content and interview transcripts to better understand how the sex educators who participated in my study thought about and approached their programming. This methodology ensured that I could expand on larger social constructs pertaining to sex education in the community, as critical discourse analysis unveils power dynamics that may or may not represent the economic and political climate in which the learning is taking place (Apple, 1999). Critical discourse analysis is also an effective tool in questioning and critiquing the status quo, both through what is being said but also unsaid (Apple, 1999).

Using inductive analysis and drawing from participants' descriptions of their organizations and lived experiences, I identified four main themes amongst the data, which are described in more detail in chapter four. In chapter five, I expand these themes to understand how they fit into a broader perspective, alongside findings that were not salient but nevertheless imperative to name. These unsaid findings concern how I did not come across topics of colonization and racism when speaking to or analyzing content of the community-based sex education programs that took part in this study. Here, I consider the gaps and limitations in this study where future research could extend the knowledge of community-based sex education. I end with three recommendations to community-based sex education programs which are grounded in praxis and incitement to continue work in this sector. Throughout my thesis, I include relevant narratives that exemplify the ideas and issues that arose throughout this study. Although this may serve to bolster my justification for this research topic, my intention was also to demonstrate that research, theory and pedagogy have real-world implications. The reason for this study was out of academic interest, but more importantly, it stemmed from a belief that sex education is a compelling and worthwhile function within community-based organizations. As

my study suggested, a community space that facilitates a contextualized understanding of sexuality is a subversive undertaking, ultimately contributing to service user/student empowerment and agency. Through community-based sex education, organizations provide a critical orientation to sex education, which involves students in "real-world community processes and structures and interaction with community members and organizations" (Jones, 2011, p.151). I haven't idolized community-based organizations, suggested that they are the ideal solution to issues in sex education or even argued that sex education is a sufficient response to achieving equity for marginalized demographics. However, I am optimistic, and I do not think that my optimism contradicts a critical perspective; these standpoints must exist in tandem. The illumination of how power relations are sustained can dissuade optimism that equity is achievable, but I am hesitant to concede to cynicism; this knowledge can act as a foundational component in informing political action and social justice. My point is that knowledge should not be separate from real-world practice (Freire, 1985). Where theory informs practice and vice versa, there are opportunities to create "a new language, rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority, and rewriting discursive borderlands" (Giroux & McLaren in hooks, 1994, p. 129). This synthesis of theory and practice is referred to as praxis (e.g. Beyer & Apple, 1998; hooks, 1994), and praxis allows the nuance of discouragement and potential to exist in the same space; "we must combine the language of critique and possibility" (Aronowitz & Giroux in Apple, 1999, p.8). I hope that this knowledge, through a critical understanding, can encourage and legitimize sex education that centers the student. By demonstrating how community-based organizations facilitate contextualized sex education, I have aimed to show that there are alternative and attainable methods that ensure sex education is accessible, relevant, and helpful.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

Strange things happen to me when I'm in public with my partner. People will say things to us, unprompted, that jolt us back into a reality that being visibly queer is not viewed as a 'normal' way to exist. I guess in many ways, being queer isn't normal, and I love that aspect of my identity, but it gets exhausting being seen through a cisgender, heteronormative lens. My partner and I are both non-binary, and our gender expressions are masculine-leaning. We have bigger bodies and tattoos and it's common for us to feel people's gazes in public, or worse, be at the other end of confused comments. A poignant example of this occurred during this past fall, at our local voting place during the provincial election. As we waited in line in an echoey school gymnasium, we were holding hands and chatting about nothing in particular. When our turn in the queue came, the person checking identification greeted us with an odd statement: "You two look so similar! You must be sisters". I took a deep breath in, and not for the first time, weighed my options to respond. I asked myself if it was worth getting into a conversation with this stranger about gender identity and queer relationships - if I did, would she get upset? If our conversation became confrontational, would I still be allowed to vote? I found a firm, but not overly detailed response: "No. We're partners". We handed over our identification, and in my mind, the difference in last names would settle the matter. It didn't. The staff person retorted, "I just can't believe that! You could be twins!".

"Nope, we're partners," I responded flatly. She then gave us our IDs back and directed us to our respective voting booths. I'm not sure if I disappointed her, confused her, or if she left that interaction in disbelief that we are not related. In any case, my partner and I spent the rest of the morning fluctuating between amusement and perplexity about this interaction. Even though it

wasn't the first time (nor will it be the last) that we've been mistaken as relatives, we tried to decipher what it was about ourselves that made this such a common experience. Was it because we were both wearing baseball hats? We both wear glasses? We both have had orthodontic work? Who knows. Sometimes, when we're mistaken for sisters, it's amusing because it reminds us of the absurdity and flaws in social labels, highlighting how our Western society strives to categorize people to make sense of the world narrowly. Other times, frankly, it's depleting. To be perceived in this way elicits a frustration and disappointment that we're not able to just *be* without having to explain ourselves. These microaggressions accumulate and manifest at every level of our existence - from monitoring what we wear for fear of being mislabeled to being anxious about the outcome of elections that may lead to our identities being erased. Comments, although seemingly inconsequential, are a stark reminder of how gender "has become a phantasm with destructive powers" (Butler, 2024, p.5). As queer theory suggests, gender is both elusive and socially constructed, but is also used as a way to maintain power over those who do not fit into neat categories (Mayo & Rodriguez, 2019).

In this chapter, I dive into the theoretical frameworks that most accurately represent how I understand power and systemic oppression. I position myself as a researcher and interrogate my positionality as it informs my thinking, experiences and identity (hooks, 1994). My experience is singular and by no means representative of many marginalized populations that also have a claim to this research topic. In an attempt to broaden and challenge my awareness, I chose to bring in queer of colour critiques on (sex) education, as well as a critical curriculum perspective that unpacks how neoliberal capitalism permeates sex education and community-based organizations. In recognition that whiteness is our (my) default, I incorporate essential material that addresses race and colonization. Queer theory remains incomplete without the integration of Indigenous

and people of colour's voices. Queer of colour critique ensures that intersectional experiences are at the forefront, and addresses the dangers of essentialism (Cohen, 1997). This is also required for sex education, as it is not immune to colonization and racism (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Distinct identities and experiences are significant, even if they act as a site of oppression (Hall, 2009); this oppression can only take place when it is systematized into the bounds of how our society operates (Cohen, 1997). An analysis of how the tenets of neoliberal capitalism – namely, morality, privatization, and a conservative resurgence (Apple, 1999; hooks, 1994; Mayo & Rodriguez, 2019) – shape the functions of public institutions is key to analyzing the current context of sex education, both in schools and in the community. An in-depth exploration of how critical curriculum analysis and queer theory apply to sex education asks whose knowledge is privileged, why, and how we can reassess and disrupt our default assumptions, norms and values.

Inside the Frame

I suppose I'm overdue for a formal introduction. As you know from the title page, my name is Krys Merritt, and I'm currently a Master's student at the University of Victoria. I am an uninvited white settler on the unceded lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and Lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples, known today as the Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt Peoples. Although I'm not able to pinpoint my lineage due to fractured or non-existent relationships with my biological family, a dissection of my name is a good enough start to wade into my positionality. Merritt is the surname I inherited from my mom's adoptive dad. I can't speak to his family's immigration patterns because we don't have a relationship; however, I'm sure it's something along the lines of Merritt first coming to BC and "was so impressed with the beauty and possibilities of the area that he resolved…to take up permanent residence" (Merritt Herald, 2015, para. 6). It was Merritt's "enterprise and commercial activity as the quintessential aspect of the American and English character [that]

transformed Upper Canada into a great commercial emporium” (Fraser, 2015, para.2). So, Merritt played a “quintessential” part in colonization by (at the very least) exploiting Indigenous lands to make himself rich. This story is an artificial narrative based on an amalgamation of what I could find on public record about the Merritt surname, but to me, it sounds like so many other European settler stories that gloss over the fact that what is now known as North America was not "discovered"; "[t]hese lands were already occupied by Indigenous Peoples who lived in intricate societies that included political and socio-economic systems” (Baikie, 2020, p. 332).

Regardless of speculation about my ancestor's justifications for colonization, the fact remains that Merritt is a European name, and even if only in name, it belongs to white settlers (City of Merritt, 2025) – me being one of them. I position myself this way because it’s important to me to come to this study, my career and personal life as someone who practices relational accountability (Baikie, 2020). As a white settler, I am privileged on these lands as a direct result of the historical and ongoing erasure of Indigenous rights, land and culture (Baikie, 2020). Therefore, I have the responsibility to disrupt and de-centre Western colonial values, beliefs and systems. This is an ongoing practice and an integral part of being in social justice spaces in which I am involved in many capacities. In the context of this study, these spaces are related to sex education in community. When I first came to this topic, I had a narrow understanding of what sex education in community looked like because I thought that it wasn’t being done. I came to realize, though, that it has been done. Prior to colonization, sex education took place in Indigenous communities (Leason, 2021). While this may not be a Western concept of a “community-based organization” such as a non-profit, this is still a group of people within a community teaching and talking about sex, reproduction, sexual health, gender identity, self and relationships (Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2014). Colonization disrupted this

education, enforced European doctrine, and produced an overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples whose sexual health, relationships and identity have been negatively impacted (Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2014). Overall, sex education in community is not a new or emerging phenomenon - it happened well before Merritt arrived on scene. My ignorance of this fact exemplifies the need for me to actively seek out knowledge that is not my own; I will unpack the intersections of colonization, race, and community-based sex education later in this chapter.

While Merritt is a name that I inherited, Krys is my own creation. My given name at birth is not Krys, although it is a short form of my given name, so it's not far off. Picking a brand-new name seemed like an impossible decision, and I wanted to honour the parts of me that existed before 'Krys' while also embracing a gender-neutral name. When I began telling people that I would be going by Krys, the transition was an easy one – although I was still being misgendered daily, those in my network had no issue adjusting to the new(ish) name. The fact that my new identifier was adopted so fluently felt significant, like I was always meant to have this name, and I finally stepped into my true self. Similar to my birth name, I inherited my sentimentality from my mother. This often manifests into pondering the deeper meaning of things, my name being no exception. It took me a long time to feel a sense of identity, to accept myself for who I am and what I've experienced. I think this loss of identity is a symptom of being in traumatic circumstances for so long – you don't get to form who you are when you're always worried about survival. So when I finally welcomed that I'm queer and have disabilities, everything became so much easier. Which sounds contradictory considering our transphobic, homophobic and ableist society, but it's true. I'm a part of an incredible community and chosen family that embraces me for who I am and who I was. In times past, I was terrified of disclosing any parts of

my lived experience of abuse, addiction and poverty; I was worried that I would alienate myself by making things awkward or come across as probing for pity. But since I've started to work past this, being honest about who I am has fostered relational connections I didn't know were possible. I share my positionality for this reason – to cultivate my relationship to this topic and the people who are impacted by it. I don't come to this research as a value-neutral observer, not only because I believe that it's impossible to remove myself from the social context that influences how I navigate academia, but also because I have experiences and a stake in this topic. Sex education is highly politicized, and I take a clear and evidence-based stance in favour of it. I recognize that my identity is wrapped up in these discussions and the outcomes of such debates can (and do) significantly impact mine and my community's existence. This is true of my identity as a queer person, but also as someone who has (thus far) dedicated their career to social services in community-based organizations as a result of lived experiences. So now you know a bit about me personally, professionally and academically, where all realms of my life are bridged through community-based sex education. This chapter situates sex education in community-based organizations by overlaying a critical lens and introducing related previous studies, ultimately foregrounding my thinking about how community-based sex education is a worthwhile effort.

On 'Earning a Living'

For a moment, I want to return to the enterprising colonizer, Merritt. The traditional, unceded territory of the Nlaka'pamux and Syilx people (Steward & Favrholdt, 2025) is what is now colonially known as Merritt, British Columbia. The settlers of the time named the municipality after William Hamilton Merritt, who spearheaded canal and railway projects to support his mill businesses (Fraser, 2015). Through a critical lens, I understand this as someone

who felt entitled and superior to the natural environment to the point where he bent it to his will for financial gain. However, I suppose at the time, and largely to this day, that kind of venture is applauded by our society. We reap all the benefits, conveniences and luxury our pillage of the land gives us, so it's easy to turn away from the uglier consequences of such undertakings. Merritt's biography reads as congratulatory for outstanding effort in industrializing Canada, probably because it would be rude to speak poorly of someone who did so much for settlers' comfort and establishment on this land. It's not rude because Canadians are stereotypically and incorrectly positioned as polite and unconfrontational; it's rude because our Western society has moralized capitalism (Collins & Rothe, 2020). Our hegemonic neoliberal capitalist system encourages and enforces economic growth, and as an ideology, it maintains that this growth is the only way for humans to progress (Richmond & Shield, 2024; Smith, 2025). How this modernization is achieved is through a free market, minimal state authority and conservative values (Apple, 1999; Smith, 2025). Therefore, those who dedicate their lives to economic growth are valorized or, at the very least, considered upstanding citizens (Apple, 1999) who did their part to 'earn a living'. Look at Merritt – a whole town was dedicated to him because he did just that. When I look at the phrase *"earn a living,"* I find it disturbing that it implies people have to earn their living – as if life is something that isn't a given unless one is a good capitalist. To me, that seems absurd, but this is the logic and ethic that has become naturalized in the neoliberal ideology (Apple, 1999). The ideology of neoliberalism creates a convincing rhetoric around making ethical decisions that contribute to one's capital gains, and individuals themselves are solely responsible for the outcomes of their lives (Collins & Rothe, 2020). If one works hard, the expectation is that there will be a payoff in the future. However, it's crucial to examine why financial gain is our primary motivation for livelihood, rather than prioritizing the fundamental

human rights of access to basic necessities like food and shelter. In this moralized framework, if someone is poor, or disadvantaged, they have failed to engage ethically in society. They are therefore burdens to those of "us" who work hard to "earn" social capital (Apple, 1999).

Community-based organizations are a case in point of neoliberal ideology. As spaces that provide essential services to those who have been pushed to the margins, assessing the place of community-based organizations (or non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, charities, etc.) within the neoliberal ethic highlights the morality that is embedded in everything we do (Apple, 1999). Neoliberalism goes beyond values though; it is also baked into our laws, policies and education resulting in a way of living that orbits around privatization and conservative politics; a critical analysis of neoliberalism is necessary because “basic forms of clarity are quickly vanishing as opportunities arise to inflame passions that serve to consolidate authoritarian powers” (Butler, 2024, p. 96). These powers are stoking divisions that are forcibly establishing schools as sites of training for workplace readiness (Beyer & Apple, 1998). Through a production of workers who create wealth, neoliberal curricula teach students to act solely in their own interest and any concept of someone disembarking from that path is pathologized and ostracized (Apple, 1999).

Neoliberalism, in its basic form, relies on the market and its associated persuasions to run society (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The state's role in this dynamic is meant to be minimized, as its expenditures are costly and primarily exist outside of a free, privatized market (Richmond & Shield, 2024. Therefore, state oversight, control, and/or interference in the free market, as well as people's economic endeavours, is deterred. Should the state require financial backing from its citizens (for example, via taxes), the neoliberal belief is that this takes away from an individual's momentum toward financial success – an endeavour considered to be a human right (Apple,

1999). It can be easily deduced, then, that state oversight of citizens' personal business is a violation of people's rights. Overall, the state is encouraged to allow market-driven forces to play out in all aspects of public and private life while intervening minimally in order to offset costs and support the economic efforts of its population (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The logic that minimal state interference better serves the people's livelihood is underpinned by the idea that economic gain is the purpose of our existence. As such, policies and systems tend to favour those who have the means to dedicate their lives to earning capital. Of course, in capitalist societies, we all must dedicate our lives to earning capital in order to survive, but for some, this comes more easily than for others. If one cannot do so, or if they are barred from doing so, they are forced into the margins of society, leaving room for those who are better positioned to get ahead financially, inherently gaining increased power (Apple, 1999). It is no wonder that those who already have power wish to maintain it, as we are all convinced that wealth is equivalent to success – if one is forced to donate (for example, to the state) a morsel of their economic capital, their efforts toward success are thwarted and their 'hard work' was simply for the benefit of another (Apple, 1999). Once this dynamic is made clear, a distinct 'us versus them' emerges (Apple, 1999); where 'we' work hard to earn a living, and our capital that is invested in services funded (or anything that does not contribute to 'our' individual wealth) by the state makes 'them' benefit at 'our' expense (Apple, 1999). If social services/welfare are bad for the economy, then those who rely on social services are undermining the morally righteous act of 'earning' their living (Apple, 1999). Who are 'they', you might wonder. They are those who are disadvantaged from operating in the neoliberal, capitalist system – they are excluded from the spaces where laws, policies and deals are made; they are women, racialized, disabled, queer and poor (Apple, 1999; Cohen, 1997). They also require state support and social services to meet their basic needs.

That's not to say that every woman, racialized, disabled, queer and/or poor person will need to access such services. However, these groups (among others) have historically been denied rights – included the supposed right to hoard capital (Apple, 1999).

Because we live in a society that orbits around economic gain, those who have been barred from said gain are more likely to exist outside of this orbit, making it increasingly difficult to find the means to survive. Being on the outside of the most powerful class is "more than just a question of money, [it] shape[s] values, attitudes, social relations and…biases" (hooks, 1994, p. 178). The neoliberal rhetoric positions dependency as an individual failure that disadvantages those who are economically independent (Apple, 1999), thereby forcing the state to remain involved in personal matters (Richmond & Shield, 2024). To people who financially benefit from conservative politics that reduce the dollar amount they pay in taxes, state dependency seems pathological (Cohen, 1997). But if the Other is financially dependent on the state, and also bears a marginalized identity, the perception becomes an issue of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., in addition to classism. The inability of someone to work hard enough to lift themselves out of poverty is perceived as a failure, and "hatred is the moral way to feel" toward these groups (Butler, 2024, p. 100). It becomes easy to understand where community-based organizations fit into this equation because they provide services to the ostensible Other, services and resources that would otherwise be bought if these people had the means.

Neoliberalism in Social Services

Even though this is theoretical, I see it play out in social services all the time. For example, early on in my career, I would consistently request leadership in my organization to change the language on our website – it said the mission was to 'help the *deserving* poor' (my emphasis). After emails, meetings, and formal feedback insisting that this language was

oppressive, I was consistently told that leadership was reviewing the matter. As I'm writing this, I checked to see if the agency has updated the website, and it has. It's too bad that didn't happen when I was still employed there. I left that role for the explicit fact that I couldn't align with their treatment of our clients; the 'deserving' poor wasn't just a slogan, it was how they operated, and I couldn't be a part of it anymore. It became obvious to me that "in an exploitative society, a well to do person or institution gives donations to selected poor people in a humiliating manner while using philanthropic slogans, in order to conceal the necessity of radical social change" (Taylor 2005, as cited in Reynolds, 2010, p. 36). When social service in communities is only about helping people normalize oppressive conditions in which they exist (Freire, 1985), it's a fast track for the social service worker to experience spiritual pain and exhaustion (Reynolds, 2010). I still wonder what 'deserving' means, or rather, who is 'undeserving', but my assumption is that the undeserving poor are meant to be those who aren't willing or able to 'earn' their living. Beyond the theory here, the reality is that there is an overbearing increase in the number of people who require social services to meet their basic needs as social disparity affects an increasingly large portion of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2024). This is especially true for women, who are both overrepresented as service-users/clients and service providers/staff (English, 2016). Neoliberal policy inherently means application of patriarchal values that de-prioritize women's services (English, 2016). Consequently, organizations that provide crucial resources to a community's most vulnerable populations are inundated with overwhelming demand to the point where clients are turned away, waitlisted, or met with rushed service providers (Statistics Canada, 2024). Said differently (or ironically), the demand for social services is not being met by the supply, partially because community organizations are relied upon by the state to address people's needs (Lim, 2022). Government funding is a critical

component of the operations of non-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations are "critical partners in supporting people and communities" (Government of British Columbia, para.2, 2025). However, the notion that the tax-paying citizen is funding the support of vulnerable communities is an affront to the neoliberal way; not only does this extract from an individual's gross income, but it means that, to an extent, the state must remain involved in people's private lives (Richmond & Shield, 2024). This creates an entanglement of the state and community organizations (Collins & Rothe, 2020) where the government contracts agencies to provide social services, but by doing so through a third party, it keeps the personal issues of its citizens at arm's length (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The result of this dynamic is that the larger systemic issues that contribute to people's disenfranchisement become depoliticized, and hardship remains the fault of the individual (Collins & Rothe, 2020). The government's reliance on non-profit organizations avoids the need to make laws and policies that intervene in the issues causing such calamity (Collins & Rothe, 2020; Farrell, 2015; Lim, 2022). The individualization of problems, encouragement of third-party responses to social issues, and creation of competition amongst organizations to vie for funding are all quintessential to neoliberal capitalism (Apple, 1999). In this system, it makes sense to rely on community-based organizations to support people with their (supposed) personal problems, less the government become involved in citizens' private affairs. Government grants for organizations are not a given; community agencies spend excessive time and resources imploring the state to fund their continued operation. The organization with the championing grant application (which must align strongly with the current government's political objectives) will receive funding to continue supporting the community. In contrast, others will be forced to slow or stop services (Clément, 2021). A result of this dynamic is a dual dependency, where the state relies on community-based organizations to provide

necessary services (Collins & Rothe, 2020), and these organizations, in turn, depend on the state to fund these services (Richmond & Shield, 2024). This cycle is volatile and inconsistent, with no room to step back to assess social affliction in a way that addresses the underlying reasons for the need for social services in the first place (Collins & Rothe, 2020; Farrell, 2015). The focus remains on normalizing dystopian living conditions, effectively avoiding systemic issues, discourses, and power relations that contribute to the basis of the Other's marginalization (Collins & Rothe, 2020).

Privatization manifests in ways that further cement the individualization of social issues. Single citizens, or groups of people under a common social order (like a religious group or private business/corporation for example) are encouraged – and even financially benefit from – donating funds to non-profit organizations (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The operations of these organizations often rely heavily on private donations, which is an inconsistent and unreliable source of funding because those who have excess funds to donate must morally or politically align with the cause(s) of the receiving organization (Collins & Rothe, 2020). In this way, philanthropy and altruism are commodified (Collins & Rothe, 2020) and community-based organizations are at the charge of those who decide who the 'deserving poor' are.

A poignant example of this arose recently in a local capacity – a prominent community-based organization posted on their social media page that their sex education program does not receive any consistent, dedicated funding (Link, 2025). The post states that the sex education program relies solely on grants, honorariums and donations despite their far-reaching impact, then requests donations to the program from its followers (Link, 2025). A little over a month later, the same organization posted a newspaper article that detailed greater loss of funding for the sex-education program – resulting in several educators losing their jobs (Link, 2025). The

article articulates worry that the gap left by the loss of sex education in this city will be filled by other organizations that offer sex education through a biased lens, such as groups that offer sexual health services and education that is driven by conservative, religious belief systems (Link, 2025). These community-based organizations are prolific for advertising crisis pregnancy and maternal support but do not disclose that the operations of these agencies are faith-based, and often "engage in purposefully manipulative and deceptive practices that spread misinformation on sexual health and abortion" (Montoya et al., 2022, p. 757). As non-profit organizations, private donations are welcome and encouraged for these operations. This is a clear case of how essential private dollars can be, as they are often steered by individuals' moral compass, regardless of evidence-based efficacy when comparing two similarly driven agencies with different underpinning values.

The Present Context of Sex Education

Sex education, both in schools and in the community, is a heavily politicized topic; therefore, it is vulnerable to being impacted by fluctuations in funding. This is true of private donations but also state funding – as the government will not fund efforts that do not align with their political platform (Collins & Rothe, 2020). For example, the conservative administration in the United States recently threatened to pull over 12 million dollars in funding for sex education curriculum in California that is used in schools and with vulnerable youth in community (Schultz, 2025). The basis of this defunding is that the sex education curriculum includes discussions of gender identity, which, according to the conservative government, is an unacceptable "indoctrination" of students (Schultz, 2025, para. 6). Debates about the morality and efficacy of sex education are overrun by homophobic and transphobic rhetoric (Butler, 2024). The popularized notion is that children who are taught "a complex view of human

sexuality, and…that gay and lesbian lives are worthy of respect and dignity" has been distorted to an argument that kids are being taught to be transgender and/or gay (Butler, 2024, p.89). As a queer person, the attack on transgender people in the United States (and internationally) (Butler, 2024) is terrifying, and these days, I brace myself every time I hear any form of news about gender. Reading Butler's (2024) analysis of gender ideology as it is today has been incredibly helpful in understanding the systemic issues and context I find myself in; concurrently, older texts such as hooks (1994) and Apple (1999) read as if they could be written today. This is because the idea of a conservative resurgence is evident in all of this literature, where governments campaign on, and people adhere to, the idea of a safer, simpler time past (hooks, 1994). However, this safety means that the 'us and them' dynamic is unambiguous – those with the most privilege maintain power over those who have less and there is no mixing or crossing those boundaries set by race, class and religion (Apple, 1999; hooks, 1994). Doing so would be immoral.

A significant aspect of this past was the idealized nuclear family, headed by a white, middle-class, property-owning male who oversees the private matters of the home (Apple, 1999). He is accompanied by a white woman and their white children. Their family affairs remain behind closed doors, as the economic and domestic realms of life are distinctly separate (Apple, 1999). This family makeup is complimentary to the Western neoliberal society, as heterosexual families procreate, remain silent about domestic matters that would otherwise agitate the status quo, and centre their lives around the economy (Apple, 1999). If public education teaches the children of the nuclear family that there are other ways to exist, and that tolerance toward others who don't look like them is worthwhile, the ideal of the nuclear family with all of its simplicity, wealth and safety erupts (Butler, 2024). The private (i.e. sex and sexuality) becomes public, and

sexuality becomes conflated with morality. The neoliberal dogma of sexuality is that of the "heterosexual, married, monogamous [and], procreative" subject (Fahs, 2014, p. 272). The nuclear family is considered a gold standard of Western colonial ambition, not because it's natural for humans to strive for suburbia, but because this unit maximizes capital (Apple, 1999; Fahs, 2014).

Like values and politics, sex education can be conservative as well; it is within the conservative sex education curriculum where students learn to adhere to heterosexuality as well as other social and religious conventions (Jones, 2011). Under the conservative framework, students are in school to learn how to engage in the workforce. Therefore, sex education may be altogether irrelevant (Jones, 2011). That said, it is a given within this approach that "legitimized sexual expression is always procreative and occurs within the context of an established heterosexual marriage" (Jones, 2011, p. 137). Those who deviate from a procreative union are labelled as immoral, pathological or not discussed at all (Butler, 2024; Jones, 2011). The labels and names that are ordained to counter-hegemonic subjectivities are a phenomenon that queer theory gives depth to. Queer theory is a valuable lens to add to this discussion, as it clarifies and complements an analysis of sex education within and outside of schools in a neoliberal context. With the synopsis of morality, privatization and conservatism (Apple, 1999) in mind, I contemplate how queer theory incorporates into community-based sex education.

The Condition of Designations

What's in a name? I've told you my name and how my name relates to large components of my identity. I've been called many things other than my name (both affirmative and derogatory), and the labels I've had placed on me exemplify assumptions of what our Western, colonial society views as normal and abnormal. Before I came out as queer and changed my

gender expression to align with my gender identity, I would be the target of sexual harassment from men yelling out of car windows. It’s a common occurrence as a woman, and because you grow up with it, it becomes normalized as just another part of being on the losing side of patriarchy. Things changed, though, when I progressively became more ambiguous in my gender by leaning into a masculine presentation. Men didn't stop yelling things at me; just the content of the harassment changed. Instead of sexualizing me, I've gotten the much less creative label of ‘fag’. Being called a fag was not something I expected to happen after coming out; quite the contrary, I noticed that men began to ignore me altogether when it became clear that I didn't exist for their gaze. Maybe it was naïve of me to be surprised, but the shift from being ignored to being hated happened fast. Suffice it to say that being called a slur was a new experience for me (an obvious privilege of my whiteness). Now, if we’re keeping score, I’ve been a fag, a sexually attractive woman, and a sister – none of which are accurate to me, but nevertheless, I am viewed in these ways. When I (quite literally) transitioned from appearing as a cisgender woman to a masculine non-binary person, how others perceived my sexuality followed suit. When one is heterosexual, cisgender female, she is viewed as sexually available (regardless of her consent), and the potential subordinate mate to a cisgender male. This union, procreative and religiously sound, is considered an acceptable arrangement (Jones, 2011). Contrarily, my queer body and sexuality don’t fit into that norm – the sex I have is for pleasure (as procreation is impossible), and to some, I am sacrilegious and therefore an abomination to the sanctity of a nuclear family (Butler, 2024). This circumstance is exemplary of how people who are not me feel the need to find a label for me, as if it helps them determine my personhood in relation to themselves. If I am a fag, then my body and sexuality is subversive and to some, worthy of violence. If I’m a woman, I must be sexually available to men. If I’m a sister, I must look similar to my sibling. All

of these default assumptions about identities and relationships become unstable when viewing them through a queer lens.

To queer something, as a verb (Parker, 2002), is to reject that anything in our social worlds is natural; rather, we assign meaning, identifiers and subjectivities to people (Morris, 1998). The categorization of identities (such as a fag, woman or sister) is a framework to understand the social construction of identities, and perhaps, what nuances exist that call into question our fixed ideas of how things are (Cohen, 1997). Additionally, by looking at prescribed categories of people and interrogating the implications of labels, hierarchical power dynamics become apparent (Collins, 1991). For example, a man holds power over women in a patriarchal society and therefore would likely not experience consequences when sexually harassing women from a passing car. Similarly, the discourse may lead us to wonder what the woman did to provoke him – what was she wearing? Can't she take a compliment? When looking at this common interaction through a queer lens, different questions are asked: why do men have power over women? What about men makes them superior? What even is a man? What is a woman? A deeper analysis to attempt an answer to these questions (through a social lens) reveals the rules and conventions we expect people to adhere to; "queer theory anticipates the precariousness of the signified" (Britzman, 1995, p. 213). Said differently, how we exist in the world, specifically through our bodies, is not neutral – queer theory provides an interrogation of the signifiers we assign to bodies that ultimately determine our social experiences. How we look, act, and what we do or cannot do is dictated by the established meanings bodies have, including our gender expression, race, and any other visible indicators (Massaquoi, 2015). As a result, this meaning is perpetuated through unequal power dynamics, where some bodies (read white, cisgender, male, heterosexual, able) have access to social capital over others (read racialized, transgender, woman,

homosexual, disabled) (Massaquoi, 2015). Again, we come to an "us" versus "them" dynamic (Massaquoi, 2015) where there is no room for nuance. This rigid perception automatically implies that one subjectivity has to exist against the other, one person must be normal in order for the other to be abnormal – there has to be some form of comparison for this to work (Collins, 1991). In this way, power and privilege emerge when the hegemonic identity is defaulted to *in relation to* anyone outside of the majority (Luhmann, 1998). Queering our deep-seated assumptions brings to light "that most forms of oppression are based on what a person is or what they are perceived to be, irrespective of what they do or how they live" (Massaquoi, 2015, p. 766).

As a queer person, I'm drawn to this framework because it demystifies much of the unfair (or uncouth) treatment I receive in public. Because I have a deviant body, I exercise agency and challenge people's norms (Cohen, 2004), which is both a positive taunt to the status quo but at the same time a tool of oppression with social and political consequences (Morris, 1998). These circumstances are two sides of the same coin. Through systems and daily interactions, norms and identities are produced and adhered to, and they become an important part of our lives (Britzman, 1995). While identities are socially constructed, the meaning they hold also creates a sense of self and community belonging (Cohen, 1997). My identity as a queer person means that I have become part of a community that has similar experiences as me, and we've created safe spaces for ourselves that foster authenticity and connection. Luhmann (1998) states that "beyond suggesting gender fluidity, queer theory also insists on the complications of the two: without gender, sexuality is nothing" (p. 123). This assertion summarized my complex feelings about the labels I choose for myself – being a lesbian implies my gender identity as being a woman, but I'm non-binary, so does that make me less of a lesbian? Such complications make any gender

identity or sexuality non-static, shifting and contextual, so I settle on calling myself queer. Queer theory, while rooted in gay and lesbian studies (Blackburn & Beucher, 2019; Britzman, 1995), has been critiqued for centring sexuality and gender identity, effectively ignoring how other signifiers such as race and class intersect with queerness (Cohen, 1997). Collins (1991) explains that people can very easily identify with the parts of themselves that cause them to be oppressed, but often fail to understand how their actions and thoughts work to uphold oppression that disenfranchises people on the outside of their own community; "each group identifies the oppression with which it feels most comfortable" (Collins, 1991, p. 229). I certainly feel that this is true for me – as a queer white person, I'm much more able to understand my own oppression compared to a queer, racialized person. Power relations exist within queer communities, so an intentional queer of colour critique avoids "theory which collapses our understanding of power into a single continuum of evaluation" (Cohen, 1997, p. 452). Siloing queer theory into the realm of gender/sexuality replicates a division between 'us and them', where only queer people earn liberation at the expense of others, specifically people of colour (Cohen, 1997). Queer of colour frameworks bring in a "both/and" point of view; one can be many things at once with the recognition that these labels are socially constructed to uphold methods of comparison that cement power across hierarchical identities (Collins, 1991, p. 225). Cohen (1997) emphasizes that for people of colour, social categories are used for solidarity and survival. Therefore, it is an immense privilege to view these categories as inconsequential social constructions. A relevant, real-world implication of this tension is exemplified in the racist discourse about single Black mothers who need social services to meet their family's basic needs (Cohen, 1997). Even though these women may be heterosexual, they are socially disadvantaged by being cast as a group who is "unable to control their sexual impulses and eventual reproductive decisions" (Cohen, 1997, p.

458). For Black women and Indigenous women, this discourse is also common as a way of enforcing white notions of civility and respectability (Hickey et al., 2021; Spieldenner & Booker, 2019). This demonstrates that our society privileges the white, nuclear family as the only ones morally capable of reproduction (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). We believe this so fervently that in Canada, Indigenous women have been forced and coerced into reproductive sterilization because they are believed to be incapable of agentic decision making (Leason, 2021). All this is to say that labels matter and should be interrogated in relation to how they maintain power – this is especially true when it comes to sexuality, sexual health and sex education.

Sex Education in Community Contexts

If you're lucky enough to have sex education, it was probably centred around whiteness – white bodies, white families, white babies (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). As I mentioned previously, when I first came to this topic, I didn't consider that sex education in community was happening outside of my own white context. My default assumption was that a community-based sex education is uncommon, that the main method of sex education is an individualized experience that would benefit from becoming more communal, accessible and contextualized. Which is true, however it ignores the fact that "sex education has been successful outside of the domain of academia. From family-led cultural teaching through various rites of passage…to community engagement projects deploying peer-based sex education models" (White & Sethna, 2014, p. 416), people of colour and Indigenous Peoples have been teaching sexuality in community for a long time. This way of teaching has been significantly disrupted as a result of colonization and the associated assumption that white sexuality is the standard by which all others should be compared to (White & Sethna, 2014). The danger in this is that, as a white person, I risk legitimizing this assumption – making it seem as though community-based sex education is

novel through the authentication of academia (Johnston, 2006). This is one way "the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" (Smith, p.2, 2021), because what is unsaid is just as important as what is said (Johnston, 2006). I recently came across a salient example of this while searching for community-based organizations that teach sex education. Monchalin et al. (2016) followed a peer-led project called the Sexy Health Carnival that introduced culturally relevant, strengths-based sex education at powwows. The study indicated that contextualized, Indigenous-led sexual health projects are well-received and effective in promoting safer sex practices for Indigenous powwow attendees (Monchalin et al., 2016). The authors point out that although Indigenous youth report higher instances of sexually transmitted infections, the issue, or risk, is not being Indigenous; the issue is the racism, colonialism and lack of culturally appropriate education and health care for Indigenous Peoples (Monchalin et al., 2016). If I leave the statement as a statistic (i.e. "the rate of STIs reported is 2.5 times higher among Indigenous youth than their non-Indigenous counterparts" (Monchalin et al., 2014, p. 161)), then I decontextualize the issue by positioning Indigenous Peoples as the Other, where white rates of STI transmission become the standard in which Indigenous Peoples are compared against. Existence of culture, race, racism and colonization exist in educational spaces, whether it is included intentionally or not (Johnston, 2006), but a deliberate exclusion of race ignores the intersections of identity and oppression – all education, including sex education, is culpable in this (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). By avoiding critical discussions of society beyond hegemonic discourse, educational settings reinforce dominant beliefs that teach students how to conform to a white supremacist society rather than challenge it (Freire, 1985). So while schools insulate students from "an unjust social reality" through a decontextualized curriculum, they also replicate systems of inequality, power and complexity (Freire, 1985, p.11). A decontextualized

educational curriculum only supports students in mastering generalized knowledge without the ability to think critically about what is being taught (Freire, 1985). Students may have memorized a vocabulary, however the social significance and history underpinning this knowledge is omitted (Freire, 1985).

I see this play out in school-based sex education especially, with racism being one component of a perfunctory curriculum. When looking at curriculum that compels students to regurgitate the “nonsense sounds of imitative thinking” (Freire, 1985, p. 11) without opportunities for deeper, dialogic learning, sex education teaches students to label anatomy diagrams, study puberty according to their own assigned sex at birth, and focus solely on heterosexual, penetrative sex (Jones, 2011). This is the case only if schools allow curriculum beyond abstinence-only methods (Jones, 2011). In contrast, critical pedagogy situates the social and political context within the topic at hand (Freire, 1985); for sex education, this would enable “students to actively respond to society’s privileging or particular sexualities… students identify and question values and practices that are unjust…and undertake actions to lead to a more equitable society” (Jones, 2011, p.151). Butler (2024) argues that a curriculum that ignores or avoids lessons on critical thinking is the underlying issue behind the current conservative escalation against sex education. When students are only exposed to hegemonic ideals of social structure and relationships, they aren’t able to imagine a society that challenges our present systems of exclusion toward queer people (Butler, 2024). Keeping sex education that discusses more than anatomy and procreation out of schools is a “deliberate form of illiteracy” (Butler, 2024, p. 91). The argument against sex education broadly (and including gender and sexuality in the sex education curriculum specifically) is justified by arguments that children and youth are passive recipients of information; therefore, if children are taught about gender and sexuality,

they will become what they learn (Butler, 2024). As a result, sex education curriculum is censored under the guise that children are being protected from sex-related topics (which could be considered child abuse and pedophilia) (Butler, 2024). This so-called protection, Butler (2024) asserts, is only making the realities of queer people unknowable, abnormal and immoral – causing harm to these groups rooted in ignorance and intolerance. The politicization of sex education – especially in our current climate, which is intent on insivibilizing queer identities (Butler, 2024) – makes sex education in school unreliable at best, and hateful at worst.

The inability of schools to adequately teach sex education is one cited motivation for community-based organizations to step in (e.g. Landry et al., 2011; McCarthy et al., 2015; Secor-Turner et al., 2017). As non-governmental actors, community-based organizations are not constrained in their curricula (Secor-Turner et al., 2017) and can therefore address the intersections of sex, gender, identity and relationships (McCarthy et al., 2015). Although the queer community would benefit from curricula that include us, this is true of all marginalized identities. As such, community-based organizations can meet the needs of those who are conventionally excluded (and as a result, may have had access to school at all). This is where the theories meet the practice – community-based organizations contextualize their sex education curricula for their students, thereby addressing unconventional but no less important topics in sexuality (e.g. Benoit et al., 2017; Chaya & Bernert, 2014; Du Mont et al., 2020; Monchalin et al., 2016; Montgomery et al., 2018).

Putting it into Praxis

Both critical curriculum analysis and queer theory emphasize the importance of praxis. Praxis can be described as the application of theory; beyond a theoretical understanding, praxis is an embodiment of theory. Actioning theory is intended to promote liberatory change (Beyer &

Apple, 1998), and through a queer, critical analysis sex education can disrupt the status quo that centers profit and invariant identities. Sex education in community-based organizations that centers “informed judgement, ethical decision-making, and a sense of bodily autonomy” (Butler, 2024, p. 102) ultimately accomplishes praxis. Through the frame of critical pedagogy, community-based organizations that provide sex education are subverting neoliberal policy and ideology. Inherent to their operations, community organizations exist for the sole purpose of supporting community members (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The ability to access resources, education and services outside of the market contradicts the individualization and privatization of our society that has become naturalized. By centring the experiences and identities of clients, community-based organizations can foster contextualized sex education. Teaching in a way that informs and enables learners to know themselves better within their contexts supports practical, applicable knowledge. Even if community-based organizations don’t centre their mission around an explicitly stated counter-hegemonic praxis, they are still “rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority, and rewriting discursive borderlands” (Giroux, H. & McLaren, P., 1994, p. 129) . Where critical curriculum analysis asks *how* (Beyer & Apple, 1998), queer theory asks *who* (Luhmann, 1998; Morris, 1998*)*. How are community-based organizations countering neoliberal traditions of (sex education)? By doing this, who is being included in sex education that is traditionally excluded? Through this praxis, is community-based sex education a viable step toward eliminating such entrenched disenfranchisement that we've come to normalize? I'm hopeful that's the case.

I recognize that community-based organizations can be oppressive spaces that operate in an unjust system. I’ve seen that first-hand, both as a recipient of services and an employee. The current context that I am in relies on community organizations for essential services regardless of

their problematic location. From a more aspirational perspective, community organizations can provide spaces for connection and subversion to normative power structures. Moreover, with flexible operational models, these agencies have the potential to fill the gap in school-based sex education. Sex education in the community has "the ability to address complex, socially situated problems and deliver services and interventions that are culturally relevant to the members of the communities" (Secor-Turner et al., 2017, p. 545). Previous studies demonstrate that sex education as a service within community-based organizations has distinctive characteristics, setting it apart from school-based sex education (SBSE). Among preceding studies of organizations, the context, clients and shortfalls of SBSE are interrelated rationalizations to include sex education as a program (e.g. Du Mont et al., 2020; Chaya & Bernert, 2014; Fisher et al., 2012; Fulcher et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2011; McCarthy et al., 2015; Monchalin et al., 2016; Montgomery et al., 2018; Secor-Turner et al., 2017). Context refers to the ability of community-based organizations to develop, implement, and change sex education programs with relatively little constraint (McCarthy et al., 2015). Situations where people are encouraged to think critically and challenge previously held assumptions are an active effort of building community (hooks, 1994). Although the students - or, in this case, clients/participants - may not arrive at an organization for the explicit purpose of subverting the hegemonic authority of public education, clients do not have to be intentional activists in order to be engaged in liberatory praxis (hooks, 1994). The Sexy Health Carnival (mentioned previously) is an example of this. Indigenous participants were able to access sex education in a culturally relevant, non-stigmatizing space. As an effective method of teaching sex education, powwows within Indigenous communities met the participants' specific needs and acted as a preventative measure to adverse sexual health outcomes (Monchalin et al., 2016). But at the same time, the Sexy

Health Carnival challenged the normative, colonial method of sex education, making it a subversive, political act; when people's lived experience is included in the learning process, relationality and connection are fostered (hooks, 1994). Schools, however, are not historically spaces in which the learning process is intended to be decolonial and relational (Apple, 1999; Johnston, 2006). Clients who access community services inform how and what is included in sex education, making the information both relevant (e.g., Fulcher et al., 2021) and empowering (Benoit et al., 2017). As sex education has the potential to cover a wide range of topics, organizations have tailored curricula that address the overall needs of their client base, integrating additional services to provide wraparound support (Du Mont et al., 2017). Montgomery et al. (2018) conducted a case study in this context, where participants reported that sex education in their transition house (a temporary residential site for safety when leaving an abusive spouse) was beneficial. While sex education at school may cover gender-based violence, healthy relationships and/or sexual assault, we know that this is not standard practice (Black et al., 2024). The trauma-informed approach and convenience of having multiple services in one space made sex education applicable and accessible for the clients (Montgomery et al., 2018). Richardson (2023) describes a trauma-informed approach to teaching as an embodied understanding that trauma impacts students, and a choice-based, safe and agentic learning environment supports students to show up with their lived experiences reflected in the curricula. Responsive to community need and embedded in the geography of an area (Richmond & Shield, 2024), community-based organizations are able to tailor their sex education curricula to the needs of their clients (Du Mont et al., 2020). In addition to transition homes for women leaving abusive relationships, examples of the inclusion of clients' lived experience in sex education can be found in care facilities for older adults, specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ seniors (Chaya & Bernert,

2014). Additionally, sex education could exist in the community for transgender folks who have experienced sexualized violence (e.g. Du Mont et al., 2020). Du Mont et al. (2020) point out that community-based organizations are already equipped with knowledge and expertise as it pertains to intersecting social issues. Clients may arrive at an agency for sex education, but may also be able to access housing support, for example. Non-profit operations are dedicated to spending the time and resources toward issues that impact sexuality, making the education relevant and helpful to the client demographic (McCarthy et al., 2015). Another related consideration is that for some vulnerable youth who experience intersecting inequities, attending school isn't realistic (Landry et al., 2011). Youth-serving organizations that already provide several supports can provide sex education and resources that they would not otherwise have access to at school or home (Landry et al., 2011). Overall, community-based organizations that provide sex education contribute to an equitable option to access critical sexual health information.

It is necessary to note here that studies examining community-based sex education pale in comparison to the extensive research conducted on school-based sex education. Although a deeper discussion of the topics and findings of these studies are outside of my purview, it is worth noting that there is resounding evidence in favour of comprehensive sex education in schools (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020), that sex education does not influence children's gender identity (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017), nor does it encourage kids to have sex before they are ready (Dreweke, 2019). Overarchingly, research on school-based sex education asserts that comprehensive sex education can have a positive impact on children and youth – that is when they have access to it (SIECCAN, 2019). With many of the studies on community-based sex education stating that school-based sex education neglects the needs of students, it is apparent that there is an urgency for alternative educational spaces, such as community organizations, to

take the initiative in meeting these needs. This isn't to say that non-profits agencies should or can be the only option for sex education; instead, they can play a part in creating equitable access to vital sexual health information in addition to the "intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy levels" of sex education (McCarthy et al., 2015, p. 2). A universal approach to sex education that fits every student and every context may not be possible, but some approaches can be more impactful compared to others (Jones, 2011). Community-based sex education is one avenue in which a critical and queer approach benefits those who are traditionally excluded from sex education.

We're taught to believe that sex is shameful, private and individual experience; however, sexuality extends far beyond the self (Spieldenner & Booker, 2019). Community-based organizations that bring people together to learn about sex in context are an interruption of this belief – an act toward creating a society that counteracts isolation and divisive conjectures. Furthermore, through a provision of sex education, community-based organizations are taking a political risk by taking pedagogic action that is inclusive of counter-hegemonic sexualities. While this may include queer identities, this action alone is a queering (Meyer et al., 2022) of sex education. Sex education outside of school is an ask for more – more inclusion, more options, more ways of doing things that work for more people. This demand is a call for a queering (Mayo & Rodriguez, 2019) of sex education; I understand community-based sex education to be doing just that. Including sex education in the operations of organizations makes the knowledge accessible and actionable, specifically for marginalized identities who cannot or do not benefit from school-based sex education.

Conclusion

hooks (1994) says that theory can be a place of healing because it is about imagining alternatives. Through theory, our taken-for-granted way of doing things is dislodged, we question our reality and plan for something different (hooks, 1994). The theoretical frameworks introduced in this chapter set a critical foundation in understanding the current (and often bleak) context we find ourselves in, but also provoke ways of thinking about the future. Critical curriculum analysis and queer theory as theoretical frameworks provide me with a perspective that looks at the systemic and power issues at play within community-based organizations that teach sex education, but at the same time, how community-based sex education can contribute to a future in which knowledge about sexuality is achieved equitably. The accessibility of sex education is critical for equity-deserving populations, as it may help to facilitate people's sexual agency, contribute to a community that has a valuable awareness of their sexuality, and provide a critical understanding of the systems that help or hinder sex education. My lived experience and identities I've adopted bring me to this research, ultimately with the goal to set a foundation for myself and others' work to progress the field of sex education.

Throughout this chapter, I've sought to describe neoliberalism and its impacts on sex education and community-based organizations. Additionally, I discussed queer theory alongside queer of colour critique, and how sex education in community-based organizations is a queering of the field of sex education. Included are relevant studies that examined sex education in community organizations; these, along with the concepts of this literature review, preface my analysis of the study I conducted. In chapter three, I convey the methodology for this study, its research paradigm and details about how the study was conducted.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Research Strategies

In the last chapter, I discussed queer theory and introduced myself as a queer person. I like to identify as queer because the rigidity of other labels that connotate a fixed gender doesn't fit me. Sometimes I'll call myself a lesbian, but this depends on the context – does the person I'm saying this to know that even though I say I'm a lesbian, I don't identify as a woman? These mental gymnastics - in addition to a general aversion to justifying my existence - makes 'queer' as a label work for now. But being queer or doing something queerly (Parker, 2002) means different things to different people in different contexts. Britzman (1995) and Cohen (1997) are poignant examples, as their discussions of the term queer span dispositions. Britzman wrote that the word queer was "a disparaging term" (p. 213) that has the potential to be used as an insult toward a person with a specific identity. However, Britzman (1995) goes on to assert that queer is more than this; it is a verb, an action that describes a way of doing things differently and questioning who and what gets legitimized. Writing about queer pedagogy, Britzman (1995) describes the word as something teachers are hesitant to say and use in curriculum. I suppose to an extent this is also true today, but not because queer is a slur, more so that an inclusion of queer identity in school curricula is sometimes avoided in fear of reprimand or legal consequences (Thoreson, 2021).

In another instance, Cohen (1997) expressed that using the term queer was exclusionary of queer people of colour. In the context of Cohen's (1997) activism, queer as a label was "rooted in class, race, and gender privilege" (p. 451). Cohen's (1997) critique is that queer is too narrow a term that ignores the power dynamics within the queer community, favouring white, middle-class, and cisgender folks. Queer can, and should, be inclusive of all identities that form

experiences based on intersectional subjectivities (Cohen, 1997). Within activist movements and spaces that uplift those traditionally excluded from social capital (Apple, 1999), queer communities have to consider that only focusing on queer sexuality has the opposite effect of liberation – rather, it excludes many who are at the receiving end of an oppressive social system (Cohen, 1997). Without queer of colour scholars like Cohen critiquing the limits of the word 'queer', we are at risk of replicating hierarchies and binaries that are at the core of queer resistance. Again, Cohen's (1997) argument remains valid in current contexts, particularly in education.

Gary-Smith (2026) argued that teaching sex education requires the perspectives of intersecting experiences. Race, queerness and sex education are all the target of anti-DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) initiatives in the United States (Gary-Smith, 2026); the removal of language that addresses race and queerness is under the justification that intersectional sex education makes "[w]hite people feel bad" (Gary-Smith, 2026, p. 14) and exposes children to "sexual grooming and pedophilia" (Hackenschmidt, 2023, para. 3). These examples demonstrate that a singular word (queer) contains multitudes of beliefs about the power and fluidity of constructed meanings behind language. Unpacking the meaning behind discourse and rhetoric reveals a great deal about our lived experiences and social dynamics. Here, queer holds invariant, contradictory, and irregular meanings across subjectivities and timelines, but the same can be said broadly about language. This is the work of critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2016). Critical discourse analysis, the methodology employed in this study, aligns with my intention of bridging the broader context with lived experiences and real-world examples of sex education in community organizations.

In this chapter, I expand on this methodology and explain my research strategies used in the exploration of community-based sex education, including the conduct of interviews with sex educators in a community context. I end with a summary of how I approached analyzing the knowledge attained through a critical lens, ultimately substantiating and justifying the importance of sex education in community-based organizations.

Orientation & Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine how and why community-based organizations implement sex education for their client base and to understand the characteristics of the accompanying content. The study explored the justifications, perceived effectiveness, and discourses surrounding sex education programs offered as a service within community-based organizations. My objective was to understand how sex education is taught within a community setting and how this education serves the specific needs of its members. I came to this topic to understand the "aboutness" (Trent & Cho, 2020, p.3) of sex education in community-based organizations because I understood that these sites held valuable insights into a subversive method of teaching sex education, which in our current context is required due to the precariousness of school-based sex education. While a quantitative approach may have been chosen by other scholars (e.g., Fisher et al., 2010, 2012), my decision to consider community-based sex education from a qualitative perspective is grounded in multiple justifications. First, it's a worthwhile challenge to hold multiple truths, to sit in a (sometimes frustrating) grey area where conclusions may be many and contradictory, as is often the case in qualitative research (Trent & Cho, 2020). Similarly, I don't have the authority to claim absolute truth or generalized knowledge, which positivist research attempts to establish (Bhattacharya, 2017). Ultimately, being able to consider context inherently acknowledges that people, including myself, apply

meaning to everything – especially in the social world (Trent & Cho, 2020). It is possible that our social worlds cannot be removed from our personal ones, and therefore, I cannot remove myself from my research (Bhattacharya, 2017). Nor do I want to; I came to this project intending to further the field of sex education, which is directly against "the vested interests of elite white men" (Collins, 1991, p. 235). Furthermore, as a researcher, I hold power over the information (data) shared with me throughout this process, as the interpretation of this data is filtered through the lens of my lived experiences, values, and feelings (Trent & Cho, 2020). That's not to say that my own subjectivity makes me right and others wrong; instead, I'm aware of myself in relation to who and what was studied for this project (Trent & Cho, 2020). All this is to say that I couldn't have done this project justice through a quantitative, positivist framework because I value the richness and socially complex nature of qualitative, interpretivist research.

In addition to my inability to accept universal truths, a critical orientation toward the methods and methodology of this study was non-negotiable. Critical research frames social phenomena as imbued with power dynamics, systemic forces and politics (Bhavnani et al., 2014). A critical lens is an expansive perspective that attempts to grasp how context informs a topic, while also honouring the people's lived experiences within that context (Bhavnani et al., 2014). This approach is crucial for studying sex education in community-based organizations because it aims to expose inequalities that can, and should, be addressed (Bhavnani et al., 2014). Not all education is treated equally, and the education a person receives can be significantly influenced by social subjectivities (Apple, 1999). This is especially true for sex education (SIECCAN, 2019), which is why access to community spaces that offer sex education also support equal access to necessary information that supports agency, choice and consent for people who are historically excluded from these human rights. To understand and expose sex

education in community-based organizations is to demonstrate its viability and value for these groups. I specifically sought out sex educators in community-based organizations and invited them to interview and examined their associated local contexts. Because my sites of analysis were conversations and educational materials, and considering my critical, interpretivist orientation, critical discourse analysis was the most suitable methodology for this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis can be described as a way to understand communication (including linguistic choice) by emphasizing the social meaning behind it (Rogers, 2016). This social meaning conveys an indication of power dynamics, inequality, and politics; therefore, it is useful in unpacking "the relationship of discourse in the construction and representation of [the] social world" (Rogers, 2016, p. 3). Simultaneously, critical discourse analysis demonstrates how discourse represents a multifaceted social reality, and at the same time, the social reality informs discourse (Rogers, 2016). This methodology recognizes that language, in a social sense, changes in significance depending on the speaker, the listener, the context and the era (e.g., Rogers, 2016). Human subjectivity isn't taken at face value; rather, this orientation "sees human subjects as constantly engaged in the negotiation of knowledge, social relations, and identity" (Apple, 1999, p. 172). Subjectivity is not considered irrelevant here, but rather a source of interrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about whose knowledge we privilege and why (Apple, 1999). This is especially pertinent in educational settings and studies, where educational materials, curricula and approaches may reveal societal power struggles and how such spaces could shift toward a more counterhegemonic, and therefore liberatory, approach to education (Apple, 1999).

The sense of possibility inherent in this methodology strongly aligns with the purpose of this research. Critical discourse analysis isn't solely about unpacking how language can be

harmful or oppressive, but also about how it can be a tool for change (Apple, 1999). Real-world manifestations of this can be drawn from the earlier example of discourse about 2SLGBTQ+ representation in schools. For example, in recent political developments, New Brunswick attempted to remove students' ability to use their chosen names and pronouns in schools (Action Canada, 2024). Through restrictions and censorship on language that identifies queer realities (i.e. chosen names, chosen pronouns, identifying as transgender or non-binary), oppression is systematically enforced. Through a critical discourse analysis, these examples demonstrate that signifiers of gender diversity are sites of contention – for opponents, gender discourse is destructive and harmful to children (Butler, 2024). For proponents, gender discourse is affirming and grounded in human rights (Butler, 2024). Censorship of gender diversity in schools is representative of broader attempts at queer erasure internationally (Butler, 2024). However, it also exhibits a hopeful and worthwhile effort of inclusion of queer realities, specifically through sex education:

> Scholarship in critical discourse analysis holds the potential to intervene in educational debates by unravelling powerful discourses of education and in education. Through critique and design, we can provide insight into what learning and transformation look, sound, and feel like over time and across educational contexts. (Rogers, 2016, p. 15).

I want to conclude with a recognition that, although critical discourse analysis is a suitable approach considering the scope of this study, it is a Western methodology that is not immune to its own shortcomings (Rogers, 2016). As discussed in the previous chapter, our society is increasingly individualistic. The focus on the individual in meaning-making through discourse can replicate this value, making the person speaking the centre of analysis (Rogers, 2016). This is true of my study, as I did not speak with the students, those at the listening side of the

discourse, or analyze the exchange of information (Rogers, 2016). The exclusion of perspectives from the student/client within community-based sex education is a shortcoming of this study, which I unpack further in chapter five. However, considering the Western neoliberal context in which this study of community-based sex education is taking place, critical discourse analysis does align with the research objective. All of this is to re-state the sentiment I began with – there are multiple, conflicting truths in which no singular conclusion can be drawn. To claim absolutes is to invalidate perspectives different from my own; therefore, I intended to approach this study with an overt acknowledgement of my own perspectives and values.

Below, I describe and rationalize my operational choices that informed how I envisioned, "and not merely captured" (Bhavnani et al., 2014, p. 172), how sex education is taught within a community setting, and how this education acts as a service specifically for those who access community-based organizations' services.

Methods

To begin this study, I formed (and consistently revisited) the following research questions:

2. How do community-based organizations implement sex education as a service?
    a. How do the clients/learners influence sex education within community-based organizations?
    b. How do the educators within community-based organizations perceive and/or assess the effectiveness of their sex education service?

2. How does the community-based organization justify sex education as a service?

    a. What themes and messages are used in community-based organizations' content for their sex education services?

b. How do themes/messages reinforce or challenge dominant discourses and approaches to sex education?

Ultimately choosing these research questions required a realistic assessment of my timeframe, resources and scope of the project. The timeframe I set out to complete this study was one year, following the approval of the research proposal (May 2025 – May 2026). With support from my supervisor and co-supervisor, the creation of an initial research proposal set a workable foundation that outlined the relevant literature, ethical considerations and methodology for the study. After finalizing the proposal, I completed the required ethics training, TCPS2 CORE-2022, prior to submitting an ethics application to the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board, which was approved in June 2025 (approval protocol number 25-0135). This study was not funded, and therefore, resources were limited. Participants were offered a $15 gift card of their choice for participating in this study. The scope of the project was limited to speaking with educators and/or leaders of community-based organizations that offer sex education as a service; this excluded students/clients who were on the receiving end of the educational programming. I initially set out to speak with people from three different organizations within the geographical confines of British Columbia, intending to interview three participants from each organization. Additionally, I requested materials/documents relevant to the sex education programming of each organization. Lastly, I analyzed the data using inductive coding. Below, I provide details of each of these processes.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (UVic HREB) and was supervised by a supervisory committee within the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership at the University of Victoria's Faculty of Education. It

did not include other academic institutions but did require approval from formal community organizations that I wished to include in the study – all of which were obtained in writing and submitted to the UVic HREB. I did not hold a dual role or power-over relationship with the participants, and I did not have any prior relationship with them prior to this study. Regardless, I engaged with participants with an awareness of potential power dynamics that could influence their experience in the study. As the researcher, I recognize the importance of establishing rapport with participants while maintaining professional boundaries and clearly defined roles (Webster et al., 2014). Furthermore, my identity as a white settler inherently informs power dynamics as "inequitable power relations exist in society and permeate every sphere", including research studies and workplaces (Hiranandani, 2012, p. 437). When engaging with participants, I remained aware of the associated privileges of being white and the power that was accorded to me in the researcher-participant dynamic. Participants' ongoing informed consent was prioritized and discussed in depth in the following section.

There were several potential benefits and inconveniences for participants in the study; additionally, the level of risk of harm associated with involvement was minimal. Potential inconveniences were related to the time commitment required for participation; participating in the study meant that regular work duties might have been interrupted. I identified two possible risks for participants. First, the network of sex educators within community-based organizations is small and intertwined; therefore, identifying information may allow for inference of identity. To mitigate this risk, I did not include any identifying or contextual information about the participants or organizations involved in the study. Second, although not intended, emotional discomfort could have been a risk, considering the nature of the topic. Sex education and sexuality are politically contentious and sometimes personal, so there was potential for semi-

structured interview conversations to veer off-topic. To mitigate this risk, I offered participants the option to review the interview questions in advance, ensured that no personal disclosures were included in the study without explicit consent, and allowed participants to skip an interview question without providing an explanation. The benefits of participation are centred around the possible contributions of sharing experiences and knowledge within a research study. Specifically, the knowledge co-created between myself, and the participants has the potential to benefit sex education services in community-based organizations by providing context and demonstrating that these programs do not exist in isolation. Participation could be meaningful to participants in that the study provides an opportunity to advance the field of sex education in community settings, with the knowledge gained being used to justify other programs in various organizations, thereby making sex education more accessible overall.

Confidentiality

Participants in this study were not anonymous during data collection, as the recruitment method did not permit this. However, the dissemination of results ensured that the identities of each participant and their associated organizations were kept anonymous. The confidentiality of each participant and associated organization was a vital consideration. I followed several guidelines to minimize potential negative consequences of participation while promoting an ethical and trustworthy research relationship (Webster et al., 2014). In addition to storing identifying data such as organizational materials or participant aliases securely (details follow), I approached all interactions relevant to this study with confidentiality top of mind. Confidentiality is not an unusual concept for me, as much of my work in social services requires strict confidentiality policies, processes and ongoing education. It is a requirement in social services to have a working knowledge of consent, limits to confidentiality and training on the Freedom of

Information and Protection of Privacy Act in British Columbia. Therefore, I applied this knowledge to this project, aiming to do my utmost in preventing inadvertent disclosure (Webster et al., 2014). When speaking with participants within the same organization, I did not refer to the conversations I had with participants' colleagues within the same organization that may have spoken with me – doing so ensured that the discussions were confidential intra-organizationally. This was important to consider through the lens of power dynamics. For example, an organization I spoke with had both paid employees and contractors. If contractors spoke poorly of the organization and the employees were made aware, there was a risk that contractors would lose employment opportunities should the employers be unhappy with the contractors sharing unfavourable information with me. The nature of the sampling method meant that some participants would refer me to other potential participants, thus limiting confidentiality should the referees consent to participate. These limits to confidentiality were shared with all participants at the onset of recruitment, participation and through ongoing consent.

Confidentiality also meant that the reporting of data had to consider context and characteristics of the participants, which could have been identifying (Webster et al., 2014). As sex education in community-based organizations is not a standard service, the network of educators is relatively small; this means that reported data had to be filtered through the assumption that perhaps less explicit disclosures during data collection were not included if there was a possibility that the information could identify a participant through inference (Webster et al., 2014). To avoid inadvertent breaches of confidentiality and ensure that all participants were comfortable with the level of information I reported, I presented the opportunity for participants to review the data anlaysis and share any information they felt could be identifying or that they did not want shared. Within the report, the confidentiality of participants was further protected by

using pseudonyms for each individual and writing generically about participants. The confidentiality of each organization was ensured by not naming the organization or its location, and by not sharing or including copies of materials within the sex education programs.

Free and Informed Consent

The participants recruited for this study were considered competent adults who were able to understand the information and potential consequences related to their participation. Consent was an ongoing process between myself and the participants. Upon each participant expressing interest in involvement in the study, I requested that they complete a consent form outlining the study, its purpose, and the potential risks and benefits of participation. A copy of a blank consent form is available in Appendix A. Upon meeting with the participant, I verbally explained the items outlined in the consent form and ensured that no further clarification was needed. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the process. This was explicitly noted in the consent form, along with instructions on who to contact if the participant made that decision.

The request to participate in the study included an ask to include organizational materials as complementary points of analysis. These materials could have included (but were not limited to) policies, process documents, lesson plans, PowerPoint Presentations, worksheets, advertisements for the program, etc., that supported the delivery of sex education. As some of these documents were internal to the organization, I requested explicit consent for the use of this content.

Recruitment and Sampling

The recruitment and sampling process for this study consisted of multiple phases. I first conducted a thorough search of organizations that would meet specific criteria. I did so using Google to find various organizations that had the potential to offer sex education as a service. I used search terms such as "sex* educat* in (insert geographical area)", "commun* sex* educat*", "org/no*profit* sex* educat*". I would then open each website that had promising leads from the initial search, and determine if its programming met the following criteria:

Community-based: Organizations had to be publicly operating and serve their community members through various services. This included (but was not limited to) non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, charities and social enterprises. Additionally, the organization had to be located within the province of British Columbia.

Currently operating sex education: Organizations had to be currently offering sex education as a service or program to community members. The organizations may or may not have had their sole operations based on sex education or sexual health. Sex education as a service also had to be publicly available information, as I was not aware of more than one organization that met this criterion. Said differently, information that a community could access regarding sex education within a given organization had to be documented somewhere, such as on a website or social media platform.

After narrowing down the organizations that met these criteria, I attempted to contact, via email, specific members of the organization I deduced may be operationally involved in the sex education program or programming generally. Regardless of the recipient, the email template introduced myself and outlined the study, its purpose and importance, its risks and benefits and a timeline for participation. If no email was available, but a phone number was listed, I opted to

phone the organization, however ultimately this was not a necessary step to make contact with participants.

The next step in this process was to request permission from organizational leaders to share relevant materials supporting their sex education program, as well as to obtain the contact information of potential participants within the organization. I specifically wanted to reach out to potential participants myself, as a leader within the organization would have the power to influence employees, and therefore, there was a risk that employees might feel coerced into consenting to participate. If the leader insisted that I not reach out directly, I requested that a neutral third party reach out on my behalf, such as an administrator or human resources personnel. Although this was a consideration, no organization took issue with contacting employees directly. Recruitment within the organizations meant following additional criteria for participants:

Participants must be involved in the sex education program: Employees or contractors of the participating organization must be involved, in some capacity, in the sex education program within that organization. The participants could be educators, facilitators, curriculum developers, policymakers, or analysts, among others. Those whom I spoke with for the study spanned roles within the organization, but all had responsibilities related to the sex education program.

Participants must be employees/contractors: Those who were receiving sex education, such as program participants, clients, or students, were excluded from this study as participants. While some employees/contractors may have been previous clients or held shared identities or lived experiences to the students, they were not currently accessing the organization's services at the time of participation. This distinction was important because clients may be considered vulnerable, protected, or otherwise unable to provide fully informed consent. If this were the

case, additional ethical considerations and approvals would be required. All participants had to be considered legal adults, i.e., 19 years of age or older.

There were instances in the study where snowball sampling became a natural method of recruitment, as defined by Ritchie et al. (2014), snowball sampling is an approach that requests participants to identify others who meet the participant selection criteria. Since I was requesting permission from organizational leaders to share the contact information of employees, this can be considered a form of snowball sampling. However, there was one instance where participants offered to put me in contact with potential participants without being prompted. Unfortunately, this connection did not lead to that organization participating in this study. A total of four people qualified within these restrictions and ultimately took part in the study.

Data Collection

This study utilized two data collection methods, interviewing and collecting curricula or supporting materials pertaining to the sex education program for each organization. Throughout the data collection process, I created analytic memos that included personal reflections as a means to document my thoughts on the information shared with me (Saldaña, 2020). A total of four interviews were completed, and two organizations provided documentation for further analysis.

Interviewing

Interviewing in the context of this study involved a verbal exchange, in which one person (myself) attempted to elicit expressions of experiences or information from another person (the research participants) (Brinkman, 2020). I chose to use semi-structured interviewing for this study, which is described as a method that approaches the interview with a purpose, but allows

for the exploration of topics that arise naturally, as would a conversation dynamic (Brinkman, 2020). A copy of the interview questions I used with each participant can be found in Appendix B. Unlike a regular conversation, semi-structured interviews are conducted to produce knowledge by understanding the interviewee's description of their experiences (Brinkman, 2020). When interviewing, the questions I prepared served as a guide but were not a strict agenda, as unexpected turns of conversation can reveal insights (Brinkman, 2020).

All data collected through interviews were secured in accordance with the data storage methods outlined below. Prior to the interview, I sent a virtual copy of the interview questions and the consent form to each participant for review and signature. Upon receipt of the signed consent form, I filed a copy in my private database and provided a copy to the participant. At the onset of each interview, the participant and I discussed consent once more prior to beginning and recording the interview. At times, I would ask follow-up questions when there was an opportunity to delve further into a topic that had been raised during the participant's discussion of the initial question. After the interview portion of the meeting concluded, I discussed the next steps with each participant. Namely, I described how I would transcribe our conversation to use the text as data for analysis. If there was anything that stood out within the conversation that had the potential to break confidentiality or was a particularly personal disclosure, I informed the participant that I would be in touch to discuss these portions of the conversation. Additionally, I explained that after analyzing the transcription, I would also assign meaning to our conversation by identifying themes or patterns that I observed within the interview. However, I requested that the participant be involved to an extent in this process by allowing me to share this analysis with them and confirm if my understanding of their answers aligned with their intention behind what they expressed.

Supporting Materials

Upon confirmation that an organization expressed interest in participating in the study, I requested copies of materials and content that were relevant to the sex education program/service. Possible materials included curricula, educational content, policies, processes, advertisements, worksheets, presentations, etc. While I was provided with a plethora of materials, I had to decide what was pertinent and most relevant to the study. To do this, I consistently revisited my research questions and determined whether the material supported the answers to these questions. The additional source of data through these materials was intended to supplement the interviews and provide a broader contextual understanding of the program. The content used gave me insight into how each organization approached sex education, what topics they deemed important for their client base, and how the discourse used reflected or subverted dominant narratives about sex education. The content of sex education programs was used in conjunction with interviewing, as these words are pre-documented discourse that exists in the real world and are therefore valuable and rich sources for understanding a phenomenon (Prior, 2020). Prior (2020) describes content analysis as a method that is usually quantitative in nature (i.e. by counting the occurrence of themes or categories within texts) but is equally valuable in qualitative research. This is because the analysis of social phenomena relies on qualitatively defined categories that assess the structural features, the choices of words, and the imagery drawn upon to make a point (Prior, 2020). Although a quantitative approach could have been taken to analyze the program's materials, I chose instead to view the content in conjunction with interview transcripts. A richer analysis was possible by reviewing discourse both within the interviews and the content.

The materials shared were sent virtually via email or were publicly available. Like the interview transcripts, any potentially identifying information within the materials was removed as a source of data or otherwise verified with the organizational leader, who could consent to its use. In addition to materials sent confidentially, supplemental information was available on each organization's public-facing website, which provided a descriptive overview of each program.

Data Analysis

The sources of data used for analysis included interview transcripts, videos, PowerPoint slides and speaking notes. I conducted an analysis for each organization independently, meaning that I analyzed the interview transcripts and supporting content for each organization prior to analyzing all organizations together. This method was used to parse the analysis into smaller sections before examining the data from a broader perspective. Upon completing data collection, I used the memos and analyzed the data to conduct a meta-analysis of information from both organizations using inductive coding. While data analysis primarily consisted of my own meaning-making and interpretation, I sought support from both supervisors and participants to ensure that my perspective did not exist in isolation. Critical discourse, as my chosen methodology, guided my thinking as I constructed patterns and assigned meaning that captured the essence of each pattern (Saldaña, 2020). To expand, this meant I examined the data through a critical lens, considering the language used in a social context, the types of hegemony that may be at play or subverted, and how larger power dynamics were or were not represented within the data.

For each organization's interviews and materials, inductive coding began by finding broad patterns of meaning within the transcripts and text. The materials were analyzed through transcribing videos into text and highlighted the words used within the speaking notes and

PowerPoint presentations. The interviews were transcribed and also reviewed multiple times, highlighting phrases that stood out as pertinent. For both materials and interviews, I entered each highlighted phrase into an Excel spreadsheet, along with the source of the quote and my interpretation. After reviewing the chosen phrases, I labelled each with patterns that I noticed after multiple rounds of observation. Within each pattern were smaller concepts and discourse that could be categorized under the larger patterns; the words, sentences and phrases I selected stood out as "significant or summative of what [was] being said" (Saldaña, 2020, p. 14) through a critical discourse analysis perspective and informed by my chosen theoretical frameworks. Said differently, the method of data analysis focused on themes from passages and text throughout the transcripts and documents where "themes are extended phrases or sentences that summarize the manifest (apparent) and latent (underlying) meanings of data" (Saldaña, 2020, p. 899). By grouping data and assigning categories representative of that information, I was able to determine how each organization experienced and approached sex education programming, how they differ and how they are similar. Inductive coding is cited by Saldaña (2020) to be an appropriate method when studies are centring the voices of the participants. The following section outlines the themes I identified from the participant's experiences and why they stood out, ultimately foregrounding the next chapter, which delves into the results of this study.

Findings

Through multiple readings of interview transcripts and associated educational content, I highlighted phrases or passages that stood out to me as representative of a larger idea or concept. For each highlighted section, I copied the text verbatim into one column of an Excel spreadsheet, along with the source of the text. In the column next to the quote, I wrote a brief analysis of what I took the verbiage to mean and why it was worth emphasizing. Throughout this process, I took

notes on patterns in the quotes, which eventually led to categorizing the quotes and their associated analyses into themes and sub-themes. I decided on four themes that captured the knowledge shared with me, each with two or three subthemes. The themes I identified did not differ between data sources; therefore, chapter five does not separate the discussion of educational materials and transcripts, but rather explores them in tandem. The following are the themes and corresponding sub-themes I arrived at through my analysis:

<u>Confronting the prevailing social order:</u> encapsulated instances where participants or materials directly addressed the systemic or social constraints they face in teaching sex education in a community-based organization. The data categorized in this theme were further divided into “the true cost”, “enduring values”, and “relationship to the body politic”. The true cost discussed how money, labour and capitalism played a role in the participants’ efforts in community-based sex education. Enduring values spoke to conservative values that restrained these efforts, and how students/clients and other community members internalized these values. Relationship to the body politic described how community-based sex educators saw themselves in relation to other groups, such as schools and to their funding bodies, such as the government.

<u>Parts of a whole:</u> discussed how participants felt isolated as organizations that provided sex education as a service, but deeply wished to create a stronger community built up of other organizations and community members. This section was divided into two sub-themes: “sequestered education” and “visions of collaboration”. Where the former highlighted how sex education happens so infrequently and is always at risk of ceasing, the latter was the hope and efforts of participants to create a network for their clients to fall back on in case they do cease to run sex education programming.

Lived experience: was the significance that was placed on the students' and educators' identities and backgrounds. Within the lived experience theme, "mutual understanding", "embodying values," and "meeting respective needs" were sub-themes. Mutual understanding referred to the connection between the students and sex educators that was rooted in shared experiences of having a sexuality that was marginalized. Embodying values were instances in which participants incorporated their theoretical perspectives into their curriculum and teaching. Specifically, this meant ensuring as many identities and experiences as possible were represented in the educational content and facilitation. Lastly, meeting the respective needs of students demonstrated that the sex educators made efforts to understand their students' learning, sensory, and previous experience needs.

Provocative modalities: described the ways in which the participants subverted traditional educational approaches and settings. This included "levelling authority", which directly addressed the power dynamics between teacher and student and worked to level this imbalance, and "take out the vibrators", which involved the creative and practical ways that sex educators facilitated sessions completely contrary to topics and methods normally seen in a classroom. Provocative modalities ended with "normalizing sex," which emphasized the justification and importance that the participants placed on simply talking about sex outside of learning spaces.

In the following chapter, I will introduce each participant and their perspectives on their work in the community. I also share choice quotes and further explanation of each of these themes, ultimately demonstrating the nuances of sex education in the community as described by the experiences of this study's participants.

Chapter 4 – Analysis

This chapter explores critical reflections and practical cases on circumstances that impede progress toward inclusive, community-oriented, and comprehensive sex education. I begin by considering what participants shared about the dominant discourses that impacts their work, then recount how they try to find solutions by using collective efforts, honoured the lived experiences of students, and explicitly challenged normative delineations of sex and sex education. As previously noted, my personal connections are interwoven throughout this thesis. When considering the information shared by participants and the broader context of sex education, I reflect on my own experiences and their relevance to this topic. For example, I sometimes joke that the TV raised me because I watched so much of it growing up. I'm not alone in that; scholars such as Kaur (2021) found that my generation has been described as particularly prolific in using TV shows we watched when we were younger to evoke feelings of comfort and nostalgia. Naturally, I had my favourite shows and the ones I didn't care for, which crossed genres (and maturity ratings). I remember hating *King of the Hill* (Judge & Daniels, 1997-present) because I thought it was boring and preferred shows like *SpongeBob SquarePants* (Hillenburg & Tibbit, 1999-present) or other overstimulating cartoons. However, as one does, I re-watched *King of the Hill* recently and found its dry humour appealing, and certainly more relatable as an adult. If you haven't seen King of the Hill, it's an American cartoon sitcom that follows a nuclear, middle-class, right-of-centre family in Texas as they encounter life's challenges. The second episode of the first season aired in January of 1997, and it showed Peggy, the family's mother and substitute teacher, being brought into her son's class to teach sex education. In the story, everyone in Peggy's life ridicules her and the entire idea of sex education,

including her husband; sex educators are called “depraved harlots” who value “intellectual hooey above common decency” (Archer et al., 1997 11:08). Peggy struggles to overcome her own internalized sense of shame, which manifests in her inability to verbalize anatomy such as vagina and penis, which she is told are curse words. Eventually, Peggy conquers her shame and immobilization, but when she begins to teach in the classroom, all students except her son have to leave because their parents didn’t sign the permission slip to attend.

Even though it’s satire from almost 30 years ago, this anecdote could reflect sex education discourse today. From speaking with sex educators for this study, I can report that much of the shame and criticisms against sex education ring true in their material experiences, and they are actively working to change this discourse. Much of what these folks shared with me embodied efforts to normalize sex across contexts, and they worked toward this goal in several ways. To understand how and why they teach sex education specifically in community-based organizations, I spoke with four sex educators from two agencies and had the privilege of reviewing the teaching materials they use in their sessions. Through qualitative interviews and content analysis, I identified four areas where these educators were actively pursuing methods or acknowledging ways that aim to dislodge rigid narratives about sex and sex education - both for the betterment of the people they serve but also the broader community. Although there are a number of concrete practices they use in learning spaces with their students/program participants, these folks are no strangers to the financial and political constraints of the junction between sex education in the non-profit sector. Hence, this chapter explores critical reflections and practical cases on circumstances that impede progress toward inclusive, community-oriented, and comprehensive sex education. I begin by considering what participants shared about the dominant discourses that impacts their work, then recount how their operations attempt

to correct this by prioritizing collective efforts, honouring the lived experiences of those involved, actualizing agency, and explicitly challenging normative delineations of sex and sex education. Echoing an earlier described TV discourse, I present to you "intellectual hooey" that rejects "common decency" through the invaluable insights of this study's "depraved harlots" with the shared hope that one day, that King of the Hill episode will be a historical account.

Introducing the Participants

The folks I spoke with for this study were all experienced sex educators in non-profit organizations located in a large urban centre in British Columbia. The agencies and identities are anonymous for the purpose of this study; however, below is a description of each of the four participants in relation to their experiences and views as sex educators in the community.

Alex is a sex educator who teaches across contexts and ages. They and their organization are prominent in the community, which has faced many challenges throughout their tenure in these spaces. Alex frames sexuality and sex education as a form of leadership by centring their student's questions, needs and lived experiences when teaching.

Jordan is a sex educator who both facilitates and works strategically in a community-based organization. They are an advocate for people who are historically discriminated against and excluded from sex education. Experienced in social services, Jordan understands the constraints and the potential for impact that sex education can have in this moment, but that doesn't deter them from taking advantage of the opportunities a non-profit organization offers to make progressive moves toward inclusive and accessible sex education.

Taylor is the founder and sex educator of a non-profit organization that teaches sex education to folks in the community. They are steadfast in creating spaces that meet people where they're at to

ensure they receive accessible, evidence-based sex education that will foster agency and autonomy for populations that generally do not have this privilege. Taylor prioritizes a person-centred practice through shaping sex education that answers the specific questions participants have in a space that intentionally does not reflect a traditional classroom setting.

Adrien is a peer facilitator at a non-profit organization, meaning they facilitate and support folks with similar lived experiences and identities in sex education spaces. Adrien sees social context and history as inextricable factors leading to the sexual abuse and negative sexual health outcomes of marginalized groups. Adrien believes that sex education places power back into the individual's hands, ultimately fostering increased capacity for clients.

The combined insights of these participants helped me understand the perspectives of people who have the underlying similarity of teaching sex within a community-based organization. Across professional and personal experiences, I derived that a significant reason why they come to this work is as a response to the prevailing ways in which sex education is seen and carried out in their communities. These folks were well aware of the principal discourses and systemic issues that fuel their work, which they carried out subversively despite an overbearing, restrictive landscape that underpins their field.

Confronting the Prevailing Social Order

Although the term 'non-profit' indicates an organization or group that doesn't gain anything monetarily from its ventures, non-profits rely heavily on income generation. This income is more readily available when a non-profit's ventures align with the state's socio-political objectives. For example, if the provincial government declares in a budget that it wants to decrease youth unemployment, then youth employment programs within non-profit organizations will be funded. The opposite is also true, where what isn't said is just as impactful.

If the Provincial Government does *not* declare its objective to reduce youth unemployment, but instead invests in healthcare, non-profit employment programs serving youth will be defunded and may potentially cease. This dynamic and what it represents to people who work in the community was not lost on the sex educators who participated in this study. The money and values that drive this system were accepted parts of teaching sex education through a non-profit organization; however, although restrictive, there were some indicated benefits in being such an agency in this context.

The True Cost

When I first reached out to Alex, they shared a recent brief with me published by the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) titled "*The economic benefits of implementing comprehensive sexual health education in Canada"* (SIECCAN, 2025). Unsurprisingly, the brief provides evidence that comprehensive sex education saves money through preventative efforts that mitigate negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes (SIECCAN, 2025). This brief implores governments to sustain and increase funding for sex education programs to cut long-term costs (SIECCAN, 2025.). As an experienced sex educator, Alex has seen how sex education is positive for the community; however, I have to assume this brief wasn't written for people who already know and believe this. Alex frequently critiqued the tendency for our society to see sex education through a purely financial lens, which results in the humanity of the topic being reduced to what is profitable. Justifying the costs of teaching sex education was difficult for this reason. Alex shared with me that compared to a private educator, community-based education reaches more people for less dollars "and if you're looking at it from a purely financial perspective, which I would hate that we have to dissolve it down to that, but essentially that's where we're at right now", then funding these organizations makes good

fiscal sense, especially considering the money saved in the long term, according to SIECCAN (2025). Alex felt as though the only thing that matters to those who have the power to flow money into community-based sex education is the quantity of how many people can become educated, which removes the humanistic outcomes of sex education that they see as equally important (i.e. reductions in gender-based violence and negative sexual health outcomes). Even though they critiqued it, Alex felt complicit in a system that says the only thing worth doing must also be profitable. Knowing from experience that sex education has an impact beyond economics, they assumed their work as an educator would always be undervalued, which led Alex to volunteer their time without compensation. When reflecting on this decision in our conversation, Alex shared with me that by working for free, they inadvertently reinforced the idea that sex education is inexpensive. When things are inexpensive in our society, it can imply that they are not valuable or do not require investment. Although this is the opposite of what Alex believes when it comes to sex education, they felt as if their free labour did not advance that conviction:

> I did a lot of work that I shouldn't have ever done because I believe in this work so passionately, and because I had the privilege to be able to volunteer a lot of my hours, rather than be paid for it, so, although it is done in the spirit of community service, and helping people, it 'invisibilizes' the true cost of a program, and then it makes it unsustainable, like, on so many levels. It's so interesting, when I have students who are like, I want to be a sexual health educator, like, what advice? And I'm like, don't volunteer your time.

By volunteering time, Alex shared that sex educators are unconsciously demonstrating that sex education can be done cheaply or for free, reinforcing the narrative that it is not worth doing.

Alex is not singlehandedly responsible for the devaluing of sex education, because even if it can be argued that sex education is good for the economy, this does not change the fact that there is currently little monetary support for it in community-based organizations. Jordan speculated that mainstream support and advocacy for sex education just isn't there yet. The lack of attention or intentional shying away from any topic related to sex had led Jordan to believe that their sex education program would be coming to an end:

> I don't have the best feeling that we're going to get funded again…I do wonder what it will look like if we aren't here anymore…[if] you ask for anything to do with the word sex and like you might get like $5 here, really, in, like, a sneaky way.

Jordan's statement envelops the idea that private donations toward their non-profit organization won't flow in because teaching people - especially those with marginalized identities – about sex and sexuality is socially intolerable. If one does place (monetary) value on sex education, they would be doing so in a way that is underground, implying that support for such programs cannot or should not be made known. This discourse bleeds into a more widespread conversation about sex education and morality, which was a topic that participants addressed in detail.

Enduring Values

When conversing about the values that are woven throughout discourse about sex education, it became clear these sex educators saw a distinct divide between themselves as proponents and others, as what Alex called "horrendous agitators" against the topic. The adverse stances weren't general; instead, they were specific to sex education that was inclusive of many identities, including queer folks and people with disabilities. All four participants in this study discussed coming up against discriminatory ideas related to the folks that they serve, specifically in relation to their sexuality. Taylor shared that their work in the community is critical because

they're addressing "a broader social context" that limits, restricts and imposes what sex and sexuality is supposed to look like based on "different stereotypes" of their clients. This context was overbearing and harmful, not only because it places unnecessary and refuted assumptions on people, but also excludes them from sex education that would significantly impact their ability to make agentic choices for themselves and their bodies. Adrien details this when they told me that as someone with a disability, they are more likely to experience "[sexual assault] …domestic violence or get killed...[experience difficult] financial issues..." and are "less likely to be able to find a job," which are larger consequences of both being oppressed and not having sex education as a result. In response to exclusionary and unsafe beliefs about characterized groups' sexuality, the interviewed sex educators were committed to doing things differently. Jordan told me they were "really interested in like, really fucking shifting the culture" of sex education and how society prohibits people's sexuality. Jordan's emphatic sentiment on transforming sex education conveys that it is the responsibility of systems and politics to ensure it is comprehensive, relevant, and accessible. Similarly, Alex mused that

> in an ideal world is to, um...really have buy-in from the community, in terms of what sexual health education is. And sexual health education is life literacy, in my opinion. Like, this... if we can sit with our sexuality in however we define that, experience it, express it in a way that we know we are supported and respected and... protected, over a, you know, over a lifetime, because it will be over a lifetime. Um, we need help with that.

The study's participants argued that community support was a critical aspect of their work, as sex education could not exist in isolation. The role community-based organizations played at the macro-level of society was another topic discussed in our interviews and will be discussed next.

Relationship to the Body Politic

When exploring where community-based organizations fit into the grand scheme of things and their responsibility to advance sex education, participants shared a sense that operating outside the constraints of formal educational systems was a significant benefit. Jordan explained that relying on institutions that reinforce and emulate oppressive hierarchies isn't viable:

> I think that's a role that, like, again, they [community-based organizations] have ability to be responsive in a way that formal like, formal hierarchy is just... that's not really what they're meant for. And they're probably, like, that's not really helpful if we try and rely on them that way.

Part of Jordan's justification was that community programs can be more responsive and better attuned to trends in their context. As hubs for accessing services, organizations and those within them have a sense of what is going on for folks well before any large institution can react to emerging needs. Being *part* of the community meant they could lead initiatives, conversations, and sex education on niche or up-and-coming topics. For example, if many participants in a sex education program began discussing the rise of incel culture online (incel is short for 'involuntary celibate', characterized by misogynistic and dangerous discourse against women) (e.g. Sparks et al., 2022), then community-based sex education can immediately hold space for discussions around responding to this and maintaining safety online.

In an interminable sense, Alex felt that the sex education offered throughout the life course by community organizations equates to fostering leaders. Sex education that is grounded in comprehensive, inclusive information not only about the self but also about others would have

a larger impact, in that those who come into positions of power will be able to understand those outside of themselves:

> Because you can't tell me that if any of those students can sit with their sexuality, and someone else's sexuality, and respect that. And maybe not understand it but offer them empathy and a space so they can understand and relate to them, they're gonna be able to lead anything. They're gonna be able to, like, if your big focus is you want them to be tomorrow's CEOs, political leaders, etc.

What both Jordan and Alex are getting at is that sex education within the community, for the community, goes beyond the individualization that is normalized in our social dynamics. Beyond informing people how to use protection in order to avoid STBBIs, sex education in the community is responsive to context and therefore works past placing the responsibility of healthy, inclusive sexuality on the individual. I expand on this further in the next section, but to close on these ideas, something Jordan said exemplifies how their organization responds to the idea that it is solely the individual's responsibility to address their sexual health. Although their organization is funded specifically for a targeted group to learn about sex for the outcome of reducing STBBIs,

> no one who's ever come to [the organization] would know that that's what we were funded for, because we have done such a departure dance… So we need to make all ages, like, all genders events. We need to have, like, yes, we can have stuff specifically for LGBTQ people, But, like, we need to have all of these different offerings, and we'll take a many-pronged approach so that we can get to this outcome. Um, and that's, like, very much, like, it just... we're so over here, and the thing that we're funded for is so over here.

So, although this agency is funded to address a specific biomedical issue within a specific population, they've successfully argued to a formal institution/their funder that the entire community will be positively impacted by their sex education programming. The funding model was such that a sexual health issue was made the fault of the individual's lack of education; however, the approach of the organization was to target those both within and outside of that group, demonstrating that it is a community's responsibility to reduce negative sexual health outcomes, not just those who are most at risk.

Parts of a Whole

The precarity of non-profit programs was a reality for the participants in this study, further complicated by the politically charged nature of sex education. Although the organizations strived to create and be part of the larger community, there were constraints to this goal due to the infrequency and shortage of programs. Being amongst others and working in collaboration was one way that the agencies I spoke with attempted to combat individualistic, siloed solutions to sex education.

Sequestered Education

The hope that sex education (and social services more generally) could be secure for both its workers and clients was overshadowed by the expectation that the programs where the sex educators I interviewed worked would eventually no longer exist. The participants wholeheartedly believed in the work they were doing and understood that it was worth doing, even if long-term education across the lifespan isn't yet a reality. Jordan wished,

> it wasn't always like kind of something that people in social work and the nonprofit sector had to live with this constant guillotine…because I do feel like we've really had an impact on

> the culture and I think a lot of people who are in direct support roles have just a very like beautiful and affirming attitude around a lot of the things that we're trying to change...this sector is getting overlooked at best, and, intentionally defunded at worst.

What I take away from Jordan's quote is the sweeping generalization they made about non-profits as a sector. Even if their particular organization ceased running sex education programs, the hope was that service users would be able to access the education from another source. Taylor told me that a main measure of success for both their organization and their funder was ensuring that students could identify places in the community where they could get sexuality and sexual health support and resources. This implies that such services and resources exist in the community. However, if such areas are not funded, it becomes increasingly difficult to meet this success metric. To be part of a community that can share sexuality resources and information with its members, organizations and programs must exist, and this ultimately depends on non-profit funding partners. The sex educators in this study held the conviction that they were often the only available option for people to learn about sexuality. Furthermore, my inability to find more than two organizations that offered sex education as a service corroborated this claim. Alex told me that when it comes to sex, their organization is "often the only voice". Even though funding is scarce and non-profits have to compete for program contracts, the sex educators made it clear that working collaboratively with an entire community, including other organizations, was critical. Jordan was surprised by this, expressing,

> So these organizations are in a partnership. Um, which is actually really rare. A lot of these organizations usually compete for contracts of support. Um, but in sort of a movement towards trying to build, kind of, better bridges.

In other words, a competition that favours one over many is an ineffective way to meet the sex education needs of people in the community. This individualistic system further places the responsibility for sexual health on a single person, rather than on a community with abundant resources and information to ensure healthy sexuality is an experience everyone is accountable for, including larger funding institutions. Alex said, “it’s not actually appropriate or ethical for me to be all things to all people,” because there is always the risk that their organization no longer exists.

Visions of Collaboration

Creating a network of sex education and resources in the community meant treating sexuality as something that follows a person throughout their lives. Participants in this study said that if this thread exists, it can only be sustained communally across many areas and times in a person’s life. Sex education was viewed as an effort that everyone should be able to access, and no single organization, workshop, or session should be considered effective for a lifetime of learning. Jordan reflected that “sex education should never be siloed, it should never be this one-off thing someone goes to and then comes back, and it's never then embedded in their everyday.” To foster this community, the agencies worked to build a network of resources for their students/clients. While they could not directly fund initiatives and new programs, educators saw their role as teaching a diverse set of audiences so people in many areas of the community felt confident talking about sex. For example, the organization that Taylor founded intentionally educates people in support roles across other organizations, because they believe that not reaching the service providers and clients “sets up folks for failure [when there isn't a network of sex-literate people] so we do feel it’s important to speak to both of these, uh, to both of these audiences”. A measure of success that Adrien shared is when workshop participants can identify

other sources of information or people in their lives to whom they can turn with questions or requests for support that are external to the organization in which they facilitate. Again, creating a network was a priority for this program's big-picture strategy. As Adrien put it,

> So you know that it's effective when people are talking about it, and know how to refer to the information you're sharing…they know where to get actual resources.

Fostering a network in which the organization and sex educators acted as brokers, enabling clients to access resources and further education, demonstrated relational and collective approaches that prioritized client needs rather than eclipsing others in the same spaces. The educators saw it as ethically imperative to collaborate, build trust, and strengthen connections for the betterment of their clients. The content educators used in their workshops reflected this approach as well, as explored further in the coming sections.

Lived Experience

Throughout the interviews with the participants, I got the sense that the students' identities and experiences were essential components of the organization's operations and educators' approaches to sex education in the community. As described above, fostering collaboration among other organizations and supporting the client's best interests were part of this. The lived experiences of participants and educators also served as a bond among folks within the learning spaces. For the educators, centring students' lived experiences was a way to shift power dynamics that are typically present in a conventional classroom setting. These sex educators viewed each individual's background and barriers as worth addressing and accommodating, while also recognizing the importance of shared identity.

Mutual Understanding

Shared experiences related to identity and/or background served as a point of connection among the students and the sex education facilitators. A shared understanding of what it's like to have one's sexuality stigmatized and to struggle with specific aspects of sex due to systemic barriers fostered a sense of solidarity and community. The participants in this study observed that by sharing these experiences, students felt less alone and more 'normal' because they met others who could resonate. Taylor's organization ensured that each sex education workshop included a peer facilitator. They described the reasoning behind it from the student's perspective:

> I'm sitting here in a room with all sorts of other folks who are like, oh man, me too…But oftentimes the peer facilitator or a peer, you know, who's another participant in those events, just hearing that, like, that's a shared experience can be really helpful and healing.

Taylor went on to say that the population they work with experiences social stigma around their sexuality, often through discourse that imposes harmful limits on what someone can and cannot do. So, when those folks come together in the community, the relationships fostered "help [to] sort of destigmatize" those beliefs that the students may have internalized.

Adrien is a peer facilitator within Taylor's organization, and they shared with me the barriers and benefits of being a sex educator with the same lived experience as their students. Adrien described their experiences pursuing an education and how they had to plan, work, and organize more than someone with greater privilege. As a result, many obstacles stand in the way of people with lived experience becoming sex educators. This is a widespread problem, as Adrien points out that sex educators with shared experience with their students can be a major benefit to learners.

> "I would be that person that they look at me and they go, oh, not only do you have the lived experience, but you have that board certification like everybody else, so I'm going to trust you more…the education to be an educator, as well as the lived experience, will help you connect better with your participants and students."

It became evident that creating a structure that intentionally includes sex educators with shared lived experience with their students was a form of equity. That lived experience meant that, structurally, becoming a sex educator was more labour-intensive and stigmatized, but organizations that saw lived experience as a strength prioritized hiring folks with those qualities. Connection and equity as primary considerations led organizations to create spaces for educators with lived experience, subverting dominant narratives that position educators/teachers as all-knowing experts who simply impart knowledge to passive recipients. Instead, the positionality and identity of everyone in the learning space were seen as valuable both as points of learning and as ways of honouring one's personhood.

Embodying Values

In conjunction with equity and connection, sex educators with lived experience demonstrate the importance of praxis. In this context, praxis, as putting theory into practice, means ensuring that those facilitating sex education were representative and/or aligned with the idea of including those who are traditionally excluded from these spaces. The educational content reflected inclusivity and diversity through its topics and language. For example, Alex's PowerPoint slides used non-gendered language such as "person with a penis" instead of boy or man, recognizing that not everyone with a penis would identify as male. The slides also covered different types of sex, challenging a normative understanding of penetrative sex between a heterosexual couple. While teaching in ways that are inclusive of non-dominant sexualities, the

organizations embodied these values by introducing students to educators who live the realities of what was being taught. Diverse representation among the sex educators in these organizations allowed the programs to demonstrate inclusivity rather than simply talk about it. Modelling the teaching through shared identity shifted the power dynamics of a traditional classroom, where professional experience and education were valued alongside lived experience; those at the front of the room would normally be excluded from formal leadership roles. Alex articulated this idea by sharing

> that's part of why one of the things that we did as an organization is, you know, look at lived experience as part of, um, your offerings, in... as an educator, right? Is that, yes, you have the professional experience to support you, um, and the development, but also your lived experience is going to play into that, and that's another layer of... you know, in a politicized, weaponized environment, asking people, you know, in some ways, it's very liberating, and our facilitators would often say that one of the best things about this job is being able to have my identity role model success as a human to someone else who isn't seeing themselves represented, right?

Although lived experience was seen as incredibly beneficial, it is not without challenges. Alex pointed out in our conversation that there is always a risk of tokenism when someone's identity is used as a source of insight for others, which may not always be safe or respectful for that educator. Educators also had to account for the inherent adversity that comes with lived experience and incorporate it into their programming. Jordan told me that folks will sometimes "bring extraordinarily traumatic disclosures into event spaces" because sex and sexuality can be emotionally charged topics. Sometimes, students would learn something within the program that led to new realizations about past experiences (i.e., not realizing a sexual encounter was non-

consensual), and the person would then begin processing it in real time. Knowing this occurs in community-based sex education, these educators adjusted and expected such disclosures, finding ways to hold space for them. Taylor's organization ensured there were always two facilitators in the room so that, if something of this nature occurred, the class could continue and the participant would have support. However, Alex's organization did not have the luxury of more than one facilitator in a class due to funding constraints, so, to address potential personal accounts being shared, educators would establish boundaries at the beginning of sessions for students to refrain from divulging private stories. Balancing the needs of learners and honouring their lived experience as it relates to their sexuality required ongoing efforts and problem-solving.

With the consideration of possible trauma related to sexuality, combined with an emphasis on agency, the approaches in community-based organizations' sex education programs were such that consent was an integral component. The sex educators noted that self-determination is a key outcome of sex education, so in addition to teaching about consent, it was modelled throughout the sessions. Alex's PowerPoint slides stood out to me because they discussed consent in depth, addressing nuances beyond 'no means no,' which is important but surface-level on this topic. Furthermore, this lesson began with a slide that addressed the "fine print" of the sex education session, covering privacy, accommodations, and consent for participation. Alex said that "having the student's consent to participate" was critical, as it exhibited the teaching – by asking for and respecting consent to be taught about sex, the students were able to practice self-determination in a safe way.

Matters such as consent through body language, enthusiastic consent, and navigating feelings of guilt and rejection were included in this material. The learning in Taylor's

organization was framed through the lens of practicing self-advocacy and initiating difficult conversations about sex and sexuality. Agency was particularly important because the identity of their students meant that their sexuality was stigmatized and restricted; dominant narratives convey that these folks are not capable of agentic decision-making. Adrien informed me that this education was therefore especially important because it teaches how to "make an informed choice about what's right for you and your body". Jordan's outlook was the same; they shared that "everything we do is a consent-based model" because "the vast majority of the people who come to our events have very little agency or autonomy over how... what their life looks like." Through deliberate inclusions of consent and encouragement to make choices that are best for themselves, the community-based sex education programs taught and exemplified a core principle of sex education. Such methodology defies conventional education, where students must be formally excused for a justifiable and permissible reason that may be denied by an authority. Instead, self-determination is encouraged.

Meeting Respective Needs

The students' learning needs guided the sex educators' practice in this study. These educators had to be flexible and adaptable to whatever came up in the program, whether that was self-disclosure or any number of questions related to one's sexuality. Even if an organization followed a set curriculum, it often 'detoured' (as Alex put it) to meet the group's needs. For Taylor, creating a space that in no way resembled a traditional academic setting was crucial, as doing so honoured the students' previous contexts and histories, which often included negative associations with similar environments or with sexuality more generally. Taylor described the setting by sharing how

> we try to make it seem really like the antithesis of anything like an academic setting, because a lot of the learners that we have coming to our events have had really, you know, shitty experiences, frankly, in formal academic settings, so it's not necessarily the best environment for them to feel like that they can relax and kind of, you know, feel confident and courageous enough to ask some of these more stigmatized questions.

As part of a community, these educators considered how people might feel in the space even before they arrived; this was made possible by getting to know their demographics and adjusting their approaches based on patterns observed during their tenure as sex educators. Jordan said the "unique needs" of students drove the format of the programming. Their organization's educational materials were in a question-and-answer format, intended to show what kinds of questions folks ask, the language that may be helpful in asking them, and to practice asking questions when they were done learning in a dedicated setting. This configuration reversed the routine classroom flow, which first teaches and then answers questions. Instead, this community organization started with questions and taught through those inquiries. Although Alex's structure differed from this by following a teach-first, questions-after arrangement, they succinctly summarized the grounds for emphasizing students' questions by stating, "this is where the questions come in…those students we're giving them the opportunity to tell us what they actually need to know." When Alex uses the phrase "what they *actually* need to know" (my emphasis), I interpret this to mean that, as an educator, entering a room of people and assuming one knows what students ought to be taught may not meet those students' needs. By listening to students' questions and adjusting the workshop accordingly, these community-based sex educators made efforts to share their knowledge by taking the lead from their students. While there is still a facilitator overseeing the session, these folks did not view their students as empty vessels who

were required to know what the educator sees as important. Instead, the students' context, history, and lived experience informed the educators.

Provocative Modalities

The sex educators in this study made it a priority to break away from conventional teaching, creating learning spaces that avoided resemblance of a standard classroom. While the subject matter itself (sex) naturally calls for a different approach, these educators also challenged norms in more subtle ways. By recognizing and valuing the lived experiences of their students, these community-based sex educators openly addressed the power they held, which is a conversation rarely welcomed in traditional classrooms. Ultimately, their goal was to build a community where sexuality is normalized, especially for those whose identities are often pushed to the margins. In doing so, these organizations not only challenged classroom hierarchies but also advocated for open dialogue about subjects that are generally labelled indecent.

Levelling Authority

A deliberate shift in power was a goal of every educator I spoke with. They told me they are very aware of the power dynamics in a classroom setting and are committed to leveling those dynamics in creative ways. Engaging students in conversation and setting the tone for the time spent together was a well-thought-out approach when first connecting with a group. Alex told me that despite their years of experience as a sex educator in the community, they are not an expert in other people's sexuality. Said differently, the educator is not the singular authority on sex, but the students themselves are masters of their own lives; the students know themselves best, and the educators are meant to empower a deeper understanding of their sexuality. Alex said,

> “ultimately, it's not a prescription, it's, um, you know, it's not a lecture. It's meant to be a conversation as much as it can be a conversation when you have someone in a position of power, right, who's leading the class.”

Jordan and Adrien discussed how power plays a role in sex education from the learners’ perspective. Recognizing that traditional classroom setups place the teacher as the head authority, they spoke about how facilitating in a way that acknowledges power requires effort to transfer knowledge through a lens of equity. Jordan reflected on the students’ experience of being on the receiving end of sex education from their point of view and how, as a facilitator, they change their approach.

> I [as the student] don't get to choose what's happening in this room. I have to sit in front of that very formal teacher at the front of the room. I'm the recipient of the knowledge, and I should be so grateful, because this is how education is set up, so we intentionally don't do that. So much so that we never try and be at the front of the room. We try not to make sure that there's no real front of a room. So, usually educators, like, the facilitators will, like, if I can, I'm on the floor. If I can sit down, as a way of taking into consideration the permanent power imbalance that's present.

Speaking more generally, Adrien explained that sex education is meant to shift power imbalances. For people who are treated as if they have less agency and autonomy over their lives and bodies, sex education can be a tool to empower folks with knowledge that affirms their authority over their own bodies. Therefore, educators have to recognize that they “need to be working with me, not for me, so it’s really a power differential and having informed consent gives the power differential back to the person”.

“Take out the Vibrators”

The educators in this study who work in community-based organizations had a strong understanding of the importance of Adrien’s perspective, not only in how they set up classroom spaces but also in their inclusion of topics overlooked or excluded in school-based sex education. Jordan described an overemphasis on biology and a reduction of STBBIs in conventional sex education, where many people would expect to gain knowledge about sex and sexuality. Although these are important to discuss and learn, there was so much more that promoted the health of students. When reflecting on the difference between community-based sex education and school-based sex education, Jordan said,

> “Um, so if we're talking about, like, masturbation, like, oh my god, it would be wonderful if, when I'm in this fucking public health... public school, like a grade 10 class, if I should be allowed to go in and talk about how great masturbation is. That's never happened before. Nobody's paid me to do that. At that point, they're like, no, no, no, like...like, safer sex options, STI testing, and maybe healthy relationships if you're, like, lucky enough to get a really progressive school. But no one's, like, there being like, yeah, let's take out the vibrators and the, like, different, like, lubes and, like, what pleasure can do for our mental health, like, those conversations never happen.”

Similarly, Taylor explained that these conversations couldn’t be separated. If lesson plans centre on “the nuts and bolts of safer sex” without including consent and relationship dynamics, the impact of sex education can only go so far. Because school-based sex education rarely covers the breadth of information needed to be comprehensive, the participants in this study saw community-based agencies as a viable option to fill that gap. This was evident when analyzing the educational materials the groups used to teach. A PowerPoint slide deck used in Alex’s

sessions for adults and service providers was a prime example, as it explained and justified how comprehensive sex education is grounded in evidence-based approaches. The same presentation used the term "for real" many times, which, to me, implied that mainstream sexuality discourse isn't based in reality and is performative or inadequate. Moreover, videos used within another organization demonstrated conversations that addressed topics also unconventional in school-based sex education, such as making sex education fun and not scary, and how it has a larger social impact. Taken together, these efforts explicitly included and acknowledged *with* their students that the sex education we have come to know can and should be done better. The organizations I spoke to felt a responsibility to establish an improved way to teach sex education to make a greater impact across the community.

Normalizing Sex

My impression from every educator who spoke with me is that their primary goal was to establish a sense of normalcy and ease when discussing sex and sexuality. As Jordan was quoted earlier, "those conversations never happen," but if that shifted, our society would be healthier and happier. Cultivating a shift in discourse about sex wasn't easy, but being part of a community as an organization meant they had a responsibility to support people in becoming more sex-literate. The idea is that if social service workers, parents, service users, teachers, and all other members could learn and practice talking about sex, discussions could happen across contexts and lifespans. We often muse in social service work that we would love to 'be worked out of a job', meaning our services are no longer needed because the system has changed in ways that allow equitable access to basic human needs. However, we know that this reality is not on the horizon, so we continue to chip away in whatever capacity we can to make the difference we believe in. For sex education, that means recognizing that people are hesitant to talk openly

about sex and, in each session, trying to make it easier for folks. Jordan's organization would teach frontline workers (those in direct support roles for service users), and they acknowledged that when it comes to sex,

> frontline support workers are often incredibly underpaid, understaffed, under-resourced, and expected to kind of do everything and so, if we're, like, assuming the best of intentions, we also want to give them the opportunity to kind of, like, feel better equipped, feel less alone, Um, feel more... like, sit with the discomfort around these topics, and maybe ask gentle questions of why is it uncomfortable for you?

These sex educators worked to normalize conversations about sex in their workshops and through the materials they used in teaching. From addressing why inclusive language is important in sexuality to dispelling myths and assumptions about sex education itself, the underlying idea was that normalizing sex was just as important as learning about it. A slide deck that Alex shared with me explained to its audience how comprehensive sex education has a broader social impact beyond reducing STBBIs, and videos that Taylor's organization used portrayed real-time conversations in which a community member asked questions a service provider couldn't answer. Even without the knowledge, the service provider was a safe enough person to broach the topic with, indicating that normalizing these discussions was equally significant to knowing about safe sex practices. As another video said, "having imperfect conversations is so much better than not having conversations at all."

I see the attempts to legitimize sex and sexuality as dinner-table conversations as efforts to shift narratives from individual, private, and shameful to ones that ensure those most at risk of negative sexual health outcomes can both exercise self-determination and ask for help in their communities when needed. By creating a community of people who can talk about sex, it

becomes a communal responsibility to ensure the sexual health and safety of folks. This collective of sex-literate people contradicts the individualism so common in health discourse, where the burden is placed on the individual to be safe and healthy, rather than on the community and systems that affect sexual wellness.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, I shared a fictional description of media that exemplified discourse about sex education through a narrow, judgmental, and ill-informed lens. Seeing this dynamic portrayed through satire helps society acknowledge that improvements are needed in sex education. However, King of the Hill isn't the only TV show that tackles this. Whenever I tell anyone about my thesis topic, many people ask me if I've seen the show Sex Education (Campbell et al. 2019-2023). I tell them yes, I have seen it, and we share the parts that resonated most when we watched it. Actually, when I tell people about this study, no one has ever brought up that King of the Hill episode. This makes me feel hopeful because Sex Education is a funny, positive show that highlights the importance of sex education and the nuances of sex in general. It doesn't shy away from the challenges or shame that discussing sex brings, but the show exists anyway, and people talk about it. This inevitably means that discourse about sex is being normalized, albeit slowly and non-linearly. In this chapter, I explored how four sex educators who work in community-based organizations think about and implement sex education that challenges norms and strives toward a collective of people who don't shy away from conversing about sex. Through an analysis of qualitative interviews and teaching materials, I examined how the participants navigate a restrictive landscape that impedes their efforts through a lack of funding, unproven beliefs, and a default toward individualizing societal shortcomings. By honouring that sex and sex education can be a source of oppression for people with stigmatized

identities and backgrounds, sex educators and their respective organizations make efforts to acknowledge the lived experiences of both students and facilitators, framing it as a strength where it is usually experienced as a deficiency. A critique of power structures in formal education settings leads these educators to approach their sessions subversively and creatively, with the ultimate goal of facilitating and mainstreaming the ability to talk, be curious, and address sex. Having summarized the data that have led me to these conclusions, I continue in chapter five by summarizing key ideas, limitations, areas for future research, and recommendations for those who have a stake in these spaces.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

Although I spend the majority of my days working within a non-profit organization, this research helped me to gain a broader, more nuanced understanding of this sector, its importance and shortcomings, and where sex education fits within it. I've brought these learnings into my daily practice and discuss the systems we're bound by with my colleagues. I believe and share that we exist in a grey area where social services provide both support against and collusion in oppressive systems. As I've written in the introduction and touched on throughout this thesis, this grey area also means holding both critique and hope at once.

In this chapter, I address critical perspectives alongside the knowledge gained from my study's participants. Specifically, I delve into how the tenets of neoliberalism infiltrate sex education in community-based organizations, and how affirming lived experience in these spaces queers sex education (in more ways than teaching about the 2SLGBTQ+ community). Although critical discourse analysis examines what is said, I also explore what was unsaid, absences in findings. Additionally, I consider the gaps and limitations and where future research would add value to this exploration. I conclude with three propositions that, based on my observations, could cultivate praxis within community-based sex education.

Unavoidable Neoliberal Authority

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I found that the attributes of neoliberalism infiltrated community-based sex education. Although the goal of sex educators was to empower their students through education meant to liberate them from oppressive structures which dictate their sexuality, working in isolated and underfunded spaces while attempting to budge conservative values made this reality difficult to realize. Where there was a clear indication that collective approaches were

the preferred methodology of community-based sex educators, obstacles to establishing strong and sustainable communities were inevitable. Individualism, as discussed thoroughly in chapter two, created a context that makes collaboration toward a shared objective difficult. I come to this conclusion because there was a tendency for sex education to focus on an individual's responsibility to ensure they engage in safer sex practices; however, this wasn't devoid of conversations about fostering a community where everyone has a part to play to ensure sexual wellness is accessible for all – that is just harder to do in our current context. Community organizations operate skeletally amid an unmanageable need for services (Richmond & Shield, 2024), and work toward larger social and policy change must happen in small (but meaningful) ways. Therefore, perhaps the only way to create the changes that community-based sex educators want to see is by reaching individuals who eventually compose a collective of sex-literate folks. This reality is critiqued by scholars who argue that non-profit organizations are depoliticized (Collins & Rothe, 2020) when they ought to challenge hegemonic systems, since those systems are what create the need for services in the first place. Larger advocacy as a non-profit organization is difficult for many reasons, but much of it comes down to money. Advocating loudly against any controversial or political approach by the current government inevitably risks funding (Richmond & Shield, 2024). The issue of funding and fixed reliance on fiscal consistency means that participating in liberatory practice through sex education is precarious. I saw this in the organizations that participated in this study, where funding was a foundational concern. There was a risk that sex education would cease altogether, which could ultimately result in community-based sex education becoming nonexistent. So even if one organization ceases operations due to funding cuts, there may not be another to send clients to; the "common reality for many sex educators housed in underfunded organizations and agencies is they are

often left to their own devices" (Malone et al., 2026, p.3), meaning that creating a network that has the capacity to serve clients while actively engaging in political action (which may risk funding) is not in the neoliberal playbook. As a consequence, individualism and reliance on economic gain win out. As Malone et al. (2026) argue, this is no fault of the organizations or their dedicated educators, as they are aware that "collective liberation requires collective access and interdependence" (p.7). However, the participants made it clear to me that reaching this point is increasingly challenging for a community-based organization (compared with a private educator or school-based sex education).

Conservative Values

Individualism and capital constraints were not the only neoliberal factors at play. Another noteworthy issue that came up was the prominence of conservative values in sex education discourse and how the community-based educators navigated this. For one of the organizations that specifically taught a demographic whose sexuality is stigmatized, unlearning was an approach in addition to learning. The internalized shame of students and other social service workers about sex and sexuality made normalizing discourse about these topics a main priority. This study's participants emphasized that openly discussing sex was something they wanted to normalize, as this type of discourse is largely considered private and amoral.

Although the goal of sex educators in the community was challenging ingrained values of what sexuality should and shouldn't be, it is "personally and professionally risky to engage in this type of pedagogic action" (Apple, 1999, p.7). This was clear for Alex, who discussed the recent debates about SOGI123 in British Columbia schools. As an (unmandated) tool to include sexual orientation and gender identity in policy and curriculum (ARC Foundation, 2026), SOGI123 sparked debate and political uproar about sex education in schools, where opponents of

the framework argued that this information taught children and youth inappropriate information that will indoctrinate them into being queer (Mason & Hamilton, 2023). Although there is no evidence to back these claims (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021), these larger discussions demonstrate that conservative values about sex, sexuality and sex education remain rampant. If we assume that schools are representations of larger societal discourse (Hodder-Shipp, 2026), then school-based sex education, if accessible at all, may not be a consistently reliable source of inclusive, comprehensive information, and both school-based and community-based sex education are under scrutiny of those who oppose this kind of education. It's important here to note that sex education has been a leading force in normalizing values "as a tool of white supremacy, colonization, conservatism and systemic oppression" (Hodder-Shipp, 2026, p.20). Through cis-heteronormative and white representations of sexuality, sex education under the guise of public health must be held to criticism – otherwise, constructs of what sex and sexuality should and should not be are taken as truth when such discourse can be linked to eugenics, pathologization and discrimination of people who do not fit into these categories (Hodder-Shipp, 2026).

Queering Sex Education

As Apple and Beyer (1998) once reminded us, there is no one right way of teaching and learning about sex, or anything for that matter. Aside from the critiques I shared above regarding school-based sex education, this form of learning about sexuality is what most would default to when thinking about our personal experiences and where youth receive this information. Said differently, the normative way in which sex education is categorized is for youth in schools. Community-based sex education challenges this by creating learning spaces for people of all ages and in all contexts. The organizations that participated in this study diverged from

standardized classroom operatives in various ways. Attempts to neutralize the power dynamics by addressing them, changing the physical space and being willing to adapt the curriculum to the student's specific needs are all forms of queering sex education. Queering sex education, as a verb in this context, means that agencies moved away from mainstream discourses and considered the contexts and social relations that shape what is taught (Morris & Pinar, 1998). I would also say that the deliberate inclusion of LGBTQ+ experiences and intersections of disability and sexuality were evident in the content and approaches of these organizations; this was another form of queering sex education. As reflected in my conversations with educators, community-based sex education actively prioritized teaching through this lens; where, comparatively, school-based sex education applies non-normative experiences inconsistently across classrooms (Black et al., 2024).

Another way these educators queered sex education was through their focus on the identity of their students. Queer or otherwise, identities were consistently taken into consideration by each of the sex educators in these agencies. Understanding the context of the student's background with past sex education, with sexual trauma, or other lived experiences was central to how their educational programming was facilitated. In doing so, the educators sought to foster spaces where learners could show up authentically (Gonzales, 2026), thereby creating community across similarities and differences. Honouring the lived experiences of students was underpinned by the deep knowledge of the social and cultural conditions that community-engaged adult educators brought to their programs. Every sex educator I spoke with provided insights about the societal-level issues that their participants encounter relating to their sexuality. It was explicitly shared with me that the marginalized identities who were being served come into the space with overbearing assumptions about how they should and should not express their

sexuality. Students accessing community-based sex education were framed as asexual, hypersexual, abnormal, unable to take control of their own reproduction or at risk of some negative outcome due to their ‘lifestyle’. These categories assigned to diverse sexualities were openly challenged by the educators I spoke to, as they understood that outside of these spaces, some of their students would be categorized as the Other. At the same time, the students and educators shared identities, resulting in resonance between the two groups. This connection was tied to the mutual experiences of having one’s sexuality be labelled and restricted based on their identities. As one of this study’s participants said, communal experiences can be helpful and healing to discuss for students. For hooks (1994), the ability to bring the self into (sex) education spaces can act as a “process of self-recovery, of collective liberation” (p.61).

(Un)findings

In the nuances of this study's findings, I see two things that should be considered true simultaneously, regardless of whether sex education is provided in the community or as a formal part of a school program. First, “the impact of sex education dismantles all oppressive systemic structures, unburdening and liberating individuals, their families, and communities with a return or revisioning of what it truly means to be an authentic person in their sexuality; their humanness" (Malone et al., 2026, p.4). Sex education inherently opens a forum for people to learn, consider and discuss a topic that is either ignored or constrained by shame. When there are opportunities to shift this usually objectionable narrative through curiosity, there is the capacity to realize possibilities beyond established ‘rules’ about what one’s sexuality should and should not be. Therefore, sex education can create space for self-exploration and acceptance if one’s sexuality (and overall existence) in the world doesn’t meet the normative assumptions about what it means to be human. As I discussed in earlier chapters, owning my sexuality, identity, and

my lived experience has given me the space to live authentically, even when these aspects of my being don't always make it easy to navigate the world. I think this can be the case, however, it is irrefutable that sex education should be criticized and open to changing course where gaps exist in order to be liberating for everyone. When reviewing the data, it stood out to me that racialization and sexuality did not come up. We did not explore the impacts of colonization on Indigenous students, nor how culture plays a part in sexual identity. I don't think this is unique to the organizations I spoke with, as scholars noted in earlier chapters, 'whiteness' is a default. However, failing to name that gap upholds those defaults rather than challenges them.

Discussions about racialization and sexuality should be as prominent as discussing gender identity within sex education - I didn't have to ask if LGBTQ+ people were included in the curricula; it was a given, so the question becomes, why is race not? Though there was an acknowledged power dynamic between the sex educators and the students, regardless of how much attempt there may be to neutralize it, it always operates to shape the educational relationship. In the same way educators must name this power differential, it is the educator's responsibility to facilitate discussions about race and colonization (Johnston, 2006). Otherwise, as Johnston (2006) argues, our attempts at inclusivity and subverting traditional sex education will fall short because our intersectionality lens becomes restricted and, subsequently, whiteness and white sexuality are legitimized. Similarly, queering sex education cannot be done through one lens of identity: "a broadened understanding of queerness must be based on an intersectional analysis that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police the lives of most people" (Cohen, 1997, p. 441). For Cohen (1997), liberation for everyone means that solidarities across various intersections of subjectivities cannot be discounted.

I see the exclusion of race in sex education as another product of the individualization that neoliberalism thrives on. If we cannot learn about ourselves and others in a critical capacity, inclusive of racialization, then communities remain stuck in categorical divisions, unable to see past their own lived experience. And it's not enough to simply include pictures of Black, Indigenous or People of Colour on PowerPoint slides. Simply providing images justified by diversity initiatives won't dislodge our preconceived notions about others who don't share our experiences or values (Britzman, 1995). Britzman (1995) discusses this as tolerance rather than changing our minds about binary assumptions of right and wrong, normal and abnormal, moral and amoral. However, to me, this must be a primary concern of sex education: ensuring these notions are meaningfully disrupted. Sex education must move beyond giving students "good knowledge" and assuming they know what to do with it (Britzman, 1995, p. 221). This matters because there are real implications of choosing not to have these discussions, especially in sex education provided by community-based organizations. Colonization and white supremacy have structured discourse to frame BIPOC folks as having sexualities that need saving (Zapata, 2026). The saviour discourse (common in community-based organizations) strips the agency and autonomy from individuals while enforcing one way to experience sexuality, thereby homogenizing what someone should and should not do, regardless of culture or personal beliefs. This ultimately contradicts the intention of sex education and discounts lived experience.

I want to acknowledge that I did not view the facilitation of sex education as a part of this study, nor did I see all the pieces of material used. Therefore, it cannot be said that conversations about race and culture as they intersect with sexuality were *never* had in sessions provided by the organizations who participated in this study. Given additional time and capacity, meeting with

sex education participants could have been something I intentionally built into the study. There were other unavoidable limitations and gaps in my process that I discuss next.

Limitations and Future Research

There were two significant limitations that I now address. First, although the importance of lived experience was a significant finding, this study did not include the voices and perspectives of students learning sex education in community-based organizations. With the exception of Adrien, who had a shared identity with the participants, I did not speak with the folks who were accessing sex education programming. This is a gap in this research, as the programs were directly informed by students' needs and identities. Therefore, to fully understand how community-based sex education develops its programs, it is necessary to explore the perspectives of the folks directly informing its operations. This would also have allowed me to ask whether they found the program adequately met their needs, whether what they were learning was relevant, and what they liked and didn't like about their experiences. Future research could include the perspectives of the clients/students of community-based sex education. Such research could take place in a community-based organization that prioritizes hiring and leadership by people with lived experience.

Another limitation in this study was the limited representation of sex educators and organizations. As community-based organizations that offer sex education are not common, or have limited organizational life span due to funding loss, there were limited options for participants. I also suspect that the capacity of those who facilitate and lead these programs was limited, as, again, the hours worked and contracted deliverables restricted prospective participants' ability to take time away from work to participate in this research study. By limiting the geographical scope to British Columbia, the availability of community-based sex education

programs for research was also limited. While the jurisdictional constraints of this study were intentional, including community-based sex education programs from across Canadian provinces might have yielded more nuanced accounts, given that education is provincially mandated.

Additionally, rural organizations and experiences of those outside of urban centres were also not included. Expanding the number of participating organizations and sex educators within those organizations in future research would be a worthwhile pursuit to deepen the knowledge gained in this study, particularly through a focus group. Having more time may have enabled the inclusion of students' voices and additional organizations. Second, this project was not funded through a grant or other funding stream, and therefore, some potential research strategies could not be pursued.

Recommendations

At the end of my literature review, I wrote about praxis. Essentially praxis is the application of theory, or putting theory into practice (Beyer & Apple, 1008). In the case of sex educators, those who theoretically align with a critical practice would find practical methods of bringing that approach into their facilitation, i.e. a form of critical praxis. Freire (1985) says that "what should be contrasted with practice is not theory, which is inseparable from it, but the nonsense of imitative thinking" (p.11). I understand this to mean that educational theory without praxis replicates the very societal conditions it has the opportunity to challenge. In this way, praxis can act as a form of accountability. It's one thing to believe in progressive social change for the betterment of marginalized identities, and it's another to make tangible contributions to that change. Therefore, if the intention is a critical or queer sex education program within the community, then sex educators must ask themselves what they are doing to make that happen.

Sex education through a community-based organization may be a form of praxis, whether this is intentional or not, as it inherently applies a subversive method against the dominant form of school-based sex education. That said, any community-based organization can provide sex education through their theoretical lens, and it may not always be evidence-based or supportive of all identities and agentic choice-making. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, some organizations teach abstinence, anti-abortion and religiously justified information pertaining to a person's sexuality—much more like indoctrination than critical education. Praxis is necessarily critical, and educators should provide opportunities for deeper exploration of meaning, context, and histories (Freire, 1985) as they pertain to sexuality. The goal of comprehensive sex education is not only to learn about biology, but also to empower individuals to make decisions for themselves. SIECCAN (2019) describes comprehensive sex education as: "…broadly aimed at equipping people throughout the lifespan to enhance sexual health and well-being (e.g., having respectful and satisfying interpersonal relationships, increased self-acceptance, increased capacity to access sexual and reproductive health services) and to prevent outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being (e.g., acquisition and transmission of sexually transmitted infections [STIs], unintended pregnancies, sexual coercion/trauma/abuse/harassment, relationship problems" (p.12).

While a useful definition, I want to explore the idea of leaving room for moving beyond the impacts on individuals. An inclusion of systems, discourse, and power (and how those aspects of our reality influence sexuality) will help to engage educators and participants more deeply in praxis. It would work toward liberation for all and enable collective efforts to change systems that negatively impact sexual health. However, it should be noted that those same systems can simultaneously constrain organizations from doing so, whether due to a lack of

funding, political backing, or general ignorance. Sometimes, the weight of the world can feel insurmountable, making us believe our efforts don't make a meaningful impact. Succumbing to this defeatist lens only perpetuates the status quo. So, although small actions in the community may not feel consequential, the only way forward is to keep going and effect changes where possible.

Using that philosophy, I recommend three interrelated actions for community-based sex education organizations to consider.

1. Don't work in isolation. Relying on other community organizations, advice from community members/service users, and emerging knowledge on sex education can foster a network that works together toward the same goals. Make yourself known to others through social media, updated websites and outreach.
2. Within sex education programs, community-based organizations should define and engage in praxis as they understand it. I suggest using an intersectional lens, being careful not to exclude experiences that do not reflect your own, especially those related to racism and colonization.

3. Keep fighting to continue to facilitate comprehensive sexual health programs within the community. Advocate loudly about how you know your cause is worthwhile, even if it appears no one is listening.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study enabled me to understand how members of my community teach sex education, as well become more knowledgeable about the broader implications of the prevailing social order that we are both constrained by and motivated to disrupt. The simultaneous truths of celebrate/critique, hope/constraints, and individual empowerment/systems change are where insightful tensions exist. Through

exploring the knowledge that sex educators shared, this process has helped me uncover where community-based sex education fits into such nuances.

References

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights. (2020). *The state of sex-ed in Canada*. https://www.actioncanadashr.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Action%20Canada_StateofSexEd_F%20-%20web%20version%20EN.pdf

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights. (2024). *Policy 713: No one left behind*. https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/policy-briefs-submissions/2024-08-16-policy-713-no-one-left-behind

Adebayo, O. W., Salerno, J. P., Francillon, V., & Williams, J. R. (2018). A systematic review of components of community-based organisation engagement. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *26*(4), pp. 474–484. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12533

Apple, M. (1999). *Power, meaning, and identity: Essays in critical educational studies*. Peter Lang Publishing.

ARC Foundation. (2026). *Everyone has a sexual orientation and gender identity*. SOGI123. https://www.sogieducation.org/

Archer, W., McCarver, G. (Directors)., Stillman, J., Dauterive, J., Hardwick, J. (Writers). Square peg (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In Judge, M., Daniels, G. (Executive Producers), *King of the hill* . Deedle-dee productions; Judgemental films; 3 Arts Entertainment; 20th century fox television; 20th television animation; Bandera entertainment; Film roman productions.

Baikie, G. (2020). (De)colonizing indigenous social work praxis within the borderlands. In Brown, C., & MacDonald, J. E. (Eds.), *Critical Clinical Social Work: Counterstoring for Social Justice* (pp. 328 – 340). Canadian Scholars.

Balzer, J. (2024, November 11). *Data shows New West is one of B.C.'s top 20 rattiest communities: New Westminster was the 10th most-visited city for pest control company Orkin Canada to deal with the rodents.* Burnaby Now. https://www.burnabynow.com/animal-stories/data-shows-new-west-is-one-of-bcs-top-20-rattiest-communities-9772162#:~:text=Data%20shows%20New%20West%20is,to%20deal%20with%20the%20rodents.&text=New%20Westminster%20is%20in%20the,latest%20%22rattiest%22%20city%20list.

Belle-Isle, L., Benoit, C., & Pauly, B. (Bernie). (2014). Addressing health inequities through social inclusion: The role of community organizations. *Action Research*, *12*(2), 177–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750314527324

Benoit, C., Belle-Isle, L., Smith, M., Phillips, R., Shumka, L., Atchison, C., Jansson, M., Loppie, C., & Flagg, J. (2017). Sex workers as peer health advocates: Community empowerment and transformative learning through a Canadian pilot program. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, *16*(1), 160. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-017-0655-2

Beyer, L.E., Apple, M.W. (1998). Values and the politics in curriculum. In Beyer, L.E., Apple, M.W. (Eds.) *The curriculum: Problems, politics, and possibilities (*pp. 1-17). State University of New York Press.

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: a practical guide* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231747

Bhavnani, K.-K., Chua, P., & Collins, D. (2020). Critical approaches to qualitative research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp.243-262). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.17

Black, S., Watt, S., Koenig, B., & Salway, T. (2024). "You have to be a bit of a rogue teacher" – A qualitative study of sex educators in Metro Vancouver. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *33*(1), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs-2023-0047

Blackburn, M.V., Beucher, B. (2019). Productive tensions in assessment: Troubling sociocritical theories toward an advancement of queer pedagogy. In Mayo, C., Rodriguez, N.M. (Eds.) *Queer pedagogies: Critical studies of education*, vol 11. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27066-7_3

Brinkman, S. (2020). Unstructured and semistructured interviewing. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 424-456). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.17

Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, *45*(2), 151–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1995.00151.x

Butler, J. (2024). *Who's afraid of gender?* Penguin Random House.

Campbell, J., Taylor, B., Nunn, L., Couchman, C., (Executive producers). (2019-2023). *Sex education*. Eleven.

Chaya, J., & Bernert, D. J. (2014). Considerations for Sexuality Education and Services for LGB Elders. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *9*(1), 99–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2014.883265

City of Merritt. (2025). History of the Nicola Valley: Father of Merritt. https://www.merritt.ca/history-of-nicola-valley/

Clément, D. (2021, May 30). *Big data reveals inequities in federal funding for non-profits across Canada*. RSC College of New Scholars, University of Alberta. https://rsc-src.ca/en/voices/big-data-reveals-inequities-in-federal-funding-for-non-profits-across-canada

Cohen, C.J. (1997). Punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens the radical potential of queer politics?. *GLQ: A journal of lesbian and gay studies, 3,* 437-465.

Cohen, C.J. (2004). Deviance as resistance A new research agenda for the study of black politics. *Du bois review,*1, 27-45. DOI: 10.10170S1742058X04040044

Collins, P.H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* Routledge.

Collins, V. E., & Rothe, D. L. (2019). *The violence of neoliberalism: crime, harm and inequality*. Routledge.

Desmeules-Trudel, F., Jakubiec, B. A. E., MacLennan, E., Manuel, G., Pang, C., Rodomar, N., Seida, K. (2023). Social determinants of mental health and care access among 2SLGBTQI people: Highlights from community-engaged research. *Canadian Psychological Association, 64*(3).

Dreweke, J. (2019). Promiscuity propaganda: Access to information and services does not lead to increases in sexual activity. *Guttmacher Policy Review* (22), p. 29-36.

Du Mont, J., Kosa, S. D., Hemalal, S., Cameron, L., & Macdonald, S. (2020). Formation of an intersectoral network to support trans survivors of sexual assault: A survey of health and community organizations. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *22*(3), 243–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2020.1787911

Fahs, B. (2014). 'Freedom to' and 'freedom from': A new vision for sex-positive politics. *Sexualities*, *17*(3), 267–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713516334

Farrell, N. (2015). 'Conscience capitalism' and the neoliberalisation of the non-profit sector. *New Political Eeconomy*, *20*(2), 254–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2014.923823

Fisher, C. M., Reece, M., Wright, E., Dodge, B., Sherwood-Laughlin, C., & Baldwin, K. (2012). The role of community-cased organizations in adolescent sexual health promotion. *Health Promotion Practice*, *13*(4), 544–552. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839910390359

Fraser, R. L. (2015). William Hamilton Merritt. *The Canadian Encyclopedia.* https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/william-hamilton-merritt

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education* (Macedo, D., Trans.). Bergin & Garvey.

Fulcher, K., Archibald, A., & Francoeur, J. (2021). "They really hear you out": Lessons on providing contraceptive care from a community-based sexual health clinic. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *30*(2), 243–251. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2021-0018

Gary-Smith, M. (2026). The great pushback: Why social justice is CompSexEd. In Malone, R.M., Gilbert, T.Q., Dukes, C., Fonte, J.A. (Eds.). *Fundamental concepts and critical developments in sex education* (pp.11-17). Routledge.

Gegenfurtner, A., & Gebhardt, M. (2017). Sexuality education including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in schools. *Educational Research Review*, *22*, 215–222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.10.002

Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (Eds). (1994). Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315021539

Goddard, T., & Myers, R. R. (2017). Against evidence-based oppression: Marginalized youth and the politics of risk-based assessment and intervention. *Theoretical Criminology*, *21*(2), 151–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480616645172

Goldfarb, E. S., & Lieberman, L. D. (2021). Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *68*(1), 13–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036

Gonzales, Y.R.R. (2026). Liberation-centered learning spaces: Valuing joy, relationships, and power-shifting. In Malone, R.M., Gilbert, T., Q., Dukes, C., Fonte, J.A. (Eds.). *Fundamental concepts and critical developments in sex education: Intersectional and trauma informed approaches* (pp. 202-210). Routledge.

Government of British Columbia. (2025). *Non-profit sector*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/non-profits-sector

Gupta, N., Chandak, A., Gilson, G., Pelster, A. K., Schober, D. J., Goldsworthy, R., Baldwin, K., Fortenberry, J. D., & Fisher, C. (2015). Discovering sexual health conversations between adolescents and youth development professionals. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *10*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2015.1009596

Hackenschmidt. (2023). *Call to remove LGBTQ2, sex education books from Brandon schools met with approval, outrage.* Global news. https://globalnews.ca/news/9692584/call-removal-lbtq2-sex-education-books-brandon-schools/

Hall, S. (2009). Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities. In Back, L., Solomos, J. (Eds.). *Theories of race and racism* (p. 199-208). Routledge student readers.

Herald, M. (2015, November 19). Gearing-edge: William Voght, father of Merritt. *Merritt Herald.* https://www.merrittherald.com/gearing-edge-william-voght-father-of-merritt/#:~:text=At%20the%20tender%20age%20of,he%20sailed%20to%20Victoria%2C%20B.C.

Hickey, S., Roe, Y., Harvey, C., Kruske, S., Clifford-Motopi, A., Fisher, I., Bernardino, B., & Kildea, S. (2021). Community-based sexual and reproductive health promotion and services for first nations people in urban Australia. *International Journal of Women's Health*, 13, 467–478. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJWH.S297479

Hillenburg, S., Tibbitt, P. (Executive producers). (1999-present). *SpongeBob SquarePants* [TV series]. Nicklelodeon animation studios; Nicktoons productions; United plankton pictures.

Hilton-O'Brien. (2024, May 9). *BC's unsubtle plot to steal parental responsibility.* Parents for Choice in Education. https://www.parentchoice.ca/bc_s_unsubtle_plot_to_steal_parental_responsibility

Hiranandani, V. (2012). Diversity management in the Canadian workplace: Towards an anti-racism approach. In Gupta, T.D., James, C.E., Anderson, C., Galabuzi, G.E., Maaka, R.C.A.(Eds.). (2018). *Race and racialization: Essential readings* (2nd ed., pp. 425-448). Canadian scholars.

Hodder-Shipp, A. (2026). From values-based to values-neutral: The pedagogical power of transparency. In Malone, R.M., Gilbert, T., Q., Dukes, C., Fonte, J.A. (Eds.). *Fundamental concepts and critical developments in sex education: Intersectional and trauma informed approaches* (pp. 19-27). Routledge.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* Routledge.

Johnston, I. (2006). Reading practices, postcolonial literatures. In Kanu, Y (Ed.), *Curriculum as cultural practice*. Chapter 4. University of Toronto press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442686267

Jones, T. (2011). A sexuality education discourses framework: Conservative, liberal, critical, and postmodern. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *6*(2), 133–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2011.571935

Judge, M., Daniels, G. (Executive Producers). (1997-present). *King of the Hill* [TV series]. Deedle-dee productions; Judgemental films; 3 Arts Entertainment; 20th century fox television; 20th television animation; Bandera entertainment; Film roman productions.

Kaur, Sohni. (2021). The comfort watch: Psychology and media theory perspectives on nostalgia and film. *Scripps Senior Theses*. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1700

Kirby, D., Laris, B.A., Rolleri, L.A. (2007). Sex and HIV education programs: Their impact on sexual behaviors of young people throughout the world. *Journal of Adolescent Health,40*(3), 206-217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.11.143

Kurtzleben, D. (2025). *Trump administration's early actions showcase focus on curbing 'gender ideology'.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2025/02/07/nx-s1-5288853/trump-administrations-early-actions-showcase-focus-on-curbing-gender-ideology

Landry, D. J., Lindberg, L. D., Gemmill, A., Boonstra, H., & Finer, L. B. (2011). Review of the role of faith- and community-cased organizations in providing comprehensive sexuality education. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *6*(1), 75–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2010.547372

Le Grice, J., & Braun, V. (2018). Indigenous (Māori) sexual health psychologies in New Zealand: Delivering culturally congruent sexuality education. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *23*(2), 175–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105317739909

Leason, J. (2021). Forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women: strengths to build upon. *Canadian Family Physician*, 67, 525-527. DOI: 10.46747/cfp.6707525

Lim, A. (2022). Nonprofits as socially responsible actors: Neoliberalism, institutional structures, and empowerment in the United Nations global impact. *Current Sociology*, *70*(3), 454–471. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120986216

Link, H. (2025, June 21). School sex educators laid off after island sexual health loses grant. *Time Colonist. https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/school-sex-educators-laid-off-after-island-sexual-health-loses-grant-10840862*

Luhmann, S. (2012). Queering/querying pedagogy? Or, pedagogy is a pretty queer thing. In Pinar, W. F. (Ed.). *Queer theory in education* (pp. 126–138). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410603760-8

MacGillivray, K. Momney, C. (2025). *New Alberta school year comes with controversial new gender policies in classrooms.* Global news. https://globalnews.ca/news/11351298/new-alberta-school-year-gender-policies/

Malone, R.M., Gilbert, T.,Q., Dukes, C., Fonte, J.A. (2026). *Fundamental concepts and critical developments in sex education: Intersectional and trauma informed approaches.* Routledge.

Mason, C., Hamilton, L. (2023). *How the parental rights movement gave rise to the 1 million march 4 children.* The conversation. https://theconversation.com/how-the-parental-rights-movement-gave-rise-to-the-1-million-march-4-children-213842

Massaquoi, N. (2015). Queer Theory and intersectionality. In *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (pp. 765–770). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.28073-2

Mayo, C., & Rodriguez, N. M. (2019). Wanting more: Queer theory and education. In C. Mayo & N. M. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Queer Pedagogies* (Vol. 11, pp. 1–8). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27066-7_1

McCarthy, M., Fisher, C. M., Zhou, J., Zhu, H., Kneip Pelster, A., Schober, D. J., Baldwin, K., Fortenberry, J. D., & Goldsworthy, R. (2015). A qualitative exploration of community-based organization programs, resources, and training to promote adolescent sexual health. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *10*(4), 316–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2015.1091759

Menon, A. (2022, December 9). *Sex education in BC's schools: An explainer.* The Tyee. https://thetyee.ca/News/2022/12/09/Sex-Education-BC-Schools-Explainer/

Monchalin, R., Lesperance, A., Flicker, S., Logie, C., & Network, N. Y. S. H. (2016). Sexy health carnival on the powwow trail: HIV prevention by and for Indigenous youth. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, *11*(1), 159–176. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijih111201616011

Montgomery, B. E. E., Marshall, S. A., Sanders, S. E., Phillips, M. M., Cline, M., & Snowden, M. (2018). Stakeholder identification of barriers and facilitators to sexual health education for

female survivors of violence: A mixed methods study. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *13*(1), 18–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2017.1410870

Montoya, M. N., Judge-Golden, C., Swartz., J. J. (2022). The problems with crisis pregnancy centres: Reviewing the Literature and identifying new directions for future research. *International Journal of Women's Health. 14.* pp. 757 - 763. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9189146/pdf/ijwh-14-757.pdf

Morris, M., & Pinar, W. F. (1998). Unresting the curriculum: Queer projects, queer imaginings. In *Queer theory in education* (p. 227–236). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410603760-14

Native Youth Sexual Health Network. (2014). *International expert group meeting on sexual health and reproductive rights: Articles 21, 22(1), 23 and 24 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.* United Nations. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f3550c11c1f590e92ad30eb/t/60cb89ac1a716738ab7ad209/1623951790129/january15172014.pdf

Parker, M. (2002). Queering management and organization. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, *9*(2), 146–166. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00153

Prior, L. (2020). Content analysis. (2020). In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 540-568). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.17

Reynolds, V. (2010). *Doing justice as a path to sustainability in community work*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tilburg University]. Taos Institute. https://www.taosinstitute.net/files/Content/5693763/ReynoldsPhDDissertationFeb2210.pdf

Richardson, C. O. (2023). Being about it: Engaging liberatory educational praxis. *Education Sciences*, *13*(6), 625. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13060625

Richmond, T., Shields, J. (2024). *The Canadian non-profit sector: Neoliberalism and the assault on community.* Fernwood Publishing.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Elam, G., Tennant, R., Rahim, N. (2014). Designing and selecting samples. In Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C.M., Ormston, R. (Eds.) *Qualitative research practice*. (2nd ed., pp. 111-145). Sage.

Ronson, J. (2023, September 22). *Reporter's notebook: Let's talk about '1 million march 4 children'*. The discourse. https://thediscourse.ca/cowichan-valley/march-4-children-protests

Rogers, R. (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780203836149

Saldaña, J. (2020). Qualitative data analysis strategies. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 876-911). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.17

Schultz, B., (2025, June 24). Trump admin. Orders California to remove gender identity from sex ed curriculum. *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/trump-admin-orders-california-to-remove-gender-identity-from-sex-ed-curriculum/2025/06

Secor-Turner, M., Randall, B. A., Christensen, K., Jacobson, A., & Loyola Meléndez, M. (2017). Implementing community-based comprehensive sexuality education with high-risk youth in a conservative environment: lessons learned. *Sex Education*, *17*(5), 544–554.

SIECCAN. (2025, September 9). *The economic benefits of implementing comprehensive sexual health education in Canada* [Issue brief]. Sex Information & Education Council of Canada. https://www.sieccan.org/post/new-issue-brief-the-economic-benefits-of-implementing-comprehensive-sexual-health-education-in-can

SIECCAN. (2019). Canadian guidelines for sexual health education. Sex Information & Education Council of Canada. https://www.sieccan.org/_files/ugd/1332d5_e3ee36e39d944009956af5b86f0a5ed6.pdf

Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (Third edition.). Zed.

Smith, N. (2025, May 16). Neoliberalism. *Encyclopedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/money/neoliberal-globalization

Sparks, B., Zidenberg, A. M., & Olver, M. E. (2022). Involuntary celibacy: A review of incel ideology and experiences with dating, rejection, and associated mental health and emotional sequelae. *Current psychiatry reports*, 24(12), 731–740. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-022-01382-9

Spieldenner, A., Booker, J. (2019). The queer act of talking sex. In Pensoneau-Conway, S. L., Ahmet, A., (Eds.). *Queer communication pedagogy* (pp. 157-169). Routledge.

Statistics Canada. (2024, March 20). *National insights into non-profit organizations, Canadian survey on business conditions, 2023*. Government of Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240320/dq240320a-eng.htm

Stewart, J. R., & Favrholdt, K. (2025, March 20). Merritt. *The Canadian Encyclopedia.* https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/merritt

Thoreson, R. (2021). *Lawmakers are harming LGBTQ+ youth.* Progressive magazine. https://progressive.org/op-eds/lawmakers-harming-lgbtq-youth-thoreson-210630/

Trent, A., & Cho, J. (2020). Interpretation in qualitative research: What, why, how. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 956–982). Oxford University Press. Https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.35

Webster. S., Lewis, J., Brown, A. (2014). Ethical considerations in qualitative research. In Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C.M., Ormston, R. (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice*. (2nd ed., pp. 77-107). Sage.

Whitten, A., & Sethna, C. (2014). What's missing? Anti-racist sex education! *Sex Education*, *14*(4), 414–429. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2014.919911

Zapata, S. (2026). From concept to community: Ethical practices in event organization. In Malone, R.M., Gilbert, T., Q., Dukes, C., Fonte, J.A. (Eds.). *Fundamental concepts and critical developments in sex education: Intersectional and trauma informed approaches* (pp. 211-218). Routledge.

Appendix A – Participant Consent Form

Educational Psychology and Leadership Department

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Beyond the classroom: A critical understanding of community-based sex education

Researcher(s):

Krys Merritt, graduate student. Educational Psychology and Leadership Department, University of Victoria.

Phone: (604) 340-3719

Email: kristynmerritt@uvic.ca

Supervisors:

Catherine McGregor, Educational Psychology and Leadership Department, University of Victoria.

Phone: 250-472-5005

Email: edadgr@uvic.ca

Darlene Clover, Educational Psychology and Leadership Department, University of Victoria

Phone: 250-472-5005

Email: clover@uvic.ca

Objective of the research:

The objective of this study is to understand how and why comprehensive sex education is taught in community-based organizations, and how this service meets the needs of the organization's clients. By speaking with those who are teaching or facilitating sex education within a community organization, the study will explore the implementation, justifications, perceived effectiveness and discourses that exist in sex education programs offered as a service within community-based organizations.

This research is important because:

Community-based organizations are uniquely positioned to offer sex education as a service for vulnerable populations because:

- They exist within a community context that works specifically to provide services for members of a particular community

- The programs are designed to meet the specific needs of a community, that may not otherwise have access to sex education, either presently or historically

Because comprehensive sex education contains critical knowledge regarding sexuality, and vulnerable populations are more at risk of negative sexual health outcomes, sex education can be made accessible within community-based organizations in which vulnerable populations may already be accessing social services. Therefore, it is essential to understand the approaches, characteristics, and discourses shared within sex education programs offered by community-based organizations.

Participation:

You have been selected to participate in the study because you have experience teaching, facilitating, leading, designing, and/or overseeing sex education programs that are offered as a service within your community organization.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your employment or how you will be treated within and outside of your organization. Your choice to participate or not will not be disclosed to your direct report/supervisor/manager. No information you provide will be shared with anyone else in your organization, for the exception of the final thesis document in which your identity and organization will remain anonymous.

Procedures: The following is an outline of what to expect within your participation of this study

- You will be asked to provide relevant internal or external (i.e. resources provided by SIECCAN) materials that are used within your sex education program. These materials may include documents, handouts, policies, program reports, PowerPoint presentations, presentation notes, program advertising, posters and/or resources. Provision of these documents are entirely voluntary, and denying this request will not impact other procedures of participation within this study.
    - The researcher will obtain individual consent from "the community-based organization, with the data steward being a leader (Executive director, director, or program manager) of the organization. Consent will be obtained from the data steward, as these documents may be internal to the organization. Consent will be obtained through written correspondence, in addition to the participant consent form
    - The materials you provide will be used for an analysis to determine the discourses, themes, approaches that your program uses within its documents that support sex education

- You will be asked to participate in one-to-one a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you a series of questions pertaining to your sex education program. The interview may take place in person or via Microsoft Teams, whichever is mutually convenient for the participant and researcher. The interview will be audio recorded, using a handheld audio recorder. The interview audio will be transcribed by the researcher for analysis.
- After the interview and document handover, the researcher will analyze the data. During this process, the researcher may follow up with you about meaning or intention regarding what was discussed during the interview. Similarly, the researcher may share portions of the transcript that

could potentially pose a risk to you, such as an identifying piece of information, or personal disclosure. Should this occur, and the information is relevant to the study, the researcher will obtain consent from to use this information in the study.

- Once the study is complete, the researcher will share the findings and thesis document with you.
- **Duration:** The expected active time involved in participation (including document handover, interviewing and follow up) is approximately 3 hours and 15 minutes.
    - Interviews are expected to take approximately 30-90 minutes
    - Gathering and sharing educational materials is estimated to take 30-60 minutes
    - Follow up between yourself and the researcher is estimated to take 30-45 minutes
- **Location:** Communication and document handover can take place virtually, via email or phone, whichever is your preference. Interviews and follow up can take place at your organization's location or via Microsoft Teams. Access to any virtual meeting will be provided and facilitated by the researcher.
- **Inconvenience:** The time required for your participation in this study may inconvenience your regular work duties as an employee of your organization.

Benefits:

Potential benefits for you, as a participant, includes research that highlights your contributions to the field of sex education, which may inform or improve the sex education program development for your organization. This research will also provide context and relationality to other organizations that offer sex education as a service, effectively demonstrating that these programs are not isolated.

Potential benefits for society include the research providing an evidence-based examination of the strengths, challenges, and practices that inform sex education within organizations. This information can be useful for organizations to consider when developing or revising sex education programs, as well as when applying for funding for these programs. Additionally, the public sector may find the information useful in policy development. The research will highlight how community-based organizations provide resources for vulnerable populations, perhaps emphasizing the need to make sex education accessible to everyone.

Potential benefits to the state of knowledge include filling a gap in knowledge about sex education outside of school settings. Through a critical framework, the research will be valuable to understand how current systems impede equitable access to sex education. Understanding different approaches to sex education will broaden the narrative about what sex education is and is not.

Risks:

Participation in this study presents minimal risk to you. However, please be aware that:

- Although your organization and identity will be disguised, and no identifying information will be included in the study (See section below on Anonymity and Confidentiality), the network of community organizations that offer sex education as a service is small. Therefore, readers may be able to identify or deduce your involvement in the study. To reduce this risk, contextual or identifying information about you or the organization you work for will not be included in the study.

- Emotional discomfort may arise if the conversations between yourself and the research inadvertently become personal. The interview questions and the object of the study is not to discuss personal experiences; however, the nature of discussing sex education poses a risk of this occurring. To mitigate this risk, the interview questions can be provided to you in advance, no personal disclosures will be included in the study without your consent, and you are always welcome to skip an interview question.

Withdrawal of Participation:

- You may withdraw from this study at any time without explanation or consequence.
- Should you withdraw, the researcher will ask for consent to use the data that has been provided prior to your withdraw. The researcher will request, via email, if the data can be used if it is anonymized. Denying this request will not result in any penalty or consequence, and the study will not include the information you provided. Your data will subsequently be permanently disposed of.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- In addition to this consent form, you will be asked over multiple occasions for your consent. The researcher will verbally check in with you at every stage in the study (see the Procedures Section).
    - Specifically, the researcher will check for consent before the interview, during the interview if necessary, and upon your review of the interview transcripts.
- Your are welcome to change your mind about consent at any point during the study. If you choose to withdraw consent at any point, please contact the researcher using the information at the top of this form.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- Your identity, professional role, and name of your organization will be kept confidential at all points during the study. Only the researcher will be able to associate your data to you. Only the researcher will have access to the data; your data will be kept via password protected and encrypted filing, or in the case of hard copy data (i.e. memory cards or physical documents), it will be stored within a lockable cabinet.
- When the data is collected, identifying information will be disguised using pseudonyms or numbers. This process is called coding, and coding information will be kept in a separate location from data that identifies you.
- There are some limits to the researcher's ability to completely protect your confidentiality:
    - Because sex education programs are not common, the study being limited to BC, and your program information is publicly accessible, there is a possibility that readers of the study may be able to deduce your identity and/or organization.
    - Because the researcher will be conducting the study within your organization with consent of the relevant supervisors, your colleagues and leadership team may be aware

that you are participating in this study. However, the information you provide within the interview and subsequent publication will not be directly linked to you.

Research results may be disseminated in the following ways:

- For the completion of a thesis project, a requirement for the researcher's graduation at the University of Victoria
- For presentations at scholarly meetings
- On the internet, for public viewing via the UVicSpace website
- To you and your organization as participants, either as a file or shareable public link
- For a published scholarly article

Disposal of Data

Upon completion of the study, your data will be stored securely for 2-3 to support the researcher's future scholarly activities, if any. After this time, electronic files will be permanently erased. Memory cards used to store audio of interviews will be wiped. Hard copies of materials will be shredded and recycled.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher using the information at the top of this document.
- Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545 ethics@uvic.ca

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

______________________	______________________	____________
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM and its importance

2. How do you go about facilitating NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM?
    a. What do you consider when you plan and execute your curriculum?

3. How do you/your organization decide what to include in the NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM?
    a. What do you think is most important when creating and implementing the program content?

4. How does your program include curriculum about social, cognitive, emotional and physical aspects of sexuality? Or if it doesn't, what aspects are most important for you to talk about?

5. How would you describe the message or messages you are sharing when implementing the NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM?
    a. Is there anything you would change about the NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM? If so, can you elaborate?

6. How does this program address the specific needs of your clients?
    a. Has there been a time where you've had to adjust your approach/delivery for a specific group of people? If so, can you elaborate?

7. How do you know that the NAME OF (SEX ED) PROGRAM is helpful for your clients/service-users/participants/students?
    a. Are there specific metrics you for evaluation? If so, are these for funding requirements?

8. Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences as a sex educator?